



## The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 13



# DAVID DECLARES IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

4:5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, <sup>6</sup>just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup>Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; <sup>8</sup>Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin." Romans 4:5-8, NKJV

## INTRODUCTION

### LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THE ONE WHO DOES NOT WORK (4:5a)
- II. BELIEVING ON HIM WHO JUSTIFIES (4:5b)
- III. WHEN FAITH IS COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (4:5c)
- IV. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MAN (4:6)
- V. DEEDS FORGIVEN AND SINS COVERED (4:7)
- VI. WHEN GOD REFUSES TO IMPUTE SIN (4:8)

If men are going to have confidence before God, they must know He has accepted them. It is not possible to boldly approach the Lord, or stand confidently

before His throne when doubtful about our relationship to Him. It only takes one real confrontation of the Almighty to cause vain religion to dissipate. Saul of Tarsus could not continue his mission of persecution after he encountered the living Christ! When God unveils the Lord Jesus, and He comes in all of His glory, those who fought against His people will not fight against Him. Instead they will *"hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand"* (Rev 6:15-17).

Knowing the sureness of the Lord's return in glory, and knowing that no character-change will be possible at that

time, the Spirit strives now to convince men of sin, righteousness and judgment. By illuminating the preached Gospel, He persuades the tender of heart of their sin of unbelief. He brings them to see that Jesus is the only truly righteous One, for He has ascended to the Father. He brings them to see that Satan has already been judged, and is no longer worthy of the smallest measure of obedience (John 16:8-11). Men must cease to listen to him.

### CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD

Although institutional-centered religion places little or no emphasis upon confidence before God, this is the great thrust of Scripture. God is **not** glorified by timorous disciples who lack confidence. He has declared He will have no pleasure in the person who draws back from Him (Heb 10:39). If the salvation of God has

made provision for the “full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22), what possible reason can be adduced for failing to appropriate it? How is it that men would claim to have faith, yet lack the assurance it brings?

Right here an important observation is in order. Almost without exception, those with a propensity toward legalism are sadly lacking in confidence toward God. With all of their emphasis on precision and exactness, they have failed to appropriate something without which men are placed at a decided disadvantage. With spiritual candor and great power the Holy Spirit associates us with the Son **only** if we have confidence and hope. “But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb 3:6).

It is certainly not my aim to sit in judgment upon people’s profession. That is an area in which we are not licensed to operate. However, it is imperative that we take hold of this word of the Spirit!

Those in Christ are “added to the church” (Acts 2:47), and “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17). They are “baptized into Christ,” and “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). God Himself has “delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13). We have been made “partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14), and, like Jesus, raised by “the glory of the Father” to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Everyone in Christ is a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), has received the “earnest,” or pledge, of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; 1 Thess 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). All who are in Christ are not condemned (Rom 8:1), have “peace with God” (Rom 5:1), and have been made “free from the law of sins and death” (Rom 8:2). They are in a state from which no external power can separate them, whether “death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature” (Rom 8:38-39). God is working “all things together for their good” (Rom 8:28),

continuing to “perform” the work begun in them “until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). The Father has not only put them into Christ, but has made Christ to be unto them “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). All believers have access to the Father through the Spirit (Eph 2:18), and free access to needed grace (Eph 3:12).

**Not Mere Technicalities**

These things are not mere technicalities to be debated in schools of theology. Nor, indeed, are they intended to be a means of dividing the body of

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Christ into various systems of regimented thought. All of them are experiences—spiritual experiences. They are deeper and more profound than any bodily experiences. They have an impact upon the human spirit, and produce all manner of spiritual fruitage within.

It is inconceivable that such things could occur without those receiving them knowing it. If a woman healed of an issue of blood could know “what was done in her” (Mk 5:33), ought not deeper experiences of the soul and spirit also be known to the individual?

The truth of the matter is that all people brought into Christ had a profound knowledge that something great has occurred to them. Thus those who were converted on Pentecost continued “daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and

having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:46-47). When the city of Samaria had given heed to the word preached by Philip, it is written, “And there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:8). Following his baptism, the Ethiopian eunuch “went on his way rejoicing,” without Philip or any fellow believer (Acts 8:39). After responding to the Gospel, the Philippian jailor brought Paul and Silas “into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:34).

This is a consistent pattern throughout Scripture. The conversion of the Ephesians is described in this manner. “Christ, in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13). It is said of the Thessalonians, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance” (1 Thess 1:5).

**Why Say This?**

There is a real need to say these things. **No child of God begins with doubt and fear.** That is simply not how the new birth is accomplished. Were that the case, joy would not attend conversion—but it does, and consistently so! The new convert may not be able perceive or explain the magnitude of salvation, but there is no question about its reality. That is why partaking of Christ is associated with “the *BEGINNING* of our confidence” (Heb 3:14), as well as “confidence and rejoicing” (Heb 6:11).

Lifeless religion has robbed people of this confidence. Without exception, as soon as the heart and mind are diverted to theological wrangling, ones status with God becomes unsure. Systematized theology too often robs the soul, taking joy and confidence from it, and replacing them with doubt and stern judgmentalism.

**This Makes the Teaching Imperative**

These unfortunate conditions are not unique to our time. Early in the history of the church, subverting teachers arose, injecting legalism and variant teachings. As a result, the souls of men became emaciated, confidence waned, and a distance began to form between the people and the Savior who had delivered them.

deliverance through Jesus. That is one of the resounding arguments for regular participation at the Lord's table.

**WHAT THE SPIRIT IS DOING**

In our text, the Holy Spirit is fortifying assurance and confidence. He is doing this because the rigors of the faith-life require the strong presence of assurance. The person who runs

They have missed the purpose of the words, and their miserable theology confirms this to be the case.

Our text is showing the BASIS of our acceptance by God, and the REASON for Jesus receiving us to the glory of God (Rom 15:7). This passage is not defining the various aspects of obedience, nor is it intended to outline every facet of our acceptance of Christ Jesus. The wording of the text should confirm to your heart that this is not the presentation of a facet of our salvation, but its foundation. We are dealing with the root of redemption, not its branches or fruit.

In this matter, the Spirit will separate believing from working. It is folly to attempt to unite the two when dealing with the BASIS of our acceptance. While it is true that faith and works go together, it is not at the primary level, where we build upon the foundation. It is essential that we understand this critical distinction. Your confidence can never rest in what you have done, even when it is absolutely correct and has been driven by faith. Confidence, like faith, must reside in the Lord of glory Himself. The teaching of this passage is designed to produce that kind of confidence.

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It is to be understood that God cannot be confidently approached where assurance is lacking. Nor, indeed, can Satan be effectively and consistently resisted where confidence lies wounded in the legal vestibule. The soul MUST be refurbished and strengthened with the knowledge of its acceptance in Christ Jesus! The redeemed must not allow themselves to get beyond the sound of the Gospel, or the recollection of their

"*uncertainly*" is not likely to finish the race (1 Cor 9:26).

We will read some strong statements in our text. They are affirmations that have spawned debates among men—but that is not their purpose. Those who read these statements, then dash through the Word of God, combining them with other texts in order to build a convenient theological system, are in serious error.

**THE ONE WHO DOES NOT WORK**

<sup>4:5a</sup> ***But to him who does not work...*** "The text means precisely what it says, and is consistently translated in every version. *"Worketh not,*<sup>KJV</sup> *"without works,*<sup>NRSV</sup> *"without working,*<sup>BBE</sup> *"is not working,*<sup>NLT</sup> *"not because of their work.*<sup>NLT</sup> A literal translation would read *"but not to him that works."*

**A FOUNDATIONAL AFFIRMATION**

This is a statement of **depth**, not of breadth. If the breadth of salvation was the consideration, the Spirit may very well have reminded us that Jesus is the *"Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him"* (Heb 5:9). Our text is affirming the **basis** of salvation, not its scope. If this was a view of the scope of salvation, mention might well have been

made of how we have been *"ordained"* to walk in *"good works"* (Eph 2:10). Here is an expression of **cause**, not effect. The necessary effects of salvation include the holy life (Heb 12:14), crucifixion of the flesh (Gal 5:24), and fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12).

**Where "Works" Have No Place**

There is an aspect of salvation in which *"works"* have no place. This is not true of the whole of salvation, but of its foundation, which is the point of this passage. We must refrain from any attempt to neutralize this text by showing the importance of obedience and righteous deeds. Those matters will be addressed with great power in chapters six through eight. In that section, the Spirit will make

no provision whatsoever for the mind or works of the flesh.

If one fails to grasp the significance of the passage before us, the following teaching on sanctification will be too strong, and will cause the heart to faint. On the other hand, receiving the truth of this passage will fortify the soul with spiritual strength. It will put a solid rock under human effort, and provide an anchor for the soul.

**Not Simply An Effort to be Good**

The *"works"* of reference are not simply efforts to be good, as ordinarily conceived. This reference has strict regard to efforts to appropriate righteousness. God does not permit men to develop their

own definitions of righteousness. In summation, the Law defined uprightness in this way. *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”* (Matt 22:37-40).

As used in our text, *“works”* are the perfect fulfillment of a primary love for God, and a consequent love for our fellow man. *“Works”* include all of the ramifications of that *“love.”* That is why *“love is the fulfilling of the law”* (Rom 13:10).

Often, such works are called *“the works of the law.”* With remarkable consistency the Spirit informs us men cannot be justified by adhering to a code of Law—primarily God’s Law. *“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified”* (Gal 2:16). The expression *“works of the Law”* refers to the moral code of the Law, not its ceremonies. It covers **all of the consequences** of loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. What is even more, all such works are accomplished in the energy of man, not through Divine working. As used in this text, *“works,”* refer to human activity apart from faith and independently of Divine influence.

**The Spirit Elaborates**

It is the nature of men to receive partial works as though they were sufficient. *“Trying hard,”* so to speak, is imagined to make the effort acceptable. But that is not the view of the Lord at all. The Law, which is the foundation for the *“works”* of our text, makes no allowance for failure. It does not impute

conscientious effort to the individual as the fulfilling of the Law. This is a pivotal point in the passage before us. Here is what the Spirit says. *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”* (Gal 3:10). The Law, therefore, will not exonerate the individual who fails in a single point of its requirements. Thus James says, *“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all”* (James 2:10). Man cannot choose the works he thinks are necessary, and discard the ones thought to be unnecessary. If man is justified by works, he must do ALL of the work, not just a part of it.

**“Works” By Any Definition**

If righteousness cannot be attained by keeping God’s Law, how much less by fulfilling ones own definition. Technically, God’s Law stands for ALL law. As it is

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written, *“For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law”*<sup>NASB</sup> (Gal 3:21). If it was possible for righteousness to be realized on the basis of Law, then that is precisely how it would have been granted. **In such a case, there would have been no**

**need for Christ, not need for faith, and no need for forgiveness!**

This is precisely the argument of the Spirit. He is showing us the utter absurdity of a Savior if man can save himself. It is preposterous to postulate the need of remitting the sins of a person who has achieved righteousness on his own. That should be apparent, and yet this truth eludes the person who insists on justification by law.

**THE ONE WHO DOES NOT WORK**

Who is the person *“who does not work?”* It is the person who refuses to **rely** upon his own work. This is the one who needs forgiveness, and knows that he does. Such an one does not hold his achievements before God, but calls on the name of the Lord, seeking mercy. Rather than boasting of what he has done, he acknowledges he has sinned and comes short of the glory of God, just as God has said (Rom 3:23).

The phrase *“does not work”* is not the same as *“does not do anything.”* It is not synonymous with being slothful or indolent. It does not mean faith is inactive. It **DOES** mean the individual does not present his works as a reason for justification. He does not rely on his own activity, but on the effective accomplishments of Christ Jesus. The truth of the matter is that no work of man can fulfill what is required to make God just in justifying the sinner. Who is the person who would dare to boast of such a thing?

No understanding person will affirm he deserves to be justified. When asked for a reason for the hope that is within him (1 Pet 3:15), the believer will always point heavenward. He will trace his salvation to God the Justifier. He will cite the death and resurrection of Christ as the basis and life-giving hope of salvation. The person who cannot confess such things is under the darkening shroud of spiritual ignorance and alienation from God. The Gospel must be powerfully presented to such individuals.

“Does not work” means we have not worked to come into Christ, but because we have been placed in Him (1 Cor 1:30). It means God has not been motivated to justify us because of what we have done, but because of what His only begotten Son has accomplished. Yes, faith has made us active, but that is not the foundation upon which a spiritual life is built. The “work” of reference is foundational work, not godly activity. It is the work declared in First Corinthians 3:11. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” You cannot build upon what you have done. That is not an acceptable foundation. You can only build upon the foundation put into place by God Himself—Jesus Christ. All of that is involved in “does not work.”

**We Need This declaration**

What is more, faith needs declarations of this sort. Those who only put us in mind of our duty have taken the heart out of religion. Those who only set before us the danger of falling away enclose us with hopelessness. Faith must hear “what the Lord hath done” (Psa 126:2-3; Isa 41:20).

The great events of the day of Pentecost were set in motion by the powerful proclamation of “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). There is not apt to be much faith or obedience where this is not done. When we are emboldened to depend upon the Lord, our works will become more abundant, and will yield more fruit. When our trust in the Lord diminishes, our faith wanes, and our works become less numerous. A considerable amount of fruitlessness in the churches is directly owing to a lack of wholehearted trust in the Lord.

**THE SPIRIT IS BOLSTERING OUR CONFIDENCE**

Remember, the Spirit is bolstering the confidence of believers. He is giving them a reason to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12), resist the devil (James 4:7), and go on their way rejoicing (Phil 4:4). This IS a word addressed to believers, not unbelievers, about WHY God has accepted them.

**Some Examples**

There are examples in Scripture of being justified “without works.” They will assist us in taking hold of this word without thinking we will contradict other words of the Spirit regarding works.

*Peter Saved from the Deep*

On one occasion, when the disciples were in the midst of a threatening storm, Jesus came to them “walking on the water.” When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were “troubled,” saying “It is a spirit.” Although they were experienced boatmen, they “cried out for fear.” Immediately Jesus called out to them saying, “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.” Knowing the implications of that utterance, Peter replied, “Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.” The answer came back

back into the boat, “the wind ceased” (Matt 14:24-32).

Who would imagine that Peter was saved because of his work? Did Peter depend upon his own activity, whether walking on or swimming in the water? Indeed not, he was saved “without works” in a very real and effective way.

Before Jesus lifted Peter out of the raging sea, Peter did something. He asked the Lord to bid him to come. He came down out of the boat. He walked on the water to go to Jesus. When he sank, he called out to the Lord. But who would dare to call them “works” by which Peter was saved from the stormy sea? In every way, Peter knew it was the Lord who saved him.

It is in this way that we are justified. We have been active in asking, seeking, and coming to the Lord. We were active in calling upon His name. But our faith was in none of those things. We did not rely on our activity, but on the Lord’s. Thus, in the sense of our text, we were justified “without works.”

*The Woman with the Issue of Blood*

En route to the house of Jairus, Jesus passed within the hearing of a woman who had been suffering from a bloody issue for twelve long years. A crowd of people thronged around Jesus, seeming to make Him inaccessible to the needy. Yet, this suffering woman started making her way toward Jesus, going through the crowd. She reasoned within herself, “If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole.” The Scriptures tell us she made it to the Master, and touched “the border of His garment.” Instantly “the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.” When the Savior confronted her, He informed her “Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague” (Mk 5:25-34).

Who will dare to imagine this woman would point to her own works to account for her healing? She did do something.

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immediately, “Come.” Without delay, Peter came “down out of the ship,” and “he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.”

You remember the incident. In making his way to Jesus, the attention of Peter was diverted from the Master. When he “saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.” Immediately, “Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Peter then accompanied Jesus on the water back to the ship. When they stepped

She heard Jesus was in her vicinity and determined to reach Him. He reasoned about His effectiveness, and inconvenienced herself to touch His clothes, convinced she would be healed as a result. All of that took intense effort, particularly for a woman weakened from such a disease.

But when Jesus accounted for her healing, He did not point to her effort, but to her faith. He did not commend her for expending energy to come through the crowd, but for her faith. According to our text, she was delivered from her plague *“without works.”* She knew everyone who touched Jesus’ clothes were not healed. It was not that touching the hem of Christ’s garment fulfilled a Divine demand, and thus was honored of God. It was her faith that was honored. That is precisely the sense of our text: *“who does not work.”*

*The Healing of the Blind Man*

On yet another occasion, Jesus confronted a man who was *“blind from his birth.”* His disciples took the occasion to ask about WHY such things happened. They could only think of sin producing such conditions, but Jesus announced this occasion was in order *“that the works of God should be made manifest”* in the blind man. Then Jesus *“spat on the*

*ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.”*

We are simply told the blind man *“went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.”* When asked by professional religion men to account for his healing, he could only say, *“A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight.”* Later, when Jesus again confronted him, we find the blind man did not even know Jesus was *“the Son of God.”* When Jesus told Him who He was, the blind man said, *“Lord, I believe. And he worshiped Him”* (John 9:1-38).

Here is an example of someone whom Jesus found. The man was not seeking Jesus, but found Him whom he sought not (Rom10:20). Do you suppose he would account for his marvelous healing upon the basis of his works? He DID do something. In obedience, he made his way to the pool of Siloam and washed the clay from his eyes. But that is not what healed him. He could have put clay on his own eyes, or had another put it there for him, and wash it off in Siloam. But he would not have come away seeing.

In the sense of our text, he was healed *“without works.”* He was not saved by a procedure, but by the interposition of the Son of God. Take Jesus out of the equation, and this man would have remained blind until the day he died!

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

I find it deplorable that the religious climate is such as requires such lengthy explanations. Those who imagine that *“he who does not work”* excludes all activity on the part of men are simply foolish, and inexcusably so. Such a circumstance would be like Peter being lifted out of the stormy sea without calling. It would be like the woman with an issue of blood being healed without extending herself to come to Jesus. It would be like the blind man being healed while ignoring the word to go wash at the pool of Siloam.

However, if you were to ask Peter, the woman with the issue of blood, and the blind man why they were delivered, they would not point to what they did, but to what the Savior did! That, of course, is precisely the point made by the Spirit in each of the cases cited. The phrase *“him who does not work”* takes us down to the root of the matter. It is not a surface view, but one faith grasps. It will sustain the soul, buoying it up in tumult.

**BELIEVING ON HIM WHO JUSTIFIES**

<sup>4:5b</sup> *... but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly . . .* Here, believing is contrasted with working. The words are clear, and cannot be controverted: *“But to him who does not work but believes on Him . . .”*<sup>NIV</sup> Whatever may be said of *“works”* (and the Spirit does have considerable to say about them), they are not the subject of this text. That means we are being given to see the foundation, or basis, upon which men are justified. Unlike James’ discourse on justification (James 2:17-26), Paul’s purpose is not to rebuke hypocrisy. Rather, **He is expounding the righteousness that is announced by the Gospel** (1:17).

**THE PREMINENCE OF BELIEVING**

It should be apparent from this verse

that believing is a preminent activity, in a class by itself. It is the fountain from which all valid work springs forth. Remember, he has already cited Abraham as the premier example of justification by faith. The quality that set him apart was that he believed God.

**What Is Believing?**

**It should be apparent from this verse that believing is a preminent activity, in a class by itself. It is the fountain from which all valid work springs forth.**

Believing is not something that can be done perfunctorily, mechanically, or mindlessly. By its very nature, believing

engages the essential nature of man, calling up more of his resources, and reaching deeper into his person. It will be profitable to briefly explore this pivotal word: *“believe.”*

From the viewpoint of language, believing involves the following.

- ▶ To be convinced, or persuaded, of the reality of something.
- ▶ To have confidence in someone or

something that has been said.

- ▶ To commit, entrust, or trust, oneself to something or someone.

Believing is the active sense of faith. Thus our text refers to the person who “believes” as the one who has “faith.” When, therefore, we read “*faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (Heb 11:1), we are brought to understand what is involved in “believing.” Believing is being so convinced of the reality of what is hoped for, that no effort is spared to obtain it. It is being dominated by the persuasion of unseen realities, beginning with the Living God and Jesus Christ, and extending to the hope that is held forth in the Gospel of Christ. **Believing is faith in motion.**

“Believing” is not a casual word. It involves infinitely more than intellectual assent, or admitting something is true. The person who believes steps out on what is believed, thereby appropriating the promise of God.

The believing person is always honored by God. This is evident from the promises that are made to the one who believes.

- ▶ “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to **him that believeth**” (Mark 9:23).
- ▶ “**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned**” (Mark 16:16).
- ▶ “**He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God**” (John 3:18).
- ▶ “**He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him**” (John 3:36).
- ▶ “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and **he that believeth on me shall never thirst**” (John 6:35).
- ▶ “Verily, verily, I say unto you, **He that believeth on me hath everlasting life**” (John 6:47).

- ▶ “**He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water**” (John 7:38).
- ▶ “**I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?**” (John 11:25-26).
- ▶ “**He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me**” (John 12:44).
- ▶ “**Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father**” (John 14:12).
- ▶ “**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek**” (Rom 1:16).
- ▶ “**For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that**

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- believeth**” (Rom 10:4).
- ▶ “Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and **he that believeth on him shall not be confounded**” (1 Pet 2:6).
- ▶ “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5).
- ▶ “**He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son**” (1 John 5:10).

We must not allow ourselves to think of believing in a shallow sense. If we have “believed through grace” (Acts 18:27), it cannot be a shallow thing.

### WHAT ABOUT THE DEMONS?

One might object to this line of reasoning, saying that the demons believe. Indeed, the Scriptures do say this. “*You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!*” (James 2:19). However, as is evident, this is not the believing that saves the soul. Demons are never said to believe on Christ, or to have faith. They believe “*there is one God,*” because they have dealings with Him. They have been personally confronted and cursed by God. **Their believing is not driven by testimony, but by experience.**

Those who believe only because they see, do **not** receive the blessing. This is confirmed by at least two notable texts. The first refers to the occasion when Thomas confronted the risen Christ. He had refused to believe until he saw. “*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe*” (John 20:25). He had to have tangible evidence. The next time the disciples met together, Jesus appeared to them. He personally challenged Thomas, “*Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.*” Thomas simply answered, “*My Lord and my God.*” The response of Jesus is most significant. “*Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*” (John 20:25-29). Notice, He did not bless Thomas, but pronounced the blessing on those who believed without seeing.

The second event that confirms believing on the basis of seeing is not blessed, is the day of judgment itself. Just as the demons have confronted God, so all men will eventually encounter the Living God. There will be no question about His reality. There will be no resistance of His

power. No charges will be leveled against Him by His creation. At that time *“saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God”* (Rom 14:11). In that day sinners will believe there is one God in the same sense that demons do, and it will do them no more good than it has the demons!

Men will also confront the reigning Son. At that time, there also will be no question about His reality or power. God will unveil the Son to all, showing Him to be *“the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords”* (1 Tim 6:15). When He does, the word will be fulfilled, *“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil 2:10-11). When Jesus was upon earth, the demons knew who He was, and bowed before Him, confessing Him to be *“the Son of God”* (Matt 8:29) and the *“Holy One of God”* (Mk 1:24). They saw and believed, but it did not save them. Sinners will see and believe on the day of judgment, but it will NOT save them!

All things will not continue as they are now. Eventually, everyone will be convinced that God is precisely Who He declared Himself to be. All men will be fully persuaded that Jesus Christ is exactly who the Gospel affirmed Him to be. No one will doubt the existence of God in that day. No one will question the authority of Christ Jesus in that day. But that kind of persuasion will not save the soul! It is not the believing that is *“to the saving of the soul”* (Heb 10:39).

Thus, the demons, who do believe, are not an example of the believing that saves the soul. They have been faced with incontrovertible evidence, and tremble in the wake of it.

**PERSUASION WITHOUT TANGIBLE EVIDENCE**

The believing mentioned in our text (*“but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly”*) is founded upon the testimony

of the Gospel, not tangible evidence. While this is unusually simplistic, it eludes the flesh. God has, in fact, withdrawn the primary evidence, which is Jesus Christ the Lord. He has moved Him beyond the reach of natural senses, and outside the realm of fleshly experience. Unless a person believes what God has said about Jesus, there is nothing else that will confirm the truth of the Gospel.

Allow me to elaborate again on this pivotal point. It is essential that we take hold of this with our hearts as well as our

**Further, if God had not revealed these things, it is utterly impossible that any man could have concluded them. There is no form of human reasoning that could have looked at the physical evidence of Christ’s life and death and concluded these things happened.**

minds. Think of what God has affirmed concerning Jesus Christ.

- ▶ He is God’s *“only begotten Son”* (John 1:18).
- ▶ He was *“in the form of God,”* and on *“equality”* with God before coming into the world (Phil 2:6-8).
- ▶ The sins of the world were laid upon Him (Isa 53:6).
- ▶ He put away the sins of the world (Heb 9:26).
- ▶ He reconciled the world to God (2 Cor 5:18-20).
- ▶ He was made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).
- ▶ He was made a curse for us (Gal 3:13).
- ▶ Through His death, He destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14).
- ▶ He made peace through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- ▶ He blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us (Col 2:14).
- ▶ He spoiled, or plundered, principalities and powers that once dominated the world (Col 2:15).

- ▶ The Son volunteered to come into the world and accomplish what God desired (Heb 10:5-9).
- ▶ God has exalted Jesus to His right hand, making angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him (1 Pet 3:22).
- ▶ Jesus is now bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10).
- ▶ He is now interceding for us (Heb 7:25).
- ▶ He is the Mediator of the New Covenant, administering its promised benefits to believers (Heb 12:24).

These are the matters with which the Gospel deals. **None of them can be confirmed by tangible evidence.** None of them can be demonstrated on a flesh-and-blood level. There are no archeological finds that can confirm their truth. There is no relic that can prove they are true. The ONLY evidence of their truth is the Word of God.

Further, if God had not revealed these things, it is utterly impossible that any man could have concluded them. There is no form of human reasoning that could have looked at the physical evidence of Christ’s life and death and concluded these things happened.

Believing, in the sense of our text, is a persuasion that does not require tangible evidence.

**THE RELEVANCE OF THIS**

This line of reasoning is germane to our text. God does not justify those who believe *“there is one God,”* but the one *“who believes on Him.”* This is NOT believing that Christ exists, but that He is precisely who God has represented Him to be. The Gospel is, in fact, a delineation of Christ Jesus. It is the *“the record that God gave of His Son”* (1 John 5:10). Other versions read, *“the testimony that God has given of His Son,”*<sup>NKJV</sup> *“the witness that God has borne concerning His Son,”*<sup>NASB</sup> and *“the testimony God has given about his Son.”*<sup>NIV</sup>

**Believing on HIM**

To believe *“on HIM”* is to trust and depend upon the Christ of the Gospel. It involves focusing all of our dependence upon Him, making Him the focal person



of our lives. Where this is not being done, men are not believing *“on HIM.”* Consider the dominance of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures—*“HIM.”* Jesus Himself affirmed the Scriptures *“testified of”* Him (John 5:39). He is the *“spirit”* or heart *“of prophecy”* (Rev 19:10). Let there be no mistake about this, where Jesus is not the most prominent Person, men have not believed on *“HIM.”*

### Believing ON Him

Believing *“ON Him”* is quite different than believing there is a God, or even believing there is one God. In the sense of our text, believing *“ON Him”* is trusting in, or relying on, the Christ of the Gospel. By that, I mean the person depends upon Jesus being the ONLY one in whom God is *“well pleased.”* He shapes His life by the persuasion that only Jesus has dealt effectively with sin. He approaches life with a dominating conviction that everything is subject to Jesus, and that there is no promised blessing that cannot be received through Him.

Again, I want to emphasize that believing is embracing Jesus as God has represented Him. There is a marked tendency in men to fabricate a Savior of their own. One who will save their home, their marriage, their finances, their country, etc. While care must be taken not to discourage people from bringing their requests to the Lord, care must also be taken not to equate this with the Gospel. Such approaches are areas of possibility. The Gospel deals with guarantees.

### Being More Specific

It may appear this has all missed the mark, for our text is speaking of believing on God—the One who justifies. Why, then, bring up believing on Christ Jesus?

Jesus has spoken to this issue. In summary, I will show that men cannot believe on God—the One who justifies the ungodly—apart from His Son. Here is something Jesus *“cried out.”* *“He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on Him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth Him that sent me”* (John

12:44-45). Again, Jesus said, *“He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth Him that sent me”* (Matt 10:40; John 13:20).

In a very poignant statement, Jesus confirmed that God cannot be accessed apart from Himself. *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). The God who justifies in inaccessible apart from His only begotten Son!

**When the Gospel of Christ is replaced with a gospel of the church, or even a gospel of the Spirit, a great disservice has occurred. Jesus, and Jesus alone, has accomplished what God required to justify you.**

Through Peter, the Holy Spirit affirms that we believe in God through Jesus Christ. *“Who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God”* (1 Pet 1:21). Confirming the effective ministry of Jesus in this regard, Peter also wrote, *“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God”* (1 Pet 1:18).

Looking at this matter from yet another perspective, John writes, *“Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also”*<sup>NASB</sup> (1 John 2:23). You must not allow the strength of this declaration to pass by you. Denying the Son is refusing Him in the capacity in which God presents Him. It involves more than denying He is the Son of God. It is a refusal to receive Him in that capacity. The very thought of NOT having the Father is startling to the sensitive soul. Let us not be deceived on this matter. No one will be saved who does not have the Father. Further, no one can have the Father independently of the confession of, and reliance on, the Son.

### The Bottom Line

Believing on the God who justifies is realized by receiving Christ in the capacity presented in the Gospel. It simply is not possible to believe ON God apart from the Christ of the Gospel.

### A TRAGEDY OF OUR TIME

When Jesus is not preached, salvation is pushed beyond the reach of the people. Dependency upon God, which is imperative to the maintenance of spiritual life, **is not possible apart from believing on the Son.** Further, believing on the Son is not possible unless the sound of the Gospel remains in our ears. Do not imagine that you can continue to believe on the Son without hearing the proclamation and exposition of the Gospel. Such a thought is a delusion, and leads to condemnation.

When the Gospel of Christ is replaced with a gospel of the church, or even a gospel of the Spirit, a great disservice has occurred. Jesus, and Jesus alone, has accomplished what God required to justify you. Your faith in God is directly proportionate to your acceptance of and reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many believers are regularly subjected to a Christ-less gospel. The issues presented to them focus more on country and family than on God and Christ. It should not surprise us to find a lack of faith in such assemblies.

### WHO JUSTIFIES THE UNGODLY

The Spirit carefully presents the means of appropriating righteousness. Believing that justifies is delineated with precision. We are to believe on *“Him who justifies the ungodly!”* Believing on God who created all things does not bring righteousness to men. The believing that saves is driven by an acute awareness of personal defilement and guilt—*“the ungodly.”* **Where there is no sense of sin, there will be no belief in Christ or quest for God’s favor.**

### Who Are the “Ungodly”

What do you think of when you hear the word *“ungodly”*? Frequently,

Scripture speaks of *“ungodly men”* (2 Sam 22:5; Psa 18:4; 2 Pet 3:7; Jude 4). Such men are never commended, never acceptable, and always under the curse of God.

King Jehosaphat was rebuked for helping *“the ungodly”* (2 Chron 19:2). The blessed person *“walks not in the counsel of the ungodly”* (Psa 1:1). *“The ungodly”* are like *“chaff”* that is driven from the presence of the Lord (Psa 1:4). They will not be able to stand in the judgment (Psa 1:5), and their way will *“perish”* (Psa 1:6). Those who were destroyed in the flood are referred to as *“the world of the ungodly”* (2 Pet 2:5). The challenge is hurled out to us, *“And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”* (1 Pet 4:18).

Some may conclude from these texts that *“the ungodly”* are obviously base and reprehensible people. Others may see them as the morally depraved and indulgent—the dregs, so to speak, of society.

Etymologically, the word *“ungodly”* means *destitute of a reverential awe of God, condemning God, impious, irreverent, or wicked.* <sup>Strong's</sup> That definition, however, contributes to the notion that *“ungodly”* refers to a sort of lower segment of humanity—that it is a term that compares men with other men. But that is not the case at all.

*“The ungodly,”* in this case, is everyone *“without Christ”* (Eph 2:12). It is everyone whose origin can **only** be traced back to Adam. *“The ungodly,”* are those mentioned previously in this Epistle. *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23).

Fundamentally, *“ungodly”* means not like God. It assesses men by comparing them with God Himself, not with one another. That condition—being unlike God—moves the sinner to think and act differently than God, which is the essence of impiety. Wherever this condition is found, the Gospel and salvation is needed.

This condition—being unlike God—is a most serious one. It required Divine intervention in order for God to even deal with it. Thus it is written, *“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”* (Rom 5:6). If Christ had not done this, God could not have corrected our condition.

**We will find that at its root, salvation has to do with making us like God. This is accomplished by conforming us to the image of His Son, who is God’s “express image” (Rom 8:30; Heb 1:3). Justification involves taking people who are unlike God, and making them like Him through a process called “from glory unto glory”**

We will find that at its root, **salvation has to do with making us like God.** This is accomplished by conforming us to the image of His Son, who is God’s *“express image”* (Rom 8:30; Heb 1:3). Justification involves taking people who are unlike God, and making them like Him through a process called *“from glory unto glory”* (2 Cor 3:18).

Being justified, or *“saved,”* is not a matter of simply living differently, or incorporating some new habits into our lives. It is not a change of routine, but a change of character. It is becoming like God, where our thoughts and ways are no longer at variance with Him (Isa 55:8-9). This is a transformation that results in a love of and preference for the truth. Everything becomes *“new”* for such a person, and *“old things pass away”* (2 Cor 5:17). In justification, there is a harmony between God and the justified one that is depicted as *“peace”* and *“reconciliation”* (Rom 5:1; Col 1:21).

**Misrepresentations**

I have been subjected to a remarkable amount of preaching and teaching that represented Christians as being at variance with God. The will of

God is often presented as not really desired by the saints. Too often the statement of Divine requirements is followed with something like, *“But that is not what we do,”* or *“We tend to go the other way,”* or *“Like the Israelites we want to do our own thing.”*

You will find no such representations in Scripture. Retreating from God, preferring our own way, and being drawn to the world are consistently represented as *“the flesh.”* These are NOT a depiction of the new creation, but of the *“old man”* which is to be *“put off”* (Eph 4:22-24). Those who are in Christ are consistently addressed as those who are reconciled to God and capable of denying ungodliness. Where the matter of living correctly is addressed, believers are told, *“Put on therefore, as the elect of God . . . For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light . . . As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby,”* etc. (Col 3:12; Eph 5:8; 1 Pet 2:2). All of this assumes that those in Christ DO have the capacity to think like God and prefer what He says.

**THE MATTER OF WORKS**

When it comes to the *“ungodly”* being justified by God, who is the person willing to affirm men can work themselves into that blessing? Who will say they can become like God by working? How can men, through works, prevail upon God to justify them. It should be abundantly clear to our hearts that the *“ungodly”* cannot be justified, in the sense of our text, by works. It is our *“works”* that revealed our need for justification. They confirmed we were fundamentally unlike God in our ways and thoughts.

God is greatly to be praised for justifying *“the ungodly.”* Only He can fully exonerate them, clearing them of all guilt. Let us be thankful that such a blessing is obtained through *“believing on Him that justifies the ungodly.”* That is a good message with a joyful sound, bringing deliverance and Divine strength to the soul.

## WHEN FAITH IS COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

<sup>4:5c</sup> . . . **his faith is accounted for righteousness.**” What a marvelous statement. Ponder the condition of the man as he stands before God. Through the Law, God acquainted men with a requirement scarcely known to men. *“none shall appear before Me empty”* (Ex 23:15). Again it is stated, *“And none shall appear before me empty”* (Ex 34:20). And again, *“and they shall not appear before the LORD empty”* (Deut 16:16). This principle is also declared in two of Christ’s parables: the talents and the pounds. In both, there was one man who had nothing to offer the master Both were called *“wicked”* servants, and were thrust from the presence of their Lord (Matt 25:26; Lk 19:22).

God has also defined the very best we do apart from Him – the very best, not the worst. *“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away”* (Isa 64:6). Just as it was true of Israel, so it is with every man: *“I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee”* (Isa 57:12). When Joshua the high priest stood before God, his priestly vestments were nothing more than *“filthy garments”* (Zech 3:3). It is no wonder that Paul determined to be *“found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law”* (Phil 3:9).

It is in our interest to ponder how we will appear, and what we will possess, when we stand before the Lord of glory. It is true, *“we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God”* (Rom 14:10-12). God will look for righteousness—a righteousness that He can receive.

Right here our text obtains a beauty that is excelled only by that of the Lord

Himself. Admittedly, we will have no works of our own to present to God. We know this is the case, for *“there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Rom 3:12). Without Jesus in the equation of life, there is no such thing as good. Even with Him in the equation, good is defined by His presence, not by our independent effort. His influence makes works *“good.”*

Imagine standing before the Lord NOW – for how He views us in this world will determine **how He views us in the world to come.** Everything is *“naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do”* (Heb 4:13). Not only does He see what we possess, He also sees what we do NOT possess – and both are critical factors. To stand before Him having sin is not acceptable. To stand

**That is the preeminent possession for which the Lord looks – FAITH. Where it is found, God always acknowledges and honors it. It is unquestionable evidence of the reception of His grace, which is packed full of both faith and love**

before Him without righteousness is also unacceptable.

We have an index to what the Lord is looking for in one of our Lord’s sayings. In His parable of the importunate widow, Jesus revealed the necessity of persistence in prayer. At the conclusion of that parable He said, *“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really FIND FAITH on the earth?”* <sup>NKJV</sup> (Lk 18:8). That is the preeminent possession for which the Lord looks – FAITH. Where it is found, God always acknowledges and honors it. It is unquestionable evidence of the reception of His grace, which is packed full of both faith and love (1 Tim 1:14).

The great men and women of this world, as confirmed by the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, were always distinguished by the faith.

### FAITH ACCOUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

When God finds faith in a person, how does He react? What is His response? O, here is a message that must be seen. Here is a word that every poor sinner must hear: **“his faith is counted for righteousness!”** Other versions also confirm the strength of this statement. *“His faith is reckoned as righteousness,”* <sup>NASB</sup> *“his faith is credited as righteousness,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“his faith is put to his account as righteousness,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“But people are declared righteous because of their faith.”* <sup>NLT</sup> The Amplified Bible reads, *“his faith is credited to him as righteousness—the standing acceptable to God.”*

The person who believes is not thoroughly righteous. He still struggles with the *“old man,”* and experiences the downward pull of the flesh. He remains in an earthen vessel that cannot transport into the world to come. Yet, God receives the one who *“believes in Him”* just as though there were no flaw at all. How is this possible?

First, the declared objective of Jesus is to present to Himself *“a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Eph 5:27). Second, God is fully able to *“present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”* (Jude 24).

But what of the interim? What about here and now? Must we live in doubt of our acceptance? Indeed not! Until the *“redemption of the purchased possession”* (Eph 1:14), our faith **IS** our righteousness. Our text is very specific on this point: *“His faith is counted for (as) righteousness.”* That is, God accepts *“faith”* as the fulfilling of the Law, and the meeting of His requirements. To put

in another way, “*faith*” is the channel through which His own righteousness is imparted to us. It is like a covering “*robe*” that makes us beautiful in His sight (Isa 61:10).

The legalist, one who imagines righteousness comes through works, cannot receive this saying. It is too lofty for him, extending far beyond the reach of his finely tuned, yet stilted, mind. But for

the person who knows what they are by nature, this is a glad sound! It moves such an one to capitalize on believing, knowing that thoughts, words, and deeds, are gloriously transformed by faith.

Believing is not a mere “step” in a salvation procedure. It is not something you do once, then move along to better and higher things. Believing is the heart of spiritual life. It is the breath of the

church, which is the body of Christ.

The acceptance of this proclamation has done more to increase my personal confidence and assurance than any other thing. It has enhanced the beauty and worth of the Gospel. It has brought the greatness of salvation more within my reach. It has confirmed the inferiority of this world, and the superiority of the one to come. Thank God for this affirmation!

## THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MAN

<sup>4-6</sup> ***Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.***” One of the undesirable traits of a law-approach to God is its de-emphasis of the Lord’s blessing. Those enslaved to law rarely speak of being blessed by God. By nature they are more interested in precision and form than in obtaining something from God. The thrust of their message is what is offered to God, not what is received from Him. Having once been snared by this emphasis myself, I know all too well of its effects upon the human spirit.

When a person begins to depend on his own works for Divine acceptance, a cloud of despair rises on the horizon of life. The soul seems to sense the inadequacy of independent human effort. By independent human effort, I mean working without a knowledge of grace and Divine acceptance. Before any real progress can be made in the light, an awareness of God’s blessing must register upon our spirits. Our text confirms this is the case.

To accentuate that God has ALWAYS taken faith as the preeminent thing, the Spirit takes us back to a saying of David, who was a man particularly close to God. Scripture refers to David as “*a man after His own heart,*” and “*the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel*” (1 Sam 13:14; 2 Sam 23:1). It should at once be apparent to us that David will be able to more perfectly articulate the purpose of God.

God does not refer us to some saying of Balaam, “*who loved the wages of unrighteousness*” (2 Pet 2:15). The Spirit does not cite a proverb of Solomon, or a saying of some worldly dignitary. Rather, He will refer us to someone who knew something of this truth, and through whom He could speak with precision.

**Those enslaved to law rarely speak of being blessed by God. By nature they are more interested in precision and form than in obtaining something from God. The thrust of their message is what is offered to God, not what is received from Him.**

### BLESSED IS THE MAN!

The importance of being blessed cannot be overstated. Jacob, you will remember, refused to let the heavenly messenger go until he was “*blessed*” by him (Gen 32:26). Jabez, unknown but powerful man of God, once prayed, “*Oh that thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!*” It is written, “*And God granted him that which he requested*” (1 Chron 4:10).

God specializes in blessing. The

creation was marked by blessing. “Of mankind it is said, “*And God blessed them*” (Gen 1:22,28; 5:2). God also “*blessed the seventh day*” (Gen 2:3). After the fall of man, we hear nothing about blessing until after the flood—around 1,600 years later. “*And God blessed Noah and his sons*” (Gen 9:1).

It was over two hundred years before the blessing of God was mentioned again. That occurred when the Lord called Abraham. “*And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will **ble**ss thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a **ble**ssing; and I will **ble**ss them that **ble**ss thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be **ble**ssed*” (Gen 12:2-3). From that time, references to the blessing of God were more frequent.

The culmination of blessing is associated with the Son of God. Of Him, it is written, “*God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities*” (Acts 3:26). Under the administration of Jesus, Divine blessing has become the standard, and is common in the household of faith.

### The Man

The Spirit will now place a single individual before us. It will not be a specific person, like Abraham, Peter, or Paul. **You can be this person!** Further, the reference will not be to a single blessing, but to a state, or condition, of

“blessedness.” It is a situation that continues, a bright and refreshing ray of glory in which the person can bask.

### What Does It Mean to be Blessed?

“Blessing” speaks of advantage and joyful benefit. It speaks of a happy frame of mind that results from favorable circumstances. Blessing not only makes the person better, it also produces a joyful in the one being blessed. Solomon once said, “The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it” (Prov 10:22). That condition is brought to its apex in Christ Jesus.

Lest we be tempted to degenerate into fleshly assessments, the Spirit is very specific about the blessed person. It is identified as “the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.” Two conditions are declared. (1) First, righteousness is “imputed,” reckoned to, or credited to. (2) Second, it is credited to the individual “apart from,” or independent of, the “works” of man.

Some people equate the ultimate blessing with health. When asked concerning their state, they will say, “At least I have my health.” During his trial, Job was not able to say that (Job 2:7). Neither, indeed, could Paul say this at the height of his prodigious ministry (2 Cor 12:7-10). Timothy was not able to make such a confession (1 Tim 5:23). Trophimus and Epaphroditus could make no such boast (2 Tim 4:20; Phil 2:25-27), nor could the mighty prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 13:14). We must be careful not to adopt sayings that are in conflict with the Word of God.

Others see the ultimate blessing as having a good and godly family. Thus, they say, “Well, at least I have my family, and that is the important thing.” Aaron could not make such a confession (Lev 10:1-2). Eli, who faithfully raised mighty

Samuel, had sons described as “the sons of Belial” (1 Sam 2:12). Make no mistake about this, a family that is united in the Lord is a blessing – but it is not the ultimate blessing.

The consummate blessing is to be received by God even though we nothing can be found in us that merits such a benefit. To receive the impeccable righteousness of God “apart from works,”

obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:9-10).

No form of religion is safe that allows a person to forget “the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged” (Isa 51:1). As soon as the heart becomes insensitive to justification, or the imparting of righteousness apart from works, a gigantic door is opened for the wicked one.

**The consummate blessing is to be received by God even though we nothing can be found in us that merits such a benefit. To receive the impeccable righteousness of God “apart from works,” equips one for life, and prepares one for judgment. It is a blessed state indeed!**

equips one for life, and prepares one for judgment. It is a blessed state indeed!

This is the blessedness of which David spoke when he confessed, “He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings” (Psa 40:2). It is what drove Paul to acknowledge, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:12-13). The knowledge of this blessedness is expressed by the Spirit in these words, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not

Under such a circumstance, the heart is easily diverted, and commandments become burdensome, and heaven seems far away.

I am concerned about the growing absence of songs of thanksgiving about being accepted by God. I have longed been discontent with the lack of personal testimonies in gatherings of believers. It is not that the absence of such things are to be viewed as sin. No person should attempt to correct such a situation by some form of legislation, or weighing down the people with heavy burdens. The lack of heartfelt expressions betrays a condition for which God has provided a remedy. When once the “blessedness” of receiving the righteousness registers upon the human spirit, it at once stimulates the heart. The stammering tongue is enabled to speak, and the lame can then leap as a versatile deer (Isa 32:4; 35:6). The one who is so blessed, himself becomes a blessing.

## DEEDS FORGIVEN AND SINS COVERED

“<sup>4:7</sup> Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered . . .” And what does kingly David say concerning the

blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works? The Spirit calls us to consider Psalm 32:1-2. “Blessed is he whose transgression is

forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” This is the same man who once

cried out under the oppression of guilt, *“Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me”* (Psa 51:8-10).

There is something about knowing God sees our sin that strikes fear into the heart. Thus David acknowledged, *“If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities (kept a record of sins-NIV), O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared”* (Psa 130:3-4). That sins can be identified in our personal history cannot be denied: *“All have sinned.”* Equally true, none of us can say we have committed no sin since coming into Christ, for *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in . . . we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us”* (1 John 1:1,9).

The question is not whether or not we have sinned. We all have! The question is whether or not we *“are forgiven!”* It is whether or not our sins are *“covered.”*

Now, God’s forgiveness must be undergirded by a righteous cause. He cannot forgive us while forfeiting His own righteousness. That is the glory of the Gospel of Christ! It announces that in the Son, God has made full provision for Him to be righteous in justifying the ungodly. Hallelujah for that!

Our text declares a most marvelous reality. Remember, the Spirit is telling us what David has said about the blessedness of a man to whom God imputes righteousness *“without works.”* He then cites David’s statement concerning the remission of sins. He refers to such remission in two ways. First, it is *“forgiveness,”* and second, it is a *“covering.”*

### **FORGIVENESS**

Because sin has credited indebtedness to God, those who are

justified are said to be *“forgiven.”* Their debt has been paid in full by the Lord Jesus. That is why Jesus taught us to pray, *“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”* (Matt 6:12). He also accentuated this marvelous benefit when He spoke God forgiveness as dissolving a great debt. *“The lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him **the debt**”* (Matt 18:27).

**Faith can teach a person to reason in such a manner as to produce joy and gladness. It says to the believer, “If my sins are gone, God has given me His righteousness.” With joy it enables the saved to shout, “If God cannot see my sin, then He has accepted me in the Son.”**

### **COVERING**

Sins that are *“covered”* are sins that cannot be seen by God. He does not consider them or associate them with the individual. This is the significance of the word *“propitiation,”* a word denoting a covering for sin (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). A vivid picture of this is seen in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. There, the noblest of our race are placed before us. Included are Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses’ parents, Moses, the Israelites, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthae David, Samuel, and the prophets.

There is not a solitary sin or deviation of any sort registered against these saints. Were you to trace their record through the Scriptures, you would find some of their sins recorded.

However, if you were granted a hearing with each one of them, not one of them would say they were without sin, or that they had no need of a Savior.

Why were not their sins mentioned in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews? Because they had lived in faith of the coming Redeemer. That Redeemer had come and removed their sins. He paid the debt they owed, and their record was cleared. Their iniquities were forgiven, and their sins were covered.

This is true of all who believe on Him who justifies the ungodly!

### **TRUTH THAT GLADDENS THE HEART**

Now, here is a truth that brings great gladness to the heart. The individual whose iniquities are forgiven is the same person to whom God has imputed righteousness! The person whose sins are covered is the very one who has been made righteous *“without works.”*

It is not possible to be *“forgiven”* and remain unrighteous. Neither, indeed, is it possible to have your sins *“covered”* and not be righteous before God. Thus, the person who really knows they are forgiven, can also know they are righteous. The one who is convinced his sins are covered, can also be convinced God has received him.

Faith can teach a person to reason in such a manner as to produce joy and gladness. It says to the believer, *“If my sins are gone, God has given me His righteousness.”* With joy it enables the saved to shout, *“If God cannot see my sin, then He has accepted me in the Son.”*

When the heart acknowledges these things, and the mouth confesses them, a certain spiritual exhilaration is experienced. It enables the person to draw near to God *“with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water”* (Heb 10:22). It is then that you can *“know you have eternal life”* (1 John 5:13), and that God is working *“all things together”* for your good (Rom 8:28).

## WHEN GOD REFUSES TO IMPUTE SIN

**“<sup>4:8</sup> Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.”** The importance of the truth before us is seen in its firm undergirding by the Holy Spirit. He does not merely make passing statements about this matter, but fastens it firmly in our conscience, thereby accentuating its significance.

The informed and sensitive person wants to know that God will not condemn him. He reasons, “How does God regard me now?” “Will God hear my prayers?” “How will He regard me in the day of judgment?” Such questions cannot be brushed aside as inconsequential by any serious-minded person.

Our text addresses this very matter. The Spirit uses what is called a Hebraism—another way of saying the same thing just declared. He will restate this affirmation: *“Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered”* (v 7). He will further define who this person is, and do so with great power.

The forgiven person, whose sins are covered, is not only the person to whom God has imputed righteousness without works, **it is also the one whom God refuses to charge with sin!** God *“WILL NOT”* credit sin to the account of that person! Hear the truth stated from several different versions. *“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”*<sup>AKJV</sup> **“BLESSSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.”**<sup>NASB</sup> *“Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”*<sup>NIV</sup> *“Blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin.”*<sup>NRSV</sup> *“Happy is the man against whom no sin is recorded by the Lord.”*<sup>BBE</sup> *“Yes, what joy for those whose sin is no longer counted against them by the Lord.”*<sup>NLT</sup> *“How blessed are those to whom the Lord imputes no guilt.”*<sup>NJB</sup>

### DOES SUCH A PERSON EXIST?

Doubt and fear both ask whether such a person even exists. But faith sees the truth that is declared. When Jesus

tabernacled among men, He made sure He made this aspect of His person known. Even before He died, He had power to forgive sins—to cover them, removing them from association with the very ones who committed them.

On one occasion, four believing men brought a palsied man to Jesus for healing. Because they could not access Jesus the ordinary way, they broke up the roof of the house in which He was ministering, letting the man down into the midst of the people, before Jesus. When Jesus saw *“their faith,”* He immediately addressed the afflicted man. *“Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.”* When facing unbelieving critics, He affirmed, *“the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins”* (Lk 5:18-24). How much more does He have that power now!

On another occasion, Jesus declared an abundance of sins could be remitted by Him. You will remember that woman who anointed Jesus feet with precious ointment, washed His feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. When He was confronted with hypocritical men He said, *“Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she*

**The forgiven person, whose sins are covered, is not only the person to whom God has imputed righteousness without works, it is also the one whom God refuses to charge with sin! God “WILL NOT” credit sin to the account of that person!**

*loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven”* (Lk 7:47-48). How much more can He forgive now that He is enthroned in glory!

Jesus also declared there were some people He would NOT condemn, even

though they were worthy, from one perspective, of condemnation. Once Jesus’ critics brought Him a woman who had been taken in the very act of adultery. After challenging the condemning multitude, *“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,”* the accusers departed, leaving the woman alone with Jesus. When He asked her where her accusers were, and who it was that condemned her, the woman replied, *“No man, LORD!”* With voice of compassion and omnipotence, the Lord replied, *“Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more”* (John 8:3-11). How much more will He refuse to condemn those who have *“received the atonement”* (Rom 5:11).

### NO CONDEMNATION

The person God refuses to credit with sin is the one who is not condemned. As it is written, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”* (Rom 8:1). *“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God”* (John 3:36). The person against whom God will not charge sin is *“not condemned.”* Again, the person who is *“not condemned”* is the one to whom God WILL NOT impute sin.

This is a most blessed consideration! The devil seeks to condemn, delivers, God will not. Often fellow men condemn us, but God will not. In a powerful way, the Lord reasons with us on this matter. *“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us”* (Rom 8:33-34). No person can effectively charge a person with sin whom God has justified! No one can condemn the one who is trusting in Christ Jesus, who died, is risen, and is at the right hand of God interceding for us! To such people, God *“WILL NOT impute sin.”*

I cannot close this section without reminding you that in Christ your sins ARE forgiven. This is powerfully declared to us. “*And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, **having forgiven you all trespasses***” (Col 2:13). Again, it is written, “*I write unto you, little children, because **your sins***

***are forgiven you for his name’s sake***” (1 John 2:12). Wonderful statements for the one who believes!

If you can receive this (and your faith will bring that enablement), if your sins are forgiven, God has given you His righteousness. It will effectively equip you

to live for the glory of God without offending Him. It will make all of His commandments pleasant to consider and sweet to obey. You can know you are forgiven, and that God Himself WILL NOT charge you with sin! In that confidence you can approach God, resist the devil, and perfect holiness.

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## CONCLUSION

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The passage we have considered is one of most weighty of all Scripture. There is sufficient truth compressed into it to feed the soul for many days to come. The apprehension of this text will shed light on all of Scripture. It will also illuminate life itself. The power of Satan

will be neutralized when you believe this text. It will bring heaven closer to you, and put this present evil world further from you.

I challenge you to zealously avoid any trend of theological thought that

makes no place for this passage, or relegates it into the background of your thinking.

Considerations that clarify this text, bringing it into the thought processes are good, and should be nurtured.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 7/14/2000. Continuing in our studies on Romans, we will cover 4:9-12, “**ABRAHAM, JUSTIFIED BEFORE CIRCUMCISION.**” The truth of justification by faith has been all but totally obscured by institutionalism and theological systems. When reading the text with which our next lesson deals, one senses the absence of a desire to defend men and their positions. Through the Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit fastens on the appropriation of the blessing of justification. With great power He shows us that Abraham was justified and accepted of God BEFORE he fulfilled the command of circumcision. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God.

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