



## The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 14



# ABRAHAM, JUSTIFIED BEFORE CIRCUMCISION

<sup>4:9</sup> Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. <sup>10</sup> How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. <sup>11</sup> And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, <sup>12</sup> and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. Romans 4:9-12, NKJV

## INTRODUCTION

### LESSON OUTLINE

- I. THIS BLESSEDNESS (4:9a)
- II. WHAT WE SAY (4:9b)
- III. HOW WAS IT RECKONED (4:10)
- IV. A SEAL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS (4:11a)
- V. THE FATHER OF ALL WHO BELIEVE (4:11b)
- VI. RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED UNTO THEM ALSO (4:11c)
- VII. WALKING IN THE STEPS OF THE FAITH (4:12)

In Scripture, the REASON for God's justification of "the ungodly" is no small point. From beginning to end, the whole

matter of salvation hinges upon the grace and graciousness of the Living God. The various terms that are central in the proclamation of salvation emphasize this reality.

### THE LANGUAGE

- ▶ **The message** that must be embraced by faith is called "Gospel," or "glad tidings" (Rom 1:16; Acts 13:32; Rom 10:15). It is not the proclamation of a Law, or the specification of requirements. It is the announcement of the "wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11), the proclamation of what the Lord has done. What a joyous sound it has, and it is good to the tender of heart. "Unto you first 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).
- ▶ **The means** of accessing this great

salvation also accentuate its nature. Faith is the appointed means of taking hold of the grace of God. Salvation is "by grace through faith" (Eph 2:8). This does not relegate obedience to an unimportant place. Rather, it makes obedience acceptable and effectual.

- ▶ **Objectively, salvation is effected by a Savior**, sent into the world by God Himself. This confirms the human condition was beyond any self-help procedure. The initiative that brought the Savior into the world belonged totally to God. He did not come by request, but because "God so loved the world" (John 3:16).

### MAN'S SINFULNESS

With great power, the Spirit has shown the sinfulness of mankind. Whether with law or without it, sin dominated man. No righteous person

could be found by the all-seeing God. He declared there was no one who sought God or did good (3:10-12). While men have chosen to debate over the condition of the “*natural man*,” there is no question in Scripture about that condition. By nature, all men are “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph 2:1). They are under the dominion of Satan, and are “*by nature the children of wrath*” (Eph 2:2-3). With no equivocation whatsoever those outside of Christ are described as “*having no hope, and without God in the world*” (Eph 2:12). Every one who is in Christ Jesus can identify their past as a time when they were “*foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another*” (Tit 3:3).

**THE DESCRIPTION OF SINNERS**

Sinners are described as “*servants of sin*” (Rom 6:17,20), “*subject to bondage*” (Heb 2:15), “*ungodly*” (Rom 5:6), “*darkness*” (Eph 5:8), “*alienated and enemies*” (Col 1:21), “*children of disobedience*” (Col 3:6), and “*sheep going astray*” (1 Pet 2:25). Out of Christ men are “*lost*” (Lk 19:10; 2 Cor 4:3), “*condemned already*” (John 3:18), and the wrath of God “*abides*” on them (John 3:36). They are so dominated by the devil that is it said of them, “*the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them . . . lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*” (2 Cor 4:4). They had to be sought before they could be saved (Lk 19:10). They had to hear a message from another world before they could be saved (Rom 10:14-17). They had to be “*delivered,*” “*raised,*” “*translated,*” and “*reconciled*” (Col 1:13,20; Eph 2:6).

**THERE SHOULD BE NO QUESTION**

There should be no question among those in Christ Jesus about their natural condition or innate abilities. It should be abundantly evident to them that they were as paralyzed in the spirit as the impotent man was in the flesh (John 5:7). They were as blind in their spirit as Bartimaeus was in the flesh (Mark 10:46).

But, alas, these “*evident*” things have been obscured by the doctors of the Law, so that men think they are able to save themselves, or to be justified by their own works.

The Lord, because of His “*great love, wherewith He loved us*” (Eph 2:4), is not willing to leave men bantering back and forth about such critical matters. He sent His Holy Spirit to unveil the truth of the matter, and to empower holy men to

**This type of strong affirmation sharply conflicts with the academic approach to Scripture. It pounds flesh down where it belongs, and provides no option for another view of salvation. The Spirit gives heaven’s perspective, and does not even allow the flesh to speak on the matter.**

proclaim it to the sons of men. That is what this section of Romans is all about.

Here, the Spirit is not showing us various views of salvation, then urging us to select the one that best suits our preconceived conceptions. That is what men do, but it is not what God does. One of the reasons this passage is so hotly contested among professed believers is the manner in which it is written. It leaves no room for opinion, no place for a variant view, and no hope to the one who objects to the message of the Gospel. This type of strong affirmation sharply conflicts with the academic approach to Scripture. It pounds flesh down where it belongs, and provides no option for another view of salvation. The Spirit gives heaven’s perspective, and does not even allow the flesh to speak on the matter.

**THE POWER OF AFFIRMATION**

Once again, I want to draw attention to the affirmations that are made in this book—particularly in the first four chapters. Remember, the power of the truth is in its affirmation. The passage we are presently reviewing is built upon the solid foundation of these firm and unwavering statements. Notice how each one of them is uncompromising, with no possibility of contradiction or negation.

- ▶ “The gospel of Christ: for it **IS** the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (1:16).
- ▶ “For therein **IS** the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it **IS** written, The just shall live by faith” (1:17).
- ▶ “For the wrath of God **IS** revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (1:18).
- ▶ Because that which may be known of God **IS** manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them” (1:19).
- ▶ But we are sure that the judgment of God **IS** according to truth against them which commit such things” (2:2).
- ▶ “For there **IS** no respect of persons with God” (2:11).
- ▶ “There **IS** none righteous, no, not one” (3:10).
- ▶ “There **IS** none that understandeth, there **IS** none that seeketh after God” (3:11).
- ▶ “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there **IS** none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat **IS** an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps **IS** under their lips: whose mouth **IS** full of cursing and bitterness” (3:12-14).
- ▶ “There **IS** no fear of God before their eyes” (3:18).
- ▶ “But now the righteousness of God without the law **IS** manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which **IS** by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there **IS** no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the

redemption that **IS** in Christ Jesus” (3:21-24).

- ▶ “Where **IS** boasting then? It **IS** excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith” (3:27).
- ▶ “Therefore we conclude that a man **IS** justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (3:28).
- ▶ “Now to him that worketh **IS** the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith **IS** counted for righteousness” (4:4-5).
- ▶ “Blessed **IS** the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (4:8).

realities upon which we “reckon,” or pillars upon which sound reasoning is based.

When we think upon the things of God, we must have a proper focus. With zeal, men must avoid reading the Scripture through a preconceived theological template. The Bible cannot be read through a Baptist mindset, a Christian Church perception, or a charismatic persuasion. It is not to be viewed through a Calvinistic or Armenian filter. Nor, indeed, are we to pass the Word of God through a liberal or conservative sieve. God does not give men the luxury of reading His Word as a

reformationist or restorationist, a trinitarian or a Jesus-only, or a sabbatarian or a first-day-of-the-week advocate. The heart is to be subjected to the raw Word of God without an attempt to make it fit into a theological box.

There are some who do not believe such a thing is possible. They are persuaded men cannot approach the Word of God without human bias. However, there is one thing of which they are willingly ignorant. It is the nature of faith.

**FAITH IS ABLE**

Faith can rise to the need to believe God. It does not need a precedent, visible confirmation, or historic attestation! Abraham can believe God without any of those things. He can embrace the Word of God without comparing it with the heathen background of his father or the customs and expertise of the Chaldeans.

Because faith is “obtained” from God (2 Pet 1:1), and comes to us by means of “the grace of God” (1 Tim 1:14; Acts

18:27), it has unique qualities of its own. Faith “comes” to men (Rom 10:17; Gal 3:23), and is given to “every man” in Christ by “measure” (Rom 12:3). However, that faith is neither supported nor facilitated by natural abilities. It has a logic of its own, reasoning after a heavenly manner. It is in no way deficient, and never puts the child of God at a disadvantage, as does the world’s wisdom.

**NOT A BY-PATH**

All of this has not been an intellectual by-path, or an excursion into the wilderness-realm of philosophy. It is necessary to say these things because of the cancerous growth of human reasoning within the professed church. It is a condition with which the Spirit Himself contends in the passage before us.

The reason for this lengthy treatise is not the inability of faith. Neither, indeed, is it because the things proclaimed are inherently *hard to believe*. They are no more difficult to believe than the promises God made to Abraham! The reason for this extended comment on righteousness is that corruption had penetrated the thinking of professed believers. They had begun to imagine they were saved because of their own effort – or because they had been singled out by God – or because they had an ordained mark upon them.

With great power, the Spirit will reason with us in the heavenly places. He will set before us matters the flesh will not be able to accept. However, that should not concern us, for God cannot receive the “flesh.” Justification will not be explained from a scholarly point of view. It will not be viewed as a mere possibility, to be discussed and debated as though it were merely “some new thing” (Acts 17:21). Rather, the Spirit is speaking to our faith, putting the matter of salvation where it can be “believed.”

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The grammarian will at once argue that there is no original word for “**IS**”–that it reflects the grammatical construction of the sentence, not a specific word. And, indeed, that **IS** the case. However, we must not allow that technicality to rob us of the truth. The point is that the statements made are foundational, firm, and unwavering. They reflect a circumstance that exists, not a possible condition. They are the affirmation of unwavering realities to be grasped by faith.

**BUILDING BLOCKS FOR REASON**

All of these statements are like building blocks, and are to be strategically placed into our reasoning. These are

**THIS BLESSEDNESS**

“4:9a *Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also?*” And

what is “*this blessedness*” or “*this blessing?*” First, this is a state or condition of benefit that is conferred,

imputed, or reckoned--not achieved. This is particularly true of the imputation of righteousness. This very point is being

made with unusual power. This precious facet of salvation has been viewed from different perspectives. Paul's salutation recognized the conferment of righteousness upon believers in Rome. Thus they are "beloved of God, called to be saints" (1:7). This comes under the broad canopy of "salvation," which is accomplished through the Gospel in which this very righteousness is revealed (1:16-17). It is becoming "a Jew inwardly" and experiencing "circumcision" in the "heart" and "spirit" (2:29). It is "being justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (3:22). It is the forgiveness of sin and the covering of iniquities (4:7). Thus believers are brought to the point where God "will not impute sin" to them. This is the state of blessedness to which our text refers.

In 1700, Isaac Watts wrote a song that declared "the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works."

**THE GOSPEL STATED**

"Vain are the hopes the sons of men

On their own works have built;  
Their hearts by nature are unclean,  
And all their actions guilt."

"Let Jew and Gentile stop their mouths  
Without a murmuring word;  
And the whole world of Adam stand  
Guilty before the Lord."

"In vain we ask God's righteous law  
To justify us now:  
Since to convince and to condemn,  
Is all the law can do."

"Jesus, how glorious is Thy grace!  
When in Thy name we trust.  
Our faith receives a righteousness  
That makes the sinner just."

Institutional religion robs men of the ability and compelling desire to express such things. It takes the joy out of salvation and surrounds the person with duty and lifeless regimentation. But when the soul is enthralled with the Gospel, and the blessedness of being a person to whom

the Lord "will not impute sin," it can sing with Augustus L. Hillhouse.

"Bright heralds of the eternal Will,  
Abroad His errands ye fulfill;  
Or throned in floods of beamy day,  
Symphonious in His presence play."

"Loud is the song, the heavenly plain  
Is shaken with the choral strain;  
And dying echoes floating far,  
Draw music from each shining star."

"But I amid your choirs shall shine,  
And all your knowledge shall be mine;  
Ye on your harps must learn to hear,  
A secret chord that mine will bear."

Methodist Episcopal Hymnal, 1878

**There is a strain of religion in our country that leaves the individual without a solitary thought of God Almighty imputing righteousness without works, or refusing to impute sin to those in Christ Jesus.**

I lament that the awareness of "blessedness" is not as common among believers as salvation provides. There is a strain of religion in our country that leaves the individual without a solitary thought of God Almighty imputing righteousness without works, or refusing to impute sin to those in Christ Jesus. The absence of these perspectives causes life to become a burden for those who are conscious of their own weaknesses and shortcomings.

True religion is one of "blessedness"—a personal awareness of what the Lord has done. This is "the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel"—the joyous benefit that is realized when that Gospel is believed (15:29). This is "the blessing of Abraham" that comes upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ (Gal 3:14). This is the blessing that qualifies us to receive the Holy Spirit. As it is written,

"He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit"<sup>NIV</sup> (Gal 3:14).

**FOR THE CIRCUMCISION ONLY?**

This is a particularly precious section for Gentiles—those who formerly were "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). Does the blessedness of receiving a righteousness from God belong to the Jews alone? Or, is it for the Gentiles also?

Here, the Jews are called "circumcision," for that was the external sign of their identity with God. Their works certainly were not a sign of that fact, even though they had been given benefits exclusive to them (Rom 9:4-5). The Gentiles are called "uncircumcision," because they had nothing to commend them to God—not even an external sign in the flesh.

**The Jews Received the Promise**

The promise of being made righteous was given to the Jews. They alone received the promise, "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer 23:6). And again, "In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness" (Jer 33:16). They alone were told, "The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God" (Jer 51:10).

The Jews alone had the proper form, the proper message, and the glorious promises. Is "this blessedness" only for them? Can those who are under the curse of the Almighty be blessed by Him? You might be surprised how many

souls imagine this is not possible. Indeed, there are people who believe they can be a member of a church—even THE church—yet they are not persuaded God will NOT impute sin to them. There are others who have a fairly good idea about what they should be doing, yet they utterly lack any confidence that God will NOT hold their sin against them. For that very reason, sin tends to dominate them.

This IS a blessed condition that is not commonly realized. There is a great deficiency within the professed church on this very point: knowing *“the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.”* Is it for the circumcision ONLY, *“to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ*

*came, who is over all, God blessed for ever”* (Rom 9:4-5).

Let me put it another way. Is this blessedness for those who have met all of the external criteria—or, at least, are so perceived? In our parlance, is it only for the ones who have the correct pattern in their congregational structure? Is it for those alone who have mastered the step-by-step procedure for coming to Christ? Is that the basis for receiving *“this blessedness?”*

Do not take this to mean that God has no interest in the structure of His people, or how they behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church, the *“pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim 3:15). Do not think that any required obedience can be ignored or treated as inconsequential when coming to Christ. But that is not the matter being

expounded in this text. Circumcision was required also, and that without exception. Yet, as we will find, it was not the basis for the conferment of righteousness.

Our text will show us that faith procures the *“blessedness”* of reference. He has already proved it cannot be appropriated by *“works,”* for natural men are incapable of producing such works.

The spirit will now confirm to our hearts that *“the righteousness of God”* is conferred upon men independently of their background or their works. The Jew must abandon his trust in works, and come to Christ believing. The Gentiles must admit their helplessness, and also come to Christ believing. Both will receive righteousness upon the basis of their faith. Neither will receive it upon the basis of their works. This righteousness comes *“by faith!”*

## WHAT WE SAY

<sup>4.9b</sup> ***For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.*** The words *“we say”* are equivalent to *“we teach,”* or *“we preach,”* or *“this is in our message.”* Whatever others may have said about Abraham’s realization of righteousness, here is what the Holy Spirit moved men to say. *“For we say that faith was reckoned to*

have heard much about Abraham. I have personally heard very little about his faith being reckoned, or credited, to him as righteousness. This simply not what was generally said about Abraham. Those who esteemed him made mention of him going to Canaan, having Isaac, and offering Isaac. But little was said about his faith. Some spoke more of Abraham *“lying*

nothing of which he could boast—no works that he could hold before God as a basis for receiving the righteousness of God. He had to be *“justified”* like all of us. He was not a super man, but a believing man. His faith is what MADE the difference. His works are what REVEALED that difference.

### FAITH AS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Although Abraham did not have a righteousness of his own, his faith was credited to him AS righteousness. **That is, his faith was accounted, or considered, as his righteousness.**

In this saying we see the greatness of faith. There is no adequate likeness of faith in nature. It transcends the ability of the flesh, taking hold of the Word of God without the imagined benefit of evidence. The *“faith of Abraham”* (4:16) confirms this is the case. Ponder the Divine utterances that Abraham believed, and around which he shaped his life.

- ▶ God would make of him a great nation and bless him (Gen 12:2a).
- ▶ God would make his name great, and

**From the standpoint of nature, Abraham was no different than any other man. He too had *“sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (3:23). He had nothing of which he could boast—no works that he could hold before God as a basis for receiving the righteousness of God. He had to be *“justified”* like all of us. He was not a super man, but a believing man.**

Abraham **for** righteousness.”<sup>KJV</sup> *“For we say, ‘FAITH WAS RECKONED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.’”<sup>NASB</sup>* *“We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him **as** righteousness.”<sup>NIV</sup>*

During over fifty-five years of exposure to preaching and teaching, I

about Sarah being his sister” than about Abraham believing God. However, when Paul said something about Abraham, he spoke in concert with the Lord of glory!

From the standpoint of nature, Abraham was no different than any other man. He too had *“sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (3:23). He had

- make him a blessing (12:2b).
- ▶ God would bless those who blessed Abraham (12:3a).
- ▶ God would curse those who cursed Abraham (12:3b).
- ▶ God would bless all the families of the earth through Abraham (12:3c).
- ▶ God promised to give Abraham the land of Canaan (12:7; 15:7).
- ▶ In his old age, when he was “as good as dead,” God promised Abraham he would beget seed (Gen 15:4).
- ▶ Abraham’s progeny would spend four hundred years in a land that was not theirs, suffering affliction (Gen 15:13).
- ▶ God would judge the nation afflicting Abraham’s yet unborn “seed” (15:14).
- ▶ In the fourth generation, Abraham’s seed would come out of bondage to possess the land promised to him (15:16).
- ▶ Abraham would be the father of many nations (Gen 17:1).
- ▶ Kings would come from the loins of Abraham (17:6).
- ▶ Abraham would have a child through his barren wife, Sarai (17:16a).
- ▶ Barren Sarai would become the mother of nations (17:16b).
- ▶ Kings of people would come forth from barren Sarai (17:16c).
- ▶ God commanded Abraham to offer his son, his only son, as a burnt offering—the one through whom all the promises would come (22:2-16).

### Believing Contradicts Human Reasoning

In all of these matters, there was not one shred of visible evidence that could justify believing God. There were no historical events to confirm such things were possible. The Scriptures tell us how Abraham reasoned on these promises. It was a higher form of reasoning than known to the advanced civilization of the Chaldeans.

- ▶ **Concerning begetting seed when he was incapable of doing so, and had a barren wife.** “*And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: he*

*staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform”* (Rom 4:19-21).

- ▶ **Concerning offering up Isaac through whom all of God’s promises to Abraham were would be fulfilled.** “*By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he*

**Not only did Abraham believe God, he did so in contradiction of human wisdom. There is nothing in human reasoning that could justify believing the marvelous promises given to Abraham.**

*that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure”* (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Not only did Abraham believe God, he did so in contradiction of human wisdom. There is nothing in human reasoning that could justify believing the marvelous promises given to Abraham. It is essential to see this, for we are living in a time when too much value has been placed upon human logic.

Believing not only rises above the wisdom of this world, it is in stark contradiction of that wisdom. That is why is it said of Abraham, “*(as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’) in the presence of Him whom he believed; God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be’*” (Rom 4:17-18).

The expression “*in hope believed*” means Abraham believed and expected, or anticipated, the fulfillment of the promise. Even though the promises were great, extending beyond human possibility, the patriarch did not “*stagger*” at them. He made no attempt to substantiate them by reconsidering his own body, or the inability of Sarah to have children.

Scripture tells us Abraham was “*strong in faith, giving glory to God*” (Rom 4:20). He did not “*waver in unbelief,*”<sup>NASB</sup> but took hold of the Divine promises without hesitation. He did not test or examine the promise of God, but believed it. That was most remarkable from a human point of view. From heaven’s perspective, however, this is the nature of faith—to believe God! It needs nothing more than a Word from God.

The Gospel announces things more difficult to conceive than those promised to Abraham. They are even more contradictive of the wisdom of this world and the reasoning of men than the Lord’s commitments to Abraham. The remission of sins, new birth, and reigning with Christ are too great for man’s wisdom. Only faith can take hold of these things, not “*staggering at the promise of God.*”

It should be evident to us that believing God involves more than your own personal effort—although it surely does include that. Faith “*comes*” to you from God, for it is “*given unto you to believe*” (Phil 1:29). It is “*obtained,*” and is therefore “*precious*” (2 Pet 1:1). It comes “*by hearing*” (Rom 10:17), and is carried to us in the “*grace of our Lord*” (1 Tim 1:14). The more you are exposed to the Word of the Lord, the more apt you are to believe. The more prominent the Gospel of Christ is in your thinking, the more disposed you will be to believe. Abraham did not “*believe God*” because he heard others philosophizing about Him, but because he heard God Himself. He believed what God said, NOT what men interpreted God to have said.

If God places such a high value upon

faith, how is it that men would not do the same? What would move anyone to minimize it, or imagine it to occupy a place on the periphery of life? Believing God actually results in Divine acceptance. Our righteousness flows from our believing, not from our works. To put it another way, **it is righteous to believe and unrighteous not to believe.**

### THE SERIOUSNESS OF UNBELIEF

For this reason, UNBELIEF is the most prominent sin. It is the transgression from which all other sins proceed. Our blessed Lord spoke of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this regard. His appointed role is to persuade men of the truth of the Gospel, and ready them for salvation. Here is how Jesus stated the case. *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged”* (John 16:7-11). The Spirit will reprove, or convict, the world of three realities. The NRSV reads, *“He will **prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.**”* Notice these three cardinal points, and their relationship to the Gospel of Christ.

1. **SIN:** “. . . concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me.”<sup>NASB</sup> The dominate (and, in a sense, **only**) sin is NOT believing in Jesus. That is, it is not believing the “record” or testimony “*God has given of His Son*” (1 John 5:10-11). To fail to believe

what God has said about Jesus is tantamount to Abraham not believing God’s promises to him. Further, just as Abraham had absolutely no hope of an offspring or inheriting the land of Canaan apart from God, so those without Christ have been shut up to sin and vanity. The persuasion of this involves the intellect, but goes much deeper. That is why it requires the work of the Holy Spirit to bring it to pass. He does this through the Gospel.

2. **RIGHTEOUSNESS:** “. . . concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me.”<sup>NASB</sup> The meaning here is twofold. First, the Spirit convinces men of the **reality of righteousness**, for men will not seek it if they are not persuaded of its actuality. Second, that righteousness is administered to men **through the exalted Christ**. That is one of the primary reasons He returned “to the Father” –to ensure others could follow. Again, this powerful work of the Spirit is accomplished through the Gospel.

3. **JUDGMENT:** “. . . concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”<sup>NASB</sup> The judgment of reference is not the day of judgment, but the casting down of Satan, who no longer dwells where he can accuse the saints before God (Rev 12:10). This is another way of saying the ground for a charge against the

people of God has been removed. Thus light has risen upon a cursed world, offering righteousness and hope. This conviction is also accomplished by the Spirit through the Gospel.

Among other things, this confirms the seriousness of unbelief. Abraham’s condition before God was **CHANGED** when he believed God. Until then, his condition was no different than the rest of the race. Believing God has never been dominant in the world. Those who have dared to take God at His word have always been in the minority. But they have never been without blessing.

### WHAT SHOULD WE SAY?

When it comes to the **conferment**

**Abraham’s condition before God was CHANGED when he believed God. Until then, his condition was no different than the rest of the race.**

of righteousness, what should we say? It should be obvious that we should say what the Spirit says. *“Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.”* Let us take care not to adopt a view of Scripture that does not allow these words to come out of our mouths. Too, let us make no attempt to dilute them by trying to make them fit into some theological pattern of thought.

When it comes to the **REASON** Abraham was considered righteous by God, it was because **he believed God**. It is no different with you.

## HOW WAS IT RECKONED?

<sup>4:10</sup> **How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.** We now come to a most precise teaching. This is like new wine that cannot be poured into old wine

skins of legalism. It is a fresh new cloth that cannot be sewn on to the old garment of Law. This is a foundational statement, and is therefore of the utmost importance. The Spirit is not providing us with the **evidence** of Abraham’s justification, as James did, but with the **cause** of it. He

will confirm to our hearts that faith did what no work could do.

The question “*How was it then accounted?*” is a critical one. Other versions read, “*How was it then reckoned?*”<sup>KJV</sup> “*Under what circumstances*

was it credited?<sup>NIV</sup> “Now how did this come about?”<sup>NJB</sup> The NIV does capture the sense of the text. The question concerns the condition of Abraham **at the time** God accounted his faith to him as righteousness. The Spirit has already spoken of the blessedness of the man “unto whom God imputeth righteousness **without works**” (verse 6). He is now going to fully support that statement by citing the principal example of justification—our father Abraham.

**THE COMMANDMENT OF CIRCUMCISION**

When it comes to “works,” there is an premier activity God commanded of Abraham. It was circumcision.

The very first mention of circumcision in the Scriptures is related to Abraham. It involved an extensive commandment, and is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis. “*This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant*” (17:10-14). Notice the many facets of this command.

- ▶ It was God’s own covenant.
- ▶ It was to be kept by Abraham and his offspring after him.
- ▶ Every male child was to be circumcised.
- ▶ Circumcision was a token of the covenant God made with Abraham.
- ▶ It was to occur when the child was eight days old.
- ▶ All generations were included in the commandment.
- ▶ Those born in Abraham’s household, as

well as all slaves, were also included.

- ▶ The uncircumcised male child was cut off from Abraham’s people.
- ▶ The one who was uncircumcised was guilty of breaking God’s covenant.

Circumcision, then, was not an optional matter. Remaining among the promised people was conditioned on the circumcision of the male children.

**Remaining among the promised people was conditioned on the circumcision of the male children. Without fulfilling this Divine requirement, neither individuals nor their sacrifices were accepted.**

Without fulfilling this Divine requirement, neither individuals nor their sacrifices were accepted. You simply could not be associated with Abraham, and specifically with the promises made to Abraham, without being circumcised.

Abraham himself was circumcised when he was ninety-nine years old. At the same time, Ishmael, who was thirteen years old, was also circumcised, together with “*all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner*” (Gen 17:24-27). Later, when Israel was delivered from Egypt, they were reminded of this requirement (Ex 12:44-48). Part of the Levitical law referred to the circumcision of a male child on the eighth day (Lev 12:3). Before Israel invaded Jericho, the fulfillment of this requirement was necessary (Josh 5:2-7). John the Baptist was circumcised on the eighth day (Lk 1:59). The infant Jesus was circumcised the eighth day, in fulfillment of this commandment (Lk 2:21). Stephen referred to this command in his last sermon. “*And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day*” (Acts 7:8).

I have taken the time to comment on circumcision because of the power of

the argument we are considering. Circumcision was no small thing. It was not an inconsequential commandment, or something that was optional to the seed of Abraham. In fact, this single ordinance distinguished the Jews from all other people. After Abraham and prior to Christ’s enthronement, all men were separated into these two categories: **circumcised and uncircumcised** (Gen 17:14; Ex 12:48; Jer 9:25). A large commandment, indeed!

**NOT IN CIRCUMCISION, BUT IN UNCIRCUMCISION!**

Here the Spirit “*speaks expressly.*” The condition in which Abraham was found **AT THE TIME** he was pronounced righteous was “*NOT in circumcision.*” **His justification, or being made righteous, occurred at least fourteen years before he or any member of his household was circumcised.**

He was “*accounted righteous*” in Genesis 15:6, **BEFORE** God told Abraham Sarah would have the promised offspring, **BEFORE** Ishmael was born, and **BEFORE** he himself was circumcised. Ishmael, as you recall, was thirteen years old when Abraham was circumcised. Abraham was counted righteous before he was circumcised, and remained so for at least fourteen years! Circumcision, therefore, **CANNOT** be the cause of justification, or being made righteous.

The Jews considered themselves superior to others because they were circumcised in accordance with God’s covenant with Abraham. Thus, Gentiles were “*called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands*” (Eph 2:11).

There was an advantage to being circumcised! That advantage is stated in this way: “*What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God*” (Rom 3:1-2). **That advantage, however, did not cause the circumcised to be righteous.** Advantages are of no value unless they



yield fruit! Adam and Eve had the advantage in the garden. Israel had the advantage in Canaan. The Jews had the advantage in Jerusalem. In every case, their advantage was not a guarantee.

As a “*master of assemblies*” (Eccl 12:11), Paul is fastening the truth of

justification by faith in our understanding. He is showing there is no way for righteousness to come through the flesh, whether by sign or by work. From Abraham, and until Jesus, the ultimate “*sign*” was circumcision in the flesh. That was the ultimate work, and act of obedience. Yet, our text affirms

Abraham was righteous when he was yet UNcircumcised. This did not take place the day before he was circumcised, but a full fourteen years before that commanded event. This is the Spirit’s powerful confirmation that the man is blessed “*to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.*”

## A SEAL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS

“<sup>4:11a</sup> ***And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised.***” Circumcision is not ignored, as though it had no significance at all. It became the confirmation of the righteousness he already possessed. It is essential to hear how the Lord spoke of circumcision to Abraham. “*This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you*” <sup>NKJV</sup>(Gen 17:10). Notice, God’s covenant was ratified by the circumcision of the “*male child.*” Further, this was not done when the men had matured, but when the child was “*eight days old,*” before they could do any “*work*” (Gen 17:11).

month, then killed “*in the evening.*” With care, each family was to “*take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the upper door post of the houses where they eat it.*” They were then to eat the Passover meal “*with haste, with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staves in their hands.*” That very night, the Lord passed through Egypt, smiting the firstborn in the land, both of man and beast. Of the blood placed upon the doorposts of the house it is written,

***and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them***”<sup>NKJV</sup>(Ezek 20:12,20).

### A Fearful Sign

All signs were not the same. On one occasion, when Korah and his rebels fomented an insurrection against Moses, the Lord assembled the people, giving them something to remember. It is written, “*And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men: **and they became a sign***” (Num 26:10). Like a flagstaff, that occasion was fixed in the minds of Israel to discourage any further rebellion.

**God used tokens and signs in His dealings with Israel. It is His manner to do so. The token, or sign, was primarily for the benefit of the one receiving it. It became the personal evidence of Divine acceptance.**

### When Israel Came Into Canaan

When Israel at last crossed Jordan to enter Canaan, they were instructed to follow a very meticulous procedure. The ark of the covenant was to be taken over first. When the feet of the priests bearing the ark touched “*the edge of the water,*” the waters which came downstream stood still, and “*rose up in a heap very far away*” at the city of Adam. With the waters “*cut off*” the priests carrying the ark entered the river bed and “*stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.*” After the people had safely crossed over, Joshua commanded twelve chosen men, one from each tribe, “*Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you*

### GOD’S USE OF SIGNS

God used tokens and signs in His dealings with Israel. It is His manner to do so. The token, or sign, was primarily for the benefit of the one receiving it. It became the personal evidence of Divine acceptance. A few examples of this form of Divine provision will suffice.

#### Deliverance from Egypt

When Israel was delivered from Egypt, a visible sign was required to be on their houses. It was not an option, and anyone failing to meet this requirement would experience the “*plague*” and the “*destruction*” with which God would smite Egypt. A lamb of “*the first year,*” “*without blemish*” was to be taken from the flock of each family. The lamb was to be reserved until the fourteenth day of the

“*Now the blood shall be **a sign for you** on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt*”<sup>NKJV</sup>(Ex 12:1-13).

#### The Sabbath Days

The Lord’s Sabbaths were also a sign to the children of Israel. “*Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for **it is a sign between Me and you** throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you*”<sup>NKJV</sup>(Ex 31:13). Ezekiel refers to the same sign. “*Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, **to be a sign between them***

and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.” Later Joshua “set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood.”

We are told why this procedure was followed: “that this may **be a sign among you** when your children ask in time to come, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you? Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever” (Josh 3:13-4:9).

**SIGNS COULD NOT BE IGNORED**

In all of these cases, the “sign” was essential. To ignore the procedures associated with that sign would incur the curse of the Almighty. None of them were optional, and none could be ignored.

The Abrahamic sign of circumcision was the same. It was not optional. With great solemnity the Lord told Abraham, “And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul **shall be cut off from his people**; he hath broken my covenant” (Gen 17:11). As we proceed in this text, it is necessary to say these things because of the tendency men have to view Divine stipulations as inconsequential. They are not! The fact that Abraham was justified by faith does not reduce God’s requirements for him to an unimportant or nonessential status. The very manner in which God spoke to Abraham confirms this to be the case.

Our text, however, is not establishing the necessity of obedience, but “the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works” (4:6). The Spirit is going deeper, to the bedrock foundation of salvation. The matter of obedience will be addressed later, and with great power.

**The point to be seen is that faith must not rest in the “sign” of**

**the covenant, but in the God of the covenant!** That it is wrong for the Jew to trust in circumcision is confirmed by the words, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh” (Rom 2:28). Circumcision did not make Abraham righteous. It ratified a righteousness that he already possessed. That circumstance, however, did not allow Abraham to ignore circumcision. It DID mean he could not place his trust in it. Divinely appointed signs are evidence, but not the basis for faith.

**THE MATTER OF BAPTISM**

Endless debates have been spawned over the matter of baptism. It is important to note that no such arguments were ever posed in God’s Word. Our baptism is clearly related to spiritual circumcision, as confirmed by Colossians 2:11-12. “In Him [Christ] you were also

**In all of these cases, the “sign” was essential. To ignore the procedures associated with that sign would incur the curse of the Almighty. None of them were optional, and none could be ignored.**

*circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”*

The essentiality and effectiveness of baptism is never questioned in the Word of God. The Spirit consistently speaks of it as a pivotal point in spiritual life. Associations are made with baptism that confirm its essentiality. Here are a few of them.

- ▶ Repentance (Acts 2:38).
- ▶ The remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
- ▶ The gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
- ▶ Believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 18:8).

- ▶ Salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
- ▶ Being buried with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
- ▶ Being raised with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
- ▶ Being identified with Christ’s death (Rom 6:3).
- ▶ Becoming dead to sin (Rom 6:2-3).
- ▶ Becoming alive to God (Rom 6:3-11).
- ▶ The circumcision of Christ, in which the whole body of sin is cut away (Col 2:11-12).
- ▶ Faith in the operation, or working, of God (Col 2:12).
- ▶ Coming into Christ (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27).
- ▶ Putting on Christ (Gal 3:27).
- ▶ A commandment (Acts 10:48).
- ▶ The confession of Christ (Acts 8:36-37).
- ▶ Gladly receiving the Word of God (Acts 2:41).
- ▶ Washing away our sins (Acts 22:16).
- ▶ Calling upon the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).
- ▶ Coming into one body through the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).
- ▶ Obtaining a good conscience (1 Pet 3:21).
- ▶ The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19).
- ▶ Believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 8:36-37).

Just as circumcision, and other ordained signs, there is no question about the necessity of baptism. One who argues that baptism is not necessary might as well attempt to tell Abraham that circumcision was not necessary, or that Israel did not really have to put the blood on the posts of the door. It makes just as much sense to tell Israel they did not have to honor the Sabbath days. To affirm that baptism has no bearing on our relationship to God is as absurd as saying circumcision was inconsequential to Abraham and his offspring. Such statements are unworthy of a child of God, and reflect an uncomely spirit.

However, when men begin to trust in their baptism, they have committed precisely the same sin as the Jews who trusted in circumcision. Faith must **not** be placed in the sign, but in the God of the sign. I come from a heritage that emphasizes baptism. Their insistence on its necessity is noteworthy, and not to be

despised. However, they are not noted for their spirituality or holiness. Many of their people trust in their baptism, and are not noted for faith in God. This does not demean baptism, anymore than the Jew's reliance on circumcision demeaned that ordinance.

The Spirit affirms that Jews who trusted in circumcision were obliged to keep the whole Law, and that without flaw. *"For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision"*<sup>NKJV</sup> (Rom 2:25). This is addressed to those who had confidence in the flesh, being *"called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God"* (Rom 2:17). Since their confidence resided in what they had done—including circumcision—they were obliged to be perfect doers, not partial ones.

While this may appear to be a rather technical point, it is precisely the one being made by the Spirit of God. God reckons people righteous because they believe. That is how it was with Abraham, and that is how it is with you! Although commanded to be circumcised, Abraham's faith was the basis of him being declared righteous.

In my judgment, this is precisely the point made by the Spirit in the third chapter of Galatians. *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* 3:26-27). It is not necessary to develop some theological formula allowing us to dissect this statement. It is enough to believe it. This is the same truth reflected in the great apologetic of Paul to the Jews. *"And*

*by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses"* (Acts 13:39).

#### A SEAL

Abraham's circumcision was also a "seal," or Divine signet, *"of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."*<sup>NIV</sup> Abraham's circumcision was a pledge, or personal assurance, that he was righteous before God—not because he was circumcised, but because he believed *"in the Lord."* His circumcision pointed to what he had, and was intended to assure his heart of that possession.

It is important to remember this is Divine reasoning. This is not intended to be a line item in a finely tuned theological system, and must not be approached in that manner. Men often think there is a need to handle the Word of God in this fashion, but it is not always to their advantage to do so. Here a commanded activity is said to be a "seal," or stamp, of something possessed before the "seal" itself was received. The ensuing argument will confirm the necessity of viewing it in this manner.

#### Sealed with the Holy Spirit

Those in Christ are said to be "sealed" with the Holy Spirit. This is thrice declared. *"Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts"* (2 Cor 1:22). *"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, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory"* (Eph 1:13-14). *"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption"* (Eph 4:30).

Concerning this matter, the Holy Spirit is said to have been sent into our

**Abraham's circumcision was a pledge, or personal assurance, that he was righteous before God—not because he was circumcised, but because he believed "in the Lord."**

hearts BECAUSE we are sons. In the fullness of the time, Jesus came into the world *"to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father"* (Gal 4:5-6). While this is not the only approach to our sonship, it is a vital one, and must not be ignored. Those who receive the power, or right, to *"become the sons of God"* are those who *"believe on His (Christ's) name"* (John 1:12). That is a foundational view of our relation to God, just as our text is a foundational view of Abraham's relation to God.

## THE FATHER OF ALL WHO BELIEVE

<sup>4:11b</sup> . . . *that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised.*" The Spirit reasons further with us on this matter. He says that Abraham was pronounced righteous **before** he was circumcised, in order that *"he might be the father of all them that believe, though*

*they be not circumcised."* There cannot be one basis for justification for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. Their dilemma is the same, therefore the remedy must be the same. For that reason, the *"father of all those who believe"* must receive righteousness on a basis that is common to both Jew and

Gentile. That basis is faith. If Abraham had been justified AFTER his circumcision, he could not have been the father of Gentile believers. He was justified, so to speak, in his "gentilehood."

We must be careful not to take this statement beyond its intended meaning.

The point being made is that national and fleshly distinctions—even those imposed by God Himself—do not make men better. They CANNOT be the basis for the conferment of righteousness. Abraham’s faith was counted to him for righteousness while he was yet uncircumcised IN ORDER THAT *“he might be the father of all those who believe.”*

### GLORIOUS COMPLEXITY

Here we are able to perceive something of the depth to which men sank when sin entered into then world. To retrieve men was not a simplistic task, and ought never to be presented as it was.

**First**, there had to be a progenitor of those who live by faith. Our text is declaring that person to be Abraham. The faith that saves had to have a genesis in a person who would become both an example and a father of following believers.

**Second**, a law had to be given through which the knowledge of sin could be imparted. That Law would effectively stop every mouth, rendering the whole world guilty before God. The various ceremonies of the Law were vivid pictures of the coming means of salvation. They had no justifying or sanctifying power in themselves, but were only faint outlines of the coming Savior.

**Third**, there had to be a man, born of woman, who lived an impeccably holy life—without any moral taint. That man must, of His own volition, lay down His life for sinners. He must bear in His body the sins of the world upon the tree. He must defeat the devil, spoil principalities and powers, and triumph over death. He must then ascend into heaven, present His blood as an atonement for sin. Then, from a throne of absolute power and authority, He must bring many sons to glory through His righteous government and effective intercession.

**Fourth**, to facilitate this great salvation, a message must be declared that announces the expiation and makes known a righteousness from God.

**Fifth**, the Holy Spirit of God must convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, unveiling the necessity and availability of a conquering Savior. Once sinners are convinced, they are born again *“of the Spirit,”* who remains with them to complete the work.

Salvation is not possible without any of these elements. What we have in our present text is the affirmation of the first requirement: a progenitor of the faithful. While he is very literally the father of “many nations,” including Jews (from Isaac) and Arabian nomads (from Ishmael), no nation is as significant as the spiritual nation of believers. In his great prophecy following the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah referred to *“our father Abraham”* (Lk 1:73). In his great message to the recalcitrant Jews, Stephen referred to *“our Father Abraham”* (Acts 7:2). The Jews of Jesus’ day frequently referred to Abraham as *“our father”*

(Rom 3:10). If, therefore, men are to be righteous, they must be **MADE** righteous by another. Further, there must be a just basis for the conferment of that righteousness.

That basis is established as faith—believing God! In particular, it is believing the record, or testimony, God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11).

There is a consistent property in faith, whether it is in Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, or you. Faith does not stagger at the promises of God. It always does what God demands. It always moves the believer to conform his life to the expectations faith produces. That is one of the reasons God can count it to us for, or in the stead of, righteousness. Where these characteristics are not found, faith is not present. This, of course, is the whole point powerfully proclaimed by James (chap 2).

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### FAITH DOES NOT DEPEND ON RITES AND PRIVILEGES

One of the strong affirmations of our text is that faith does not require or depend upon rites and privileges. Abraham believed God and was counted righteous BEFORE the rite of circumcision of the privilege of national status. Faith did not require those things. That did not mean they were useless. It does mean faith can exist independently of them. If this was not the case, the Gentiles could not have faith, for they had neither rite nor privileges according to the flesh.

### FAITH HAS MORAL POWER

Faith has moral power that Law cannot impart. It can move a person to obey when nothing else can—not even fear. Noah, for example, *“moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.”* But it was only AFTER he had faith (Heb 11:7).

Think of our father Abraham, and of the effective constraining power of his faith. When he was called to a place he would afterward receive, he *“obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whether he went”* (Heb 11:8). By faith he *“sojourned*

(John 8:39,53). But our text moves beyond the Jewish nation to the multitude of believers in Jesus Christ.

To Gentile Romans Paul refers to *“Abraham our father”* (4:1). Our text affirms he is the father of Gentiles, or the uncircumcision, who believe (4:12). Later it is declared he is *“the father of us all”* (4:16). Those who believe on Jesus are part of a spiritual lineage that goes back to Abraham, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.

### RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST BE CONFERRED

Let it be clear that righteousness MUST be conferred, imputed, or credited. It cannot be the result of doing, or working. The Spirit has already confirmed *“there is none righteous, no not one”*

in the land of promise,” without ever possessing a bit of it (Heb 11:9). Faith moved him to look “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). Although he was “as good as dead,” faith gave Abraham the ability to beget progeny “so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable” (Heb 11:12).

Place a high priority upon faith, and do not despise it, or relegate it to a place of inferiority. God regards it so highly that those possessing it are counted righteous in His sight.

### RIGHTEOUSNESS COMES FROM FAITH

Where there is no faith, righteousness cannot be possessed, and where righteousness is not possessed, there can be no salvation. In the imputation of righteousness, the inward man is so impacted that righteous expressions also come from the believer. The character of the individual is changed when righteousness is imputed to him.

It is essential that this be seen, for some have imagined that the presence of faith obviates the need for righteousness. This is not so. If, when righteousness is imputed to the person, he remains essentially unrighteous, God is not glorified. To put it another way, when God imputes “righteousness without works,” it is done in order that truly upright works may be realized. By moving the engine of religion from outward activity to an inward disposition, the standard of conduct is raised. It is not possible to be unholy or disobedient while in fellowship with God.

This is seen in our father Abraham. After Abraham had believed God, and it

was imputed to him for righteousness, he was brought into union with the Lord. Of that union, God said, “For I have known him, **in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him**”<sup>2NKJV</sup> (Gen 18:19). **Apart from acceptance by and affiliation with the Living God, doing righteousness and justice is not possible.** Therefore, God focused his attention upon Abraham in order that he might be righteous in his doing. He could not, however, do this unless Abraham was righteous in character. Further, only faith could cause that to occur.

Abraham’s righteousness prompted him to intercede for Sodom (Gen 18:24-32). It provoked him to circumcise Isaac on the eighth day, as God had commanded him earlier (Gen 21:4). It moved him to rise early in the morning to sacrifice Isaac, as God commanded him (Gen 22:3). His faith constrained him to seek a proper wife for Isaac (Gen 24:6-9). It moved him to sojourn “in the land of promise, as in a strange country,” living in tents while looking “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). He was a godly man!

Faith, then, closes the gap between men and God in order that He might confer righteousness upon them. Because that blessedness involves the remission of sin, God may now dwell with the individual. In doing this, He is “just,” as

well as the “justifier” of him that believes in Jesus (Rom 3:26).

A godly life is the result of Divine intimacy—of being called into the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor 1:9). This is involved in the statement of Ephesians 2:10. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared

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beforehand that we should walk in them.”<sup>2NKJV</sup>

The grace of God effectively teaches us “that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:11-13). **However, this teaching could NOT take place if you were not accepted and righteous in God’s eyes.** Further, you could not be righteous if you did not have faith! Your practical righteousness was preceded by the imputation of God’s righteousness “without works.” It sprang from the righteousness credited to you. When your character changed, your life changed also.

## RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED TO THEM ALSO

“<sup>4:11c</sup> . . . that righteousness might be imputed to them also.” This is a most powerful argument, devastating any notion that national heritage, family lineage, or religious tradition can be the basis for Divine acceptance. Mind you, the

Jews boasted in their heritage, thinking that of itself it lifted them above all peoples. The Jews once said to Jesus, “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man” and “Abraham is our father” (John 8:33,39). They imagined

being able to trace their fleshly origin back to Abraham was sufficient.

### ABRAHAM’S FAITH

However, Abraham was not received by God because of his flesh, but because of

he *“believed God.”* His faith is what pushed him beyond his peers, bringing him into the realm of blessing. Apart from faith, he was like others.

**He Looked Ahead**

In a telling remark of the nature of Abraham’s faith, Jesus said of him, *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad”* (John 8:56). The NIV reads, *“Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”* That is, Abraham lived in the prospect of the Seed through whom the whole world would be blessed. This is a rare insight into *“our father Abraham.”* Although he was given relatively few particulars, this patriarch knew a day of great blessing and benefit was coming—the time, so to speak, of the Seed. He had no greater delight than this glorious prospect. Even while in Canaan, noted for its cultural superiority, his faith moved him to anticipate a greater time and a more perfect residence.

**He Saw Christ’s Day**

Now, Jesus says that Abraham *“saw”* His day *“and was glad.”* What does this mean, for elsewhere Jesus said, *“For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them”* (Lk 10:24).

First, Abraham did not see Christ’s day in all of its fulness, as those blessed to sit at his feet and hear His words. While in the flesh, he saw Christ’s day from a great distance, which accentuates the power of faith. But it seems to me there is more to this than that. The last record we have of Abraham pertains to his post-death existence. Enough is said to show us many things. The reference is found in the well known sixteenth chapter of Luke, in Christ’s account of a certain rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. Both men died in due time. The rich man, Jesus said, awoke in hell, and in much torment. Lazarus *“was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom,”* as though lovingly embraced by him (Lk 16:22-23).

Lazarus was being *“comforted”* by Abraham (Lk 16:25). And, how could a man who also died around two thousand years before bring solace to Lazarus? I suggest that it was because he had seen something. His understanding had been

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enlarged. Indulge me for a moment as I show the evidence of this.

Abraham made several observations to the condemned rich man that are of note.

- ▶ He knew the rich man had his good things in the world.
- ▶ He knew that man was now in torment.
- ▶ He knew Lazarus had experienced evil things in the world.
- ▶ He knew a great fixed gulf was between the departed blessed and cursed, which could not be crossed.
- ▶ He knew the people on earth had Moses and the Prophets, which came hundreds of years after he left the world.
- ▶ He knew if men did not receive God’s Word, they could not be convinced of its truth by one returning from the dead.

If these lesser things were known to Abraham on the other side, how much more should he have been aware of the *“Seed”* which he so fervently anticipated?

**THE POINT OF THE DIVERSION**

The point of this brief diversion is to confirm that Abraham’s faith made him unique, not his earthly status or religious achievement. He himself was changed by faith and the consequent imputation of

righteousness. The anticipation of the blessing of the world eclipsed his own possession of the promised land. Is that not a marvelous consideration?

**RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED TO THEM ALSO**

Abraham became the father of the faithful in order that righteousness might also be imputed to *“them,”* that is, those who believe. While Abraham is *“the father of us all,”* our righteousness cannot come from him. It must be personally imputed to us because of our personal faith. It is simply not enough to be associated with Abraham, who was among the greatest of our race.

One of the dreadful effects of sectarianism is the idea that being identified with a particular group brings the approval of God. Thus men banter back and forth about what makes the group unique, thereby guaranteeing it of the blessing of the Lord.

- ▶ For some, the whole matter is form or ritual. To go through the proper procedures is the fundamental thing. If the particular church has managed to preserve the more holy routines, participation in that church makes one acceptable to God.
- ▶ For others, the pattern of the church itself is the real issue. Does it have the proper offices, and does it observe the proper ordinances. Are its servants called by the proper names, and are the proper people holding its respective offices?
- ▶ Some conceive the creed, or official statement of beliefs, to be the primary thing. A precise statement of what is officially believed is perceived as outweighing everything else.
- ▶ Still others feel the outstanding matter is the day on which believers gather together. Some insist it is the Sabbath, or seventh day, while others contend it is the first day of the week. The Sabbatarians place a greater stress on this matter.
- ▶ Certain groups accent human experience—visible and audible experience. They state what they

perceive to be the fundamental blessing, binding it upon all others. It generally has to do with people being overpowered by God. Such people seem to give no thought to the dreadful condition of a person who must be knocked down by God to be blessed.

► There are also those who make the attire and occupations of the believer the primary marks of distinction. They rally around their perception, and are actually known more for how they look than their affiliation with God.

This is only a sampling of the types of distinctions that presently exist among believers. There are varying degrees of dogmatism and tolerance in all of them, but they are all held to be critical issues.

**Not to be Misunderstood**

These observations are not to be construed as meaning these matters have no relevance at all, or that how we feel about them is of no consequence. It is not intended to be a sort of scoffing at something perceived to be ignorant and unlearned.

What I am endeavoring to show is the sharp conflict between these approaches and that of our text. Remember, we are at the foundation level, showing what brings men into true accord with the Living God, through Christ, and by the Spirit.

The argument is that being righteous in God’s eyes IS the point! Nothing else makes any difference whatsoever if the individual is not righteous. Furthermore, no one can be righteous unless he is MADE righteous. As it is written, *“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be **made righteous**”* (Rom 5:19). That can ONLY come through faith, for it is faith that is *“counted as righteousness.”* The premier example of this has been given, and is being expounded. Abraham *“believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness”* (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3,9,22; Gal 3:6; James 2:23).

**PERSONALLY APPROPRIATED**

The righteousness of God must be **personally** appropriated. It cannot be realized by proxy! Abraham had to attain it personally, and so do his children. That is precisely the point of this text: *“that righteousness might be **imputed unto them also.**”* And how is it that it will be imputed, or credited, to them? Is it because they are in the fleshly lineage of Abraham? Indeed not! When it comes to the progeny that receive righteousness, Abraham is *“father of **all them that believe.**”*

Where faith is lacking, righteousness will not, and cannot, be found. There is no Divine acceptance where men do **not** believe God! *“But without faith it is impossible to please*

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*him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”* (Heb 11:6). Jesus has declared, *“he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16).

**MAKING THE MATTER PRACTICAL**

I have a profound concern for the unacceptable level of faith that exists in the average church. In many congregations and Christian institutions there is a remarkable level of unbelief. One can hardly attend a class or an assembly where this it not made known. It is not at all strange for statements of Scripture to be challenged or questioned. People will often express alarm that God reacted in the manner described in Scripture. Such people are confounded that God *“loved Jacob”* and *“hated Esau”*. Others marvel that David was a man after His own heart, or that Peter was so highly favored by Jesus. They cannot see that

when a person believes God, he pleases God.

God promised Abraham something that was impossible from any human point of view. Abraham believed Him anyway! That is why God imputed righteousness to him. What can be said of the person unable to accept a seven-day creation, or a universal flood, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? What of the one who says the Scriptures are not flawless, or that God cannot send anyone to hell?

What about the sinner who cannot believe his sins can be remitted? Or the pious hypocrite who does not think he has any sin? Ponder the person who is not devoted to the Lord, yet feels qualified to have a leading position among the saints. Consider the individual who sees no need to regularly ingest the Word of God, or fight the good fight of faith, or put on the whole armor of God, or resist the devil!

Do you imagine these are unusual circumstances? Churches throughout our country, and this very city, are filled with people holding these unbelieving persuasions. How can they hope to be accepted by God? Will their association with what is perceived to be the “right church” cover up their unbelief? Indeed, it will not!

**GOD WANTS TO BLESS!**

God wants to bless humanity! He has a desire to grant His righteousness to those created in His own image. Early in human history He divulged a gracious purpose that would bring this to pass. He showed it to Abraham, and Abraham believed him. In our father Abraham, God revealed what He would do for every soul who believed on Him. He made Abraham a distinguished man among men. In him the Lord revealed what happens when a person will believe Him, and what will occur when He imputes righteousness to that man.

To those who will *“have faith in God,”* He will give righteousness. It is

made known in the Gospel and confirmed in Abraham. It is for the Jew and the Gentile as seen in Abraham's righteousness. It was received while he was yet uncircumcised.

Abraham did not have a fine religious heritage. He had no works to present to God that would qualify him for acceptance. He did not have a good understanding of God. But when God

spoke to Him, unveiling a blessing that transcended any earthly possibilities, Abraham *"believed God."* He did it BEFORE he was circumcised! He did it BEFORE he got to Canaan! He did it BEFORE Sarah could conceive or Isaac was born.

What possible reason can be presented for you not believing God? You have every reason to be convinced you

CAN believe God. God has gone on record on this matter, and He will not withdraw His word. Abraham's faith brought righteousness to him before he had the sign of acceptance. God did it this way to convince us righteousness will also be imputed to all who believe, whether they are Jew or Gentile. This is a word worthy of much proclamation. It brings a joy and peace to the soul that cannot be otherwise known.

## WALKING IN THE STEPS OF THE FAITH

<sup>4:12</sup> . . . ***and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.*** The precision with which the Holy Spirit speaks is a source of great edification. Notice how He approaches the fatherhood of Abraham. He will teach us the ramifications of being righteous before God. First, He points to our entrance into God's favor. *"That he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also"* (v 11b). But He does not stop there. He now shows us that God's children continue to walk by faith. In fact, that is the secret to their strength. Abraham's children are not only described as those who believe, but also those ***"who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."***<sup>NIV</sup>

There is a certain progress to faith that must be seen. While faith does have its genesis in our hearts, it must be retained. By that, I mean faith must impact the way we live. The faith must be *"kept"* in order for the intended benefit to be realized.

It may appear as though the Spirit is referring to two separate classes of people: i.e., *"them that believe,"* and those *"who walk in the footsteps of the faith."* But this is not the case. These are two

stages of spiritual life, not two categories of believers. One is the beginning of that

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life, the other its progression and culmination. Neither stage is taken for granted, and neither occurs automatically. Abraham had to exert effort to believe God initially. He also had to exert himself to continue to believe God. He was put to the test by both time and circumstance, both of which have proved more than some could bear. Again, this is seen in our father Abraham.

We have an inspired record of one hundred years of Abraham's life. God first appeared to him when he was seventy five years of age (Gen 12:1-4). One hundred years later, he died *"in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people"* (Gen 25:7-8). During that one hundred years Abraham's faith left footsteps to be followed. From the time God first

appeared to him until the day he died, he was noted for his faith. His life was shaped around the promises of God, and his heart was riveted to God's revealed purpose. He lived in the blazing glory of Divine commitment.

- ▶ He left Ur by faith (Gen 12:4).
- ▶ He dwelt in Canaan by faith (Gen 12:6; Acts 7:4)
- ▶ During a famine, he sojourned in Egypt by faith (Gen 12:10-20)
- ▶ By faith he chose to dwell in Canaan following a dispute between his herdsmen and those of Lot (Gen 13:12).
- ▶ He prayed for Abimelech, resulting in his healing and the opening of the wombs of the women in his house (Gen 20:17).
- ▶ By faith he took up arms against Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, recovering his nephew Lot and their belongings (Gen 14:1-15).
- ▶ By faith he paid tithes of all the spoils of battle to Melchizedec, priest of the Most High God (Gen 14:18-20).
- ▶ Several years after God's initial appearance to him, Abraham was again visited by God. This time he was told his offspring would be as multitudinous as the stars of the heavens and the sand of the sea. He believed God, even though his own body was as good as dead, and Sarah was barren (Gen 15:1-6; Rom 4:19).
- ▶ God again appears to Abraham, giving him the covenant of circumcision. At ninety-years of age, and by faith, Abraham and all of the males of his



household were circumcised (Gen 17:1-23).

- ▶ Heavenly messengers appear to Abraham, confirming that Sarah would have a son about that time next year. Abraham believed God (Gen 18:1-16).
- ▶ When the Lord divulged the eminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, by faith Abraham pled for any righteous that were in the cities (Gen 18:20-33).
- ▶ By faith he cast out Hagar and Ishmael, according to Sarah's word, as confirmed by the Lord (Gen 21:10-14).
- ▶ By faith Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac as God commanded him (Gen 22:1-15).
- ▶ By faith Abraham buried Sarah, confessing he was a stranger and a sojourner among those with whom they lived (Gen 23:3-19).
- ▶ By faith he provided a wife for Isaac, being mindful of his covenant with God (Gen 24).
- ▶ According to God's promise, Abraham died in peace, keeping the faith for a full one hundred years (Gen 15:15; 25:7-8).

There is a marvelous example of *"the footsteps of faith."* Here was a life that was lived in the dominating persuasion of the truth of God's promises.

**IN DEFENSE OF ABRAHAM**

Some sophists, who have the audacity to stand in criticism of Abraham, remind us that he twice said Sarah was his sister. These judges tell us he lied, and did so out of unbelief. I feel compelled to say a word in defense of our father Abraham.

First, I am more anxious to hear what Abraham has to say about them, than what they have to say about him!

*The first occasion*

The first occasion took place when Abraham and his household went down to Egypt during a grievous famine in Canaan. As they approached Egypt, Abraham (then Abram) said to Sarai, *"Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Therefore it shall*

*come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee"* (Gen 12:11-13).

When they came into Egypt, the princes of Pharaoh saw Sarai and told the king about her, *"and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house."* We are told he treated Abram well for the sake of Sarai, and *"Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels."*<sup>NIV</sup> However, it did not go well for Pharaoh's house. It is written, *"But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai."*<sup>NIV</sup>

Upon discerning that Sarai was actually Abram's wife, the Pharaoh called

**While men have sat in judgment on Abraham for this occasion, it is more than interesting to observe that God sat in judgment on the household of Pharaoh. The Spirit speaks not one syllable of condemnation against Abraham.**

for him saying, *"What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister'? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way"* (Gen 12:13-20). Abram then went his way with all of his household, including Sarai and Lot.

While men have sat in judgment on Abraham for this occasion, it is more than interesting to observe that God sat in judgment on the household of Pharaoh. The Spirit speaks not one syllable of condemnation against Abraham.

*The Second Occasion*

The second occasion took place when Abraham was briefly residing in Gerar. Here they confronted Abimelech, king of Gerar. The Scriptures say, *"And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah."* We are also told that Sarah said of Abraham, *"he is my brother."*

Things did not go well for Abimelech. Although a heathen, God came to him *"in a dream by night."* His words were enough to suddenly awaken any person of sound mind. *"Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife."* The king, we are told, had not come near to her. He therefore pled with the Lord. *"Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this."*<sup>NKJV</sup>

In a dream, the Lord answered the objection of Abimelech, revealing that He had not allowed him to touch Sarah. *"Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."* Notice how the Lord sided with Abraham, protected his wife, and told the king to have Abraham pray for him.

Early in the morning Abimelech confronted Abraham. *"What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done."* Then Abimelech said to Abraham, *"What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?"* Abraham's answer was candid and without guile. *"Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. But indeed she is truly my*

**sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, 'He is my brother.'"**

Abimelech then gave Abraham gifts of sheep, oxen, men servants, women servants, and a thousand pieces of silver. It is then written, "So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children" (Gen 20:1-18).

I have taken the time to deal with these two events because of the seriousness of the charges leveled against Abraham, who is "the father of us all." His critics have displayed an abysmal ignorance of the Word of God and the servant of God. They overlook that Sarah was, indeed, Abraham's half-sister. They also judge Abraham through the eyes of a fuller revelation, not recognizing he had neither Bible nor a table of commandments from God. He was en route to the promised land, and passing through hostile lands.

While the Lord holds up Abraham as the "father of us all," they subject him to demeaning criticisms, attempting to bring him down to the level of mediocre disciples. In so doing, they have injected poison into the bloodstream of the church. Their words cause men to regard Abraham with less honor than God requires. As representatives of God, their

role is to speak of Abraham as God has spoken. The other alternative is to say nothing at all.

### LIVING BY FAITH

Walking in the steps of the faith of Abraham is living by faith. Early in this Epistle, we were reminded of this fact: "The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17). Since Jesus is the "Author and Finisher of our faith" (Heb 12:2), it is not enough to start believing. We must continue to do so.

It should be apparent to us that if our faith is credited to us for righteousness, if we are ever found without faith, we will possess no

strange land, he did so by faith. These are "the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had."

This was not a different faith, but the faith he had "while still uncircumcised." It was the faith he "obtained" in Ur, and maintained until he died a hundred years later, when he "gave all that he had unto Isaac" (Gen 25:5).

There is a progression in faith that is essential to remaining righteous before God. Believers are solemnly warned, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God" (Heb 3:12). Faith has "footsteps" that are always leading

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righteousness. Remember, "without faith, it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:6). Abraham's faith in God continued during the twenty-five year wait for the promised seed. It waxed strong in a strange land as well as the land of promise, and in famine as well as in plenty. Even when there was no evidence that he could have a child, he believed! When faced with the barrenness of Sarah, he refused to consider it. His faith stood strong when the word of a cursed city was received, and it rose to the challenge of sacrificing Isaac. While he sojourned in land of promise as in a

forward, moving closer to the goal, and further from the curse.

For those who walk in those footsteps, Abraham is their father. If you are in doubt as to how God regards such people, look to Abraham. He is your example and "father." Behold how highly God speaks of him! Consider what marvels he unveils to him! Ponder what is said of him AFTER he left this world!

There you have an index as to how God looks upon those who are willing to believe Him, regardless of circumstance.

## CONCLUSION

The passage we have considered is a particularly important one. While it is devastating to institutional religion, it brings great consolation and hope to those who believe God. The imputation of righteousness is not a luxury, nor is it optional. This is the legal side of our salvation, while the remission of sin accents the compassionate side. But both sides are essential, and neither can be

relegated to the position of unimportance.

A religion that leads people to imagine they are safe while their faith is weak, or even non-existence, is a delusion from the wicked one. The Jews rested in their external status, and are soundly rebuked by this section of Romans. Jewry, however, stood for the ultimate fleshly institution. It owed its origin, ordinances,

and benefits, to the Lord of glory. They had done nothing to deserve this status, and everything to be worthy of it being withdrawn. If this is true of them, it is all the more true of Gentile religion.

You are never more right than when you believe in the Lord, moving out upon His word. You are never more wrong than you doubt Him, and do not move out upon

His word. For the believer, that opens the door of hope, for it is never vain to trust the Lord. Faith will always be rewarded by the imputation of righteousness. It is what constrains the Lord to forgive sin, uphold the weak, and cause hope to abound in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In dealing with a text like this, I realize there is a certain risk of being misunderstood. This is particularly true among those with a propensity to legalism—a bondage under which I once labored. Some will consider an emphasis on faith to necessarily involve a minimization of obedience. However, it is quite to the contrary. When faith is emphasized, obedience becomes more of a reality. It is the “*footsteps of faith*” that

leads us into all areas of obedience.

Faith that is no larger than a mustard seed will take you further than a mountain of rules and regulations. It will make obedience refreshing and joyful, and remove the grievousness from the commandments.

A people who insist on doctrinal precision, yet are sloppy in their lives and spiritual persuasions bring no glory to God. The church at Ephesus provides a sterling example of this (Rev 2:1-5). Jesus will open a great and effectual door to those who believe, even if their strength has been sapped by trial. He will, because they have kept the faith, cause their enemies to publically admit they are loved by Him, because they kept His word, and

did not deny His name (Rev 3:8-9).

But for those souls or institutions that live in practical aloofness from God, there is no blessing to be had from Him. The “*blessedness*” of our text cannot be experienced apart from faith. The awareness of that condition will exercise an influence upon the soul that makes the individual equal to the difficulties and vicissitudes of life.

Now, be up and “*walking in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham.*” There are promises to be inherited, and blessings to be enjoyed. There is power to be realized, and fellowship to be experienced. God will credit your faith to you as righteousness, protect you, and speak highly of you. The example of Abraham proves that is the truth.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 7/28/2000. Continuing in our studies on Romans, we will cover 4:13-25, “**GOD’S PROMISE REALIZED THROUGH FAITH.**” Because of man’s propensity to law, the Spirit reasons with us extensively concerning justification. This is not like a catechism, to ensure we memorize the correct things. Rather, this is like a Divine construction process, whereby the soul is fortified against both fear and doubt. “*Faith*” brings the promises of God to us, whereas “*works*” seek to go to the promises in the energy of the flesh. The whole of our faith is focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. It rests completely upon Him for acceptance. 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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