

# **A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS**

## **(LESSON THIRTY-SEVEN)**

### ***“IS ABRAHAM OUR SPIRITUAL FATHER?” (PART 2)***

#### **GALATIANS 3:7-9**

#### **(ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)**

*7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.*

*8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”*

*9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

In the first five verses of **Galatians** chapter 3, the Apostle Paul asks five questions of the Galatian believers for the purpose of appealing to their own spiritual experiences. He does so, in an effort to convince them of their error in departing from the Gospel of grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and embracing “another gospel,” a message of justification by works. The essence of Paul’s argument in the first 5 verses of the chapter, is that their new position is a contradiction of their own spiritual experiences, as well a contradiction of the Gospel.

In verse 6, Paul cites the spiritual experience of the Patriarch Abraham. He writes, “*Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’*” The first two words of the verse, “*Just as,*” call the attention of the believers in Galatia to the comparison that he is going to

make between the way that they were justified, or declared righteous, and the way that Abraham was justified, or declared righteous.

Paul appeals to the Old Testament as a witness, testifying that justification has **always** been by faith alone, **never** by works. He quotes from **Genesis 15:6**, “*Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”*” This quotation is one of the clearest statements in the entire Bible about how a person can be justified, or declared righteous before God. Abraham “**believed**” God, and his belief or faith, rather than his works, was the basis upon which he was justified, or declared righteous before God.

Paul cites the experience of Abraham because Abraham is the “**Father of the faithful.**” Abraham was justified, or declared righteous, more than a decade before he was circumcised, and more than 400 years before the Law was given to Moses. It is clear therefore, that neither circumcision nor the Law played any role in his salvation. Paul is making the point that the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, which includes the imputation of the perfect righteousness of Christ, is not merely a divine afterthought following the failure of Israel under the Law. It was the very means by which Abraham was saved!

Paul is drawing a conclusion between Abraham’s justification and the justification of the Galatian believers. His conclusion is that Abraham’s experience of justification is an illustration of the manner in which **every** human being, in **every** age is saved, whether Old or New Testament, whether Jew or Gentile. It is this conclusion that he declares in verse **7**: “*Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.*”

Paul is explaining to his readers, that it is evident from the **Genesis** account, that only those who come by faith can be the children of Abraham. He is persuaded by Scripture that since Abraham, the “*father of all who believe*” (**Romans 4:11-12**), was justified by faith alone, it follows that every one of his “*offspring*” **must** be justified in the very

same way! In other words, it is those who exercise the same faith that Abraham exercised who are his true followers.

Thus the faith exercised by Abraham is declared by Paul to be the **fundamental condition** of acceptance with God for all human beings! Abraham's true children are not those who are his **natural** offspring, or those who diligently observe the Law or some other system of rule-keeping. His true children, his "**spiritual**" children, are those who simply believe! The expression "*those of faith*," refers to those who have exercised faith for salvation, and whose standing and character are consequently determined by that faith.

Brothers and sisters, Paul argues persuasively that the blessing of justification that Abraham received from God, was received by him through faith alone, and that it is through the exercise of a similar faith that the Gentiles become his spiritual children, and not through submission to circumcision and/or rule-keeping of any kind whatsoever.

In verse **8**, Paul writes, "*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.'*"

In this verse, Paul personifies Scripture. He attributes a personal nature or human characteristics to Scripture. Indeed, he attributes to Scripture the nature of deity, the very characteristics of God. He credits Scripture with foresight. He uses personification to express the thought that God's divine foresight is expressed in the Scriptures. **Kenneth Wuest** informs us that the Jews would ask, "What did the Scripture foresee?"

Brothers and sisters, because Scripture is God's Word, when it speaks, God speaks! This truth should cause us all to do two things. It should cause us to fall on our faces before God in wonder and awe and thanksgiving. We, sinful human beings, have the privilege of hearing directly from the Living God through His living Word! But this truth also begs questions. If reading the Bible and listening to sound biblical teaching and preaching is the way that God speaks to us, why

don't we read the Bible more? Why are we so indifferent to the Word when it is preached and taught? Do we really believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is through His Word that He communicates with us?

The **Bible Knowledge Commentary** observes that,

"It should not be overlooked that Paul referred to Scripture speaking as though God were speaking, so it can rightly be affirmed that what the Bible says, God says. This and similar verses...provide important support for believing in the absolute and total inspiration and authority of Scripture."

In **Galatians 3:8**, Scripture is depicted by Paul as acting like an Old Testament prophet, foreseeing and foretelling what would occur in the future. What is it that Paul says Scripture foresaw and foretold? The answer is, "*that God would justify the Gentiles by faith.*" Scripture foresaw and foretold that the Gentiles would be justified in the same way as Abraham-by faith! And by the way, what was Abraham when he was justified? Was he a Jew? Of course not. He was a former pagan idol worshipper, which connected him more closely with the Gentiles than with the Jews!

In referring to the Old Testament passage, Paul is showing that what God was now doing with the Gentiles in Galatia was no different than what He had done with Gentiles in the past. He was justifying them, or declaring them righteous, or saving them by faith, which is the manner in which He always has saved, and always will save, every human being whom He elects to save, both Jew and Gentile!

Is Paul making referring to a particular verse of Scripture? No doubt he has in mind **Genesis 12:3**, "*I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you** all the families of the earth shall be blessed*" (**English Standard Version**).

**Genesis 18:18** is similar: “*Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?*” (**English Standard Version**)

Warren Wiersbe writes that,

“Paul’s quotation of Moses (**Genesis 12:3**), proves that, from the very beginning of Abraham’s relationship with God, the blessing of salvation was promised to all the nations of the world. God preached the ‘Good News’ to Abraham centuries ago, and Paul brought that same Good News to the Galatians: sinners are justified through faith and not by keeping the Law. The logic here is evident: if God promised to save the Gentiles by faith, then the Judaizers are wrong in wanting to take the Gentile believers back into Law. The true ‘children of Abraham’ are not the Jews by physical descent, but Jews and Gentiles who have believed in Jesus Christ. All those who are ‘of faith’ (believers) are blessed with ‘believing Abraham.’”

Paul says that God, “*preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’*” The phrase, “*the gospel beforehand,*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “to bring good news ahead of time, to proclaim the gospel before, to spread good news in advance of it actually coming to pass.” The words are in a construction in the Greek which indicate that a point in time in the past, God Himself preached the Gospel, the Good News about Jesus Christ, to Abraham. We, of course, are unaware as to how much God revealed to Abraham about Jesus. What we do know for certain from what Paul writes in verse **16**, is that God preached Christ to Abraham: “*Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ.*” (**English Standard Version**).

In **Genesis 12:7; 13:15** and **17:7**, God makes promises to Abraham and his “offspring,” (singular), or “seed.” In **Genesis 24:7** Abraham rehearses these promises to his oldest and most trusted, servant and he

also refers to a singular “offspring,” or “seed.” And Paul intimates that God explained enough about this “offspring,” or “seed” to Abraham for him to understand that He was referring to Christ!

**Wuest** has an excellent note as it relates to this matter:

“God, foreseeing that He would justify the *Gentiles* by faith announced the gospel to Abraham, which message was to be received by faith. The good news announced to Abraham was that someday the Saviour would arise out of his nation Israel, and that the *Gentiles* would be saved through Him as Abraham was saved. Thus, Abraham rejoiced to see the coming of that day (**John 8:56**). Abraham was therefore to become the **pattern** to all who would follow, of how a sinner, Jew or *Gentile*, must appropriate salvation. The words “*would justify*,” are from a **present tense** verb in *Greek*, the thought being that Paul is here dealing with a **general principle, God’s rule of action on the basis of which He operates for all time**. Thus, the condition upon which any person was to be justified is faith.”

The Gospel is “good news” because it is a message of salvation by grace. A message of salvation by works would not be good news but bad news. Abraham’s faith rested in the Gospel that was preached to him by God, and he was justified, or declared righteous on the basis of his faith. That is the same Gospel we have today, with this exception: what was promised in the Old Testament to Abraham has now been fulfilled.

**Spurgeon** states that,

“The apostle tells us that the *Gospel* was preached to Abraham. **The true Gospel is no new thing**; it is as old as the hills. It was heard in Eden before man was driven from the garden, and it has since been repeated in sundry ways and in diverse places, even to this day. Oh, that its very antiquity would lead men to venerate it, and then to listen to its voice!”

Paul says that the message of the Gospel to Abraham was, “*In you shall all the nations be blessed.*” **Spurgeon** makes the following comment regarding the phrase “*In you:*”

“In you, because you are the father of believers. You are a sort of head and prototype of men who believe in me. So, ‘In you all the nations will be blessed.’ And in your seed, too, as you will be the father of the Christ, all nations will be blessed.”

The reference to “blessings” here, has to do with **spiritual** not **material** blessings. Justification by faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit are the primary blessings that the Gentiles would receive. They are the primary blessings that salvation offers to any individual. **Galatians 3:14** clearly indicate this: “*so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith*” (**English Standard Version**).

In verse **9**, Paul is drawing a conclusion between Abraham’s justification and the justification of the Galatian believers. It is the same conclusion that he drew in verse **7**. He writes, “*So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*”

The conclusion is that both Jews and Gentiles are justified, or declared righteous as a consequence of trusting God, not by being circumcised or observing the Law. Though provision was made for “*all nations,*” only those individuals from all the nations who exercise the same faith that Abraham exercised, will receive the blessing of justification and the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This statement emphasizes that the way of salvation for Jews and Gentiles is the same as for Abraham, by grace through faith, not by works of the Law.

Paul is explaining that it was God’s design for Abraham to be the prototype of the universal people of faith, not simply the ancestor of the Jewish race.

Commenting on this verse, **Phil Newton**, writes the following:

"In verse **nine**, we again see one of the Apostle's conclusions of his argument from Scripture concerning justification by faith alone... What does it mean to be "*blessed with Abraham, the believer?*" Paul is using this to address one subject. He is **not** speaking of all the tangible, **material** blessings which belonged to Abraham. Certainly, God blessed him enormously with great wealth, power, and prominence. But that is not the issue of this text nor its Old Testament context. Here the whole matter is righteousness before God, which means to be justified before God. For justification is the legal declaration of righteousness for the sinner. To be blessed with Abraham is synonymous with being justified or declared righteous with him before God. The great concern of the Apostle was how a sinner might be declared righteous before a thrice holy God. **Everything else is non-essential in comparison to our need for righteousness before God. All eternity is at stake with this matter. Our whole existence hangs in the balance over the subject of justification.** By the conclusive phrase, "*So then,*" Paul is reminding us that there is no doubt that only those who are of faith are justified even as Abraham was justified."

Paul describes Abraham as "*the man of faith.*" He does so in order to make it clear to his readers that the important thing about Abraham was the fact that he chose the **grace-faith** way of salvation rather than the **Law-works** way of depending on personal merit and good works. The phrase speaks of the fact that Abraham believed God. Those who exercise the same faith as Abraham, share with him in the same salvation which he received from God by faith.

We will conclude this evening by reading **Romans 4:13-16** from the **English Standard Version**:

*13 For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.*



*14 For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.*

*15 For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.*

*16 That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.*