

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: *dikaíosunē* (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.

PREPARING THE LESSON

- Refer to the *Townsend Press SS Commentary Teacher’s Edition* for an additional lesson plan—with word studies, insights on teaching adults, learner matrices, etc.
- Review last week’s student assignments (“Your Life” and Your World!”).
- Thoroughly review your student book for your adult or young adult class.
- Please note that you have the option of using your subscription bundle supplements, i.e., Lesson Scenario, Student Activity Sheet, SSL-AAG

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

People often look to those older than they are for assurance. Who is an example one can trust? Through faith, Abraham, the father of all who believe, proved he was in right relationship with God.

THE LESSON IN FOCUS

As we grow older, we become increasingly concerned about the legacy we will leave behind. While legacy is not a primary concern in our earlier years, it should be. Leaving a legacy becomes a greater concern as we mature naturally and spiritually. Throughout life, most people continually search for a sense of purpose. Most adults are reluctant to leave the comfort of the familiar to venture into unknown spaces or experiences. This is especially true when we have settled into a community, built and maintained a successful career, and are cruising toward or through retirement. The older we become, the more we tend to cherish and take pride in our family heritage and connections and traditions. All of us have personal heroes, whether living or historic. Based on our values and belief systems, we often seek to find impact and improve our community. What we do for others will become a part of our legacy. The example we set can encourage (or warn) future generations who will learn from us as they grow and go. In every experience of life, each rising generation can learn wisdom from those who have gone before them.

THE LESSON IN CONTEXT

One of the goals of Paul's letter to the Romans was to provide foundational teaching on a number of topics related to salvation. Paul made an effort to explain the doctrine of justification, which teaches that repentant sinners can be made acceptable to God because the requirements of the Law have been fulfilled through the sacrifice of Jesus (see Romans 3:21-26; 8:3-5). Justification eliminates the Christian's bragging rights. We are not made righteous through any inherent goodness, only by the righteousness of Jesus imputed or credited to us by faith in Him. It is not rituals or routines that make us righteous. God justifies the believer through faith in Jesus Christ and His saving power. During the early days of Christianity, Jewish believers still believed that circumcision determined one's spiritual standing with God. The old covenant, that is, the Law of Moses, required every Jewish male to be circumcised. Paul, however, showed that Abraham enjoyed the favor of God prior to being circumcised; so, it followed that the same favor might be true for others 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. To support his earlier statement, Paul produces verification from Scripture (see Genesis 15:6), proving that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works. Paul asserts that Abraham was justified by faith, and his faith was counted as righteousness. Further, Paul shows that if people were to be justified by works, faith would be of no use and the promises of God would have no effect. Paul alluded to circumcision as a seal of the covenant that God had made with Abraham. The seal used in ancient times was a mark made of wax or some other substance, and was attached to a document (such as a deed) to confirm, ratify, or make it binding. This was a public testament to the fact that God had previously approved of Abraham and made important promises to him that were binding. The Jews place great value in the fact that Abraham was the father and founder of Israel. Paul knew that an argument drawn from his example or conduct would be especially powerful to Christians of Jewish background in the church of Rome.

OPENING INQUIRY (Choose from the questions below.)

1. Share a time when you needed reassurance that you were on the right track.
2. As you sought reassurance, where (or to whom) did you turn for comfort and encouragement?
3. What was your guideline for determining whose assurance was most reliable?

INSIGHTS

As Christians, we should always be concerned with setting a good example for new believers and young Christians. We continue to do what is right, sacrificing and serving our communities—not to earn salvation but to obey and please God. Our love for God causes us to serve faithfully even when it hurts or is uncomfortable. Examples from the Bible (e.g., Ruth and Naomi; Paul and Timothy; and others) encourage us to form relationships with seasoned, stable believers who are led by the Holy Spirit. They can help guide and encourage us appropriately in our faith walk. As we journey through this life as Christians, we understand that our shortcomings do not exclude us from being counted as righteous.

EXPLORATION

As Christians, we must continually grow to trust in and rely on God's promises. God's greatest promise to us is salvation that has been sealed by the Holy Spirit. God still requires confession of known sin and repentance. Being sealed is not a greenlight for reckless living, but a strong assurance that God still loves us and gives us an opportunity to get it right even when we miss the mark. Our goal as believers is to continually seek a relationship with God through prayer, obedience, and worship.

ADDITIONAL EXPOSITORY INSIGHTS FOR THE TEACHER

Commentary on *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*.”

As a Jew, Paul presents the initial question of verse 1. The questions that Paul often raises quite possibly are questions that are put to him while he is travelling from city to city. In this case, he builds upon the conversation of Romans 3:31. Paul goes back to Abraham, patriarch and spiritual forefather of the Jews. If Abraham were justified by works, he could then boast of his spiritual standing with God. Such ungodly boasting, however, would not be of God, but of himself. Knowing that we are saved only by God's grace or undeserved favor, we have no reason to boast or look down on anyone else. Christians are not perfect or better than anyone else but are simply forgiven. To settle the issue, Paul turns to the testimony of the Scripture as the final authority for settling any disputed spiritual point. Paul was aware that Abraham believed and trusted God. It was Abraham's faithful trust and belief that God credited as righteousness. Paul argues his point

based on the simple truth of the Scriptures. In this case, he refers to Genesis 15:6, noting that God Himself proclaimed Abraham as righteous on the basis of belief rather than circumcision or any other routine or ritual. Abraham is named among the faithful. Under the new covenant, anyone whose sins have been forgiven can be justified or cleansed through faith in God. It is God who declares us as righteous and God alone who justifies us.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Questions:**
What rituals and requirements do we impose on others that might hinder them from coming to salvation or growing deeper in Christian discipleship?
- **Young Adult Question:**
Do you think Paul's message was received differently by Jewish and Gentile believers? Explain.

Commentary on *Romans 4:4-8*

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."

The reference to earned wages (verses 4-5) has nothing to do with unmerited favor. It is a brief but complete summary of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. Constant trust or committal to God is the first and only requirement of the believer who is declared righteous. This, to the Jews, was a scandalous thought of no small proportion. To them, it was unthinkable that God would acquit a guilty, godless person just because he/she repented and turned to trust in God. Two major thoughts are overlooked by the Jews who objected to this teaching. First, when the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, they therefore rejected the redemptive transaction involving God and Christ. Second, they failed to see the significance of belief or trust on the part of one who is considered as godless. Such trust shows that a person is no longer without God, but has fully committed himself or herself to all that God is, has done, and will do. Paul highlights that David also speaks to the blessedness of the one who turns to God. Repentant believers who turn to God simply

confirm the earlier assertions Paul makes about Abraham. Psalm 32:1-2 indicates that when God forgives and covers transgressions and sin He credits the sinner as righteous, not counting the person's sin against him/her. The Lord does not put sin on his account. God records righteousness in place of a sin debt the sinner could never pay. God justifies repentant sinners as an act of grace, in Jesus' name. The only way we can stand as righteous in the sight of God is by being covered by His unmerited favor and love for us. God bestows His righteousness upon those who trust Him (see Philippians 3:9). Justification is presented in the Scriptures as both an Old and New Testament doctrine.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Questions:**

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

- **Young Adult Question:**

Forgiveness is an experience that is given and received. Explain how joy can be a part of this experience.

Commentary on *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 apostle Paul insists that Abraham's faith preceded his circumcision. By faith alone, God made Abraham the father of the faithful before he was circumcised and prior to the establishment of the covenant. Circumcision was the physical affirmation of an existing righteousness that was

conferred by faith. Paul reasoned that circumcision was a sign or symbol of the righteousness that God bestowed upon Abraham because of his faith. Since the faith and the bestowal of righteousness happened before the circumcision, Abraham may also be considered the father of the Gentiles who believe but do not have the symbol of circumcision, just as he is the father of the Jews. Paul explained that believing (uncircumcised) Gentiles could therefore be reckoned as righteous on the basis of their faith. To help the Jews understand their need for salvation, Paul clarified that Abraham is not the spiritual father based on circumcision alone, rather, he is only the father of those who walk in the same faith that he had long before being circumcised (fourteen years after the profession of his faith in God). To be made righteous, Jews must walk in the path of Abraham's righteous faith. The ritual of circumcision, without faith, does not make anyone righteous.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Question:**
What are ways that we can seek assurance in God without wavering in faith?
- **Young Adult Question:**
- If Abraham pleased God before he ever heard of the ritual of circumcision, then why do you think an ordinance like baptism is so important for believers?

LIFE APPLICATION

Refer to Adult Book

(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)

— 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.

(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)

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

Refer to Young Adult Book

(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)

— When you accepted Christ into your heart, not only were your sins forgiven, but also, you were declared righteous by God. You cannot be saved by religious rituals without faith. Your baptism was a public declaration of the work God had already done in your heart.

(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)

— Many will be shocked to learn that their "works" (offerings, acts of service, or church attendance) cannot earn them a place in heaven. Abraham was not declared righteous because of his works and neither will they be. Salvation is not a matter of heritage, rituals, or good deeds—it is only accomplished through genuine faith in Jesus Christ.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

The lesson topic for Sunday, July 25, 2021, is "Seeking Reconciliation." The Devotional Reading is Isaiah 53:1-12, the Background Scripture is Romans 5:1-11, and Printed Text is Romans 5:1-11.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, help us to trust Your promise that we are saved by grace. Thank You for the forgiveness of sin and blessing of justification. Strengthen us as we seek to serve You and live by faith. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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)