

LESSON 7

JULY 18, 2021

UNIT II. FAITH AND SALVATION SEEKING ASSURANCE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Genesis 15:1-6

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 4

PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 4:1-12

KEY VERSE

Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. (Romans 4:3b, KJV)

“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:3b, NIV)

LESSON AIMS

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Study the difference between faith and works as manifested in the life of Abraham.
- Reflect on the knowledge and wisdom of Paul as seen in his understanding of the Old Testament.
- Identify ways in which you rely on your faith for a relationship with God.

KEY TERMS

Believed (verse 3)—Greek: *pisteuó* (pist-yoo’-o): trusted or relied upon; had faith in.

Grace (verse 4)—Greek: *charis* (khar’-ece): unmerited kindness or favor; mercy extended by God; “gift” (NIV).

Justified (verse 2)—Greek: *dikaioó* (dik-ah-yo’-o): shown to be righteous; declared righteous.

Reward (verse 4)—Greek: *misthos* (mis-thos’): “wages” (NIV); recompense for service or achievement.

Righteousness (verse 3)—Greek: *dikaioné* (dik-ah-yos-oo’-nay): justice or the virtue which gives each his due; being morally right.

Works (verse 2)—Greek: *ergon* (er’-gon): deeds; actions; generosity or benevolent actions.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, there has been much discussion and debate over the state of the modern family. Many millennials now dismiss the traditional values and structures that guided and preserved families for generations. Given the dramatic rise of single-parent households, divorce, and unwed pregnancies, it seems that young couples would do well to look to the elders and learn their success secrets for building families that thrive and survive. Today, the distractions of technology, entertainment, and social media, and the tendency of families to live farther apart rather than closer has resulted in some unfortunate realities. The growing physical divide between families has weakened the safety net and support system for many individuals, particularly among African Americans. Following slavery, the black family structure was strong. For decades, black couples were more likely to choose long-term marriages and black children were more likely to be raised in a home with both parents. Time-honored traditions in black families are losing their appeal with younger generations. The days of Sunday dinner are declining. Sadly, family reunions and homecomings, while more cherished than ever, are becoming less frequent and seeing

dwindling attendance from the young and old alike. Many have replaced weekends of family chores and rest with jam-packed schedules, running from one event to another, or individual family members isolated with their own personal affairs, to the exclusion of other family members. This cannot be our future. Many celebrities frequently credit their personal success to the elders in their lives—typically, a family member who made a difference. They acknowledge that without guidance from those who traveled the path before them, they would not have reached the next level. In a spiritual context, the example and witness of seasoned saints reassure us that we can tread new paths toward success. We must cherish the voices of wisdom among us, look to the elders for advice and support (listening carefully to their stories with patience and respect), and allow their stories to inform us as we gather lessons from the pages of their lives. God has given us countless examples to follow—both in the Scriptures and in our families, churches, and communities.

THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Paul was writing to Jewish Christians in Rome about righteousness by faith in the life of Abraham. Paul argued that being declared righteous by faith is not a new Christian phenomenon, but a concept rooted in the faith history of Israel and their ancestor and spiritual father, Abraham. Paul taught that the object of faith is Christ, God in the flesh. Using the Old Testament Scriptures, Paul sets forth a clear presentation of faith as the path to righteousness and the foundation of God's new, everlasting covenant with His people. The old covenant embodied the principle of righteousness by faith, as demonstrated in the life of Abraham, who believed God and was credited as righteous. In that Abraham enjoyed the favor of God prior to his circumcision, Paul examines whether this might be true for other believers as well. Paul asks, "What does the scripture say?" This phrase was commonly used by the Jews when questioning practices that seemed contrary to Scripture. Paul produces verification from Genesis 15:6 to prove that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Father of the Faith (*Romans 4:1-3*)

KJV

WHAT SHALL we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

2 For if Abraham were *justified* by *works*, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham *believed* God, and it was counted unto him for *righteousness*.

NIV

WHAT THEN shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter?

2 If, in fact, Abraham was *justified* by *works*, he had something to boast about—but not before God.

3 What does Scripture say? "Abraham *believed* God, and it was credited to him as *righteousness*."

In chapter 3 of Romans, Paul concluded that God is God of anyone who trusts Him, not just the Jews. God justifies every believer, both circumcised and uncircumcised, by faith. Therefore, Paul argues, it is faith that establishes the law rather than the law that establishes faith.

With this in mind, Paul transitions to a discourse on Abraham, the father of the faith and patriarchal ancestor of the Jews. Paul examines the role of faith versus works in the life of Abraham (verse 1), noting that if Abraham had been justified by his own works, then he could boast that his justification was not of God (verse 2). The Jewish reader would immediately call this hypocrisy. To avoid confusion and provide clarity and credibility to the subject at hand, Paul grounded his argument in the Scriptures (see Genesis 15). Paul challenged his readers to examine the Scriptures and note that Abraham was counted as righteous by God only because he believed God (verse 3). Abraham simply believed God. His righteousness before God did not proceed from any ritual or routine. God therefore counted Abraham as righteous by faith alone. If Abraham, the father of the faith, was counted as righteous because of his trust in God, then it is pointless for anyone to add extra requirements upon others as a prerequisite to being in right standing with God.

What do you think?

What rituals and requirements do we impose on others that might hinder them from coming to salvation or growing deeper in Christian discipleship?

Facts of the Faith (*Romans 4:4-8*)

KJV

4 Now to him that worketh is the *reward* not reckoned of *grace*, but of debt.

5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

NIV

4 Now to the one who works, *wages* are not credited as a *gift* but as an obligation.

5 However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7 “Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

8 “Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”

Paul proceeds to expound on the facts of faith. He reminded his readers that the one who receives a reward as a result of work is not receiving from the standpoint of grace but from debt. The one who gives the reward or benefit of the work does so because it is owed in exchange for the work that has been done (verse 4). By contrast, the one who does not labor to attain righteousness but believes in the One who makes all righteous is made righteous by faith (verse 5). To seal his argument, Paul spotlighted another beloved patriarch, David, as an example of one justified by faith rather than works. Using Psalm 32:1-2, Paul reminded his readers that David was credited as righteous not because of any work he had done but because the Lord had forgiven his iniquities and covered his sins (verses 6-7).

In verse 8, Paul quotes Psalm 32:2 to reinforce his argument that believers are not made righteous by rituals. He writes that individuals are blessed when the Lord forgives their transgressions, covers their sins, and refuses to count their actions against them (verse 8)—that is, pardoned people are blessed people. Because we are blessed and forgiven, we no longer carry the guilt and burden of personal sin. Our joy in the Lord, the One who has set us free, should be on display for the world to see. This should be the believer's testimony regardless of his or her role, rank, or longevity in the faith. This is the point Paul wants to emphasize with the Jews. Righteousness before God does not require a specific checklist of duties performed; faith and its evidence are enough to please God.

What do you think?

Why is it beneficial that God does not justify believers as righteous based on spiritual knowledge, length of church membership, longevity of belief, or other such variables?

Footsteps of the Faith (*Romans 4:9-12*)

KJV

9 Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

NIV

9 Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.

10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!

11 And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.

12 And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

The blessed joy that Paul discusses in the previous verse is now presented to the reader in a question. Who receives this blessedness, Paul asks (verse 9a)—is it for the circumcised only, or are the uncircumcised eligible to receive it? Abraham was counted as righteous by faith (verse 9b). Paul began to challenge their understanding and assertions regarding Jewish history and biblical accuracy as he asked them how Father Abraham was made righteous (verse 10a). As they continued to read, he gave them the answer. It was not in circumcision but in a state of uncircumcision that God counted Abraham as righteous (verse 10b). Paul emphasized that circumcision was an outward or visible sign (or symbol) of God's seal of righteousness. The act

of circumcision did not make one righteous; it is merely the evidence that one has been declared righteous by God (verse 11). Righteousness emerges from “the substance of things hoped for” (Hebrews 11:1) and not of works. Because he was declared righteous before circumcision, Abraham is a spiritual example for both the circumcised and the uncircumcised (verse 12). Paul’s clarification that Abraham was counted faithful by God in Genesis 15:6 would remind many Jews of what happened some fourteen years later in Genesis 17. Eventually, God required Abraham to arrange circumcision for himself, his family, and every male in his household. God calls every believer to demonstrate the (pre-circumcision) faith that Abraham possessed—a faith that does not need validation by outside sources, only an inward, unwavering trust in God.

What do you think?

What are ways that we can seek assurance in God without wavering in faith?

A CLOSING THOUGHT

Many might illustrate what it means to live by faith with a long list of dos and don’ts. Circumcision is one example of an outward display of what should have already occurred in the heart. Without a circumcised heart or without a soul that completely relies on God, it is impossible to please God or to achieve righteousness before Him.

YOUR LIFE

This week, consider the ways in which you trust God even when you do not understand. Try to distinguish your personal, practicing faith and those attributes you use to justify or prove your faith.

YOUR WORLD!

This week, compare the faith list you created with that of another class member’s. What are the similarities and differences? In what ways does your list fail to capture the fullness of your walk with Christ?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, help us to trust that we are saved by grace through faith. No matter what others might say or think, we who call upon Your name serve and live by faith in You. Strengthen us in all we do. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION (Preparing for Next Week’s Lesson)

While reading the background Scripture, consider this thought: “When should we seek reconciliation with others?”

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Justification through Faith

(July 19-25, 2021)

MONDAY, July 19:	“Blessed Are Persecuted Believers”	(Matthew 5:9-12)
TUESDAY, July 20:	“Jesus, Not Suffering, Matters”	(Philippians 1:12-20)
WEDNESDAY, July 21:	“Suffering for Christ and the Church”	(2 Corinthians 11:21b-30)
THURSDAY, July 22:	“In Hope Our Salvation Is Secure”	(Romans 8:18-25)
FRIDAY, July 23:	“Free Gift of Jesus Brings Justification”	(Romans 5:12-17)
SATURDAY, July 24:	“Grace Leads to Eternal Life”	(Romans 5:18-21)
SUNDAY, July 25:	“Justified through Faith in Jesus Christ”	(Romans 5:1-11)