

## THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

Bible Background – ROMANS 4

Printed Text – ROMANS 4:1-12

### The Faith of Abraham

<sup>4</sup> Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God?

<sup>2</sup> If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way.

<sup>3</sup> For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith."

<sup>4</sup> When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned.

<sup>5</sup> But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners.

<sup>6</sup> David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it:

<sup>7</sup> "Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight.

<sup>8</sup> Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of sin."

<sup>9</sup> Now, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles? Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith.

<sup>10</sup> But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised!

<sup>11</sup> Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith.

<sup>12</sup> And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised.

-----New Living Translation

### Lesson Introduction

Is it our Faith or our good deeds that allow us to receive eternal life? Many people would impose rules, traditions and rituals on those who seek salvation from God. But what is taught in the scriptures concerning this? The Apostle Paul explains the difference between faith and works as manifested in the life of Abraham, our father in the faith. In this passage of scripture, Paul demonstrates that salvation is a gift from God to those who will receive it and there is nothing that humanity can do that is good enough to *earn* God's Grace.

**Background:** This letter to Christian believers in Rome was written by the Apostle Paul between AD 56 and AD 58 when he was living in Corinth, a Grecian port city. It is

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thought that the emerging Christian belief had made its way to Rome from Jewish believers who had heard about Jesus Christ during visits to Jerusalem and on returning to Rome, shared the good news with both Jews and Gentiles. In AD 49, Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews. After he died around AD 54, Jewish Christians returned to Rome and found Gentile believers leading a growing number of Christ-followers. Well entrenched in the rules and regulations of the Jewish tradition, these Jewish Christians believed that Gentile believers needed to adhere to the practice of circumcision which had been established by the patriarch of their faith, Abraham. The letter to the Romans offers a well-developed explanation of God's interaction with humanity since creation and the fall, the preeminent role of belief in Jesus Christ for humanity's redemption, and the faithful response of believers when they rightly understand that salvation is a gift that had been made available to Jews and Gentiles alike—not through human works—but by belief in the sacrificial life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

-----*Precepts for Living*, the UMI Annual Commentary 2020-2021, p. 537

### **Faith Builds Relationship**

**Romans 4:1-3:** In the early church, during the first century, many Jewish Christians in Rome were appalled that Gentile converts were not practicing the tradition of circumcision that was established by the patriarch, Abraham (Acts 15:13-18). They had traditionally recognized Abraham as the father of their national lineage and their faith. They were proud of his legacy of faithfully walking with God but failed to recognize that the righteousness Abraham received from God was not earned by works but by his faith in the One True God.

In his letter to the Roman church, the Apostle Paul explains that Abraham gained nothing through works according to the flesh but gained all through faith according to the spirit. Abraham was justified because he believed God (Genesis 15:6) and God credited the belief to Abraham [Abram in the referenced passage] as righteousness. Explained another way, because Abraham believed God's promise, God trusted Abraham with righteousness/justice. When we have faith in God, He has faith in us and expects us to act as agents of justice and righteousness. God is counting on believers to represent Him. The way that our covenant relationship with God manifests in our lives is the desire to see God's purpose revealed through us in this world.

◆ *Name some of the ways Abraham's and Sarah's faith was tested as they waited for God to fulfill His promise?*

### **Faithful Becomes Righteousness**

**Romans 4:4-8:** The emphasis in this passage emphasizes the stark difference between earning rewards as a direct result of an individual's work or effort, and a gift from God that can never be earned. In the natural, for work, one receives wages or a salary—sometimes accolades and honors. But no human effort[s], work[s] or deeds, whether secular or religious, can earn righteousness. However, faith in God can give something much more substantial—a relationship that places one in right standing with God. In the case of the Gentile believers in Rome, upon hearing the truth of the Gospel, they trusted God just as Abraham trusted God. Even though, they were not previously

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in covenant with God, they exhibited the faith that caused God to credit their trust in Him as righteousness. God chooses to extend His grace toward those who wholeheartedly trust Him, without regard to their previous sinful state—Jew or Gentile.

Paul also reminds us of what David wrote in Psalm 32—Blessed is the one who God declares as righteous through no effort on their part. For those who have faith in God and trust that Jesus sacrificially paid for the sins of humankind, salvation is a gift over which God is sovereign. One of the greatest blessings is to know that God’s focus is forgiveness and the transformation of believers into people of righteousness and justice, and not condemnation.

◆ *Why would the Apostle Paul choose Abraham and David to make his argument that people are saved by faith, not their works?*

### Faith Begets Works

**Romans 4:9-12:** Paul continues the logical progression of his argument. Was circumcision the condition that Abraham had satisfied prior to being accepted by God? The answer is no, Abraham was credited by God as righteous because of his faith *before* his circumcision. He was accepted by God because of his faith, not for anything that Abraham had done except to trust God. Paul described the subsequent circumcision as a sign that he already trusted God and God declared him righteous because of his faith. In this case, therefore, how is Abraham any different from uncircumcised Gentiles? Therefore, Abraham is the spiritual father of both those who have been circumcised [Jew] and those who have not [Gentile]. In other words, Abraham can be seen as the ancestor of all who place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

The faith of Abraham trusted a covenant that blessed all of his descendants. The practice of circumcision was a sign (Gr. *semeion*) and a seal (Gr. *sphragida*) of the covenant. Paul demonstrates that through faith in Jesus Christ, this covenant has been expanded to all who have faith. Abraham was not perfect, but he became a model for justice and righteousness. He believed God’s promises even though he had no idea how God would fulfill those promises. His example is lifted up by Paul to encourage all believers to live a life of faith. And just as Abraham’s faith blessed his descendants, believers everywhere should live a life of faith that blesses future generations and causes them to live according to the same faith.

◆ *What role, if any, does works of righteousness have in the life of those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ?*

### Conclusion

While there are rarely debates in the modern church over the religious practice of circumcision, there are other religious rituals and practices that continue to divide the body of Christ. Let us be mindful of the religious practices and rituals that many try to impose on others and some traditions that we, too, may be holding on to. Justification and the forgiveness of sins is a gift from God and no amount of traditions, rituals and good works can earn this gift.

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**Source:**

Banks, M. (Ed.). (2020). Love For One Another. *Precepts for Living*, 23(Summer Quarter), 533-544. The Urban Ministries, Inc. Annual Commentary 2020-2021.

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Lesson for Next Week – July 25, 2021 – Study Guide 8

## JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH

Bible Background ♦ ROMANS 5:1-11

Printed Text ♦ ROMANS 5:1-11

Devotional Reading ♦ ISAIAH 53:1-12

### Daily Bible Readings

#### MONDAY

Blessed Are Persecuted Believers  
(Matthew 5:9-12)

#### TUESDAY

Jesus, Not Suffering, Matters  
(Philippians 1:12-20)

#### WEDNESDAY

Suffering for Christ and the Church  
(2 Corinthians 11:21-30)

#### THURSDAY

In Hope Our Salvation Is Secure  
(Romans 8:18-25)

#### FRIDAY

Free Gift of Jesus Brings Justification  
(Romans 5:12-17)

#### SATURDAY

Grace Leads to Eternal Life  
(Romans 5:18-21)

#### SUNDAY

Justified through Faith in Jesus Christ  
(Romans 5:1-11)