

LESSON 11

May 12, 2024

Unit III: Standing in the Faith For Our Sake

DEVOTIONAL READING: Genesis 15:1-6

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 4

PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 4:13-25

KEY VERSES

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. (Romans 4:20-21, KJV)

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Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. (Romans 4:20-21, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Examine why Paul presented Abraham as a model of faith despite Abraham's shortcomings.
- Commit to being persistent in faith despite personal weaknesses or failings.
- Demonstrate loving actions in response to God's blessing of grace through faith.

*Key Terms

Heir (verse 13)—Greek: *kléronomos* (klay-ron-om'-os): an inheritor, beneficiary; someone who inherits.

Hope (verse 18)—Greek: *elpis* (el-pece'): expectation; trust; confidence; properly, expectation of what is sure (certain).

Promise (verse 16)—Greek: *epaggelia* (ep-ang-el-ee'-ah): a summons; a pledge; a guarantee; what was promised.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

Through the ages, the doctrine of salvation has been a divisive and confusing issue among Christians. Some have estimated that there are more than two hundred different Christian denominations, each with its own spin on doctrine, leadership, and the meaning and pathway to



The Biblical Context

Paul stated that the theme of his letter to the Christians in Rome is “The Righteousness of God”—that is, the restoration of the right relationship between humanity and God (see Romans 1:16-17). In Romans 1:18–3:20, the apostle proves that all humanity stands condemned because of sin and needs God’s righteousness. Paul addressed Gentile believers (see Romans 1:18-23) as well as Jews who believed they were already right with God because of their covenant relationship with Him (see Romans 2:1–3:8). Next, Paul introduced justification as the only possibility for humanity to stand in righteousness before God. Through justification, the righteousness of Christ is ascribed or credited to the believer (see Romans 3:21–5:21). This righteousness is God’s gift through His Son and can be acquired only through faith in Him. Paul supports his argument of justification by faith by proving in Romans 4 that the faith–righteousness principle is not a new phenomenon. He demonstrates that Abraham’s faith in God’s promises justified him apart from circumcision (see Romans 4:9-12), apart from the Law (see Romans 4:13-17), and by faith alone (see Romans 4:18-25).

biblical salvation. Some set a high bar for salvation, relegating it to a form of works, as if an individual can become right with God and righteousness through their own power or effort. God’s Word establishes only one step to receiving salvation—believing in the Lord Jesus Christ by faith alone. Disagreement over how to obtain salvation is not a modern-day issue. The apostle Paul addressed it in the book of Romans after emphasizing that all humanity, Jews and Gentiles, were sinners and candidates for receiving God’s wrath (see Romans 1:19–3:20). The Jews believed in a works-based righteousness that involved circumcision and the traditions they added to the Mosaic Law. Paul dismantled this erroneous understanding by presenting the doctrine of justification (see Romans 3:21-31). The entire fourth chapter of Romans focuses on God’s grace toward the patriarch Abraham. God credited Abraham as a righteous man not because he was perfect, but on the basis of Abraham’s faith in Him.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Justified Apart from the Law

(Romans 4:13-17)

KJV

13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

Justified by Faith Alone (*Romans 4:18-25*)

KJV

- 18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.
19 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:
20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;
21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.
22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.
23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;
24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;
25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

NIV

- 18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."
19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead.
20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,
21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.
22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."
23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone,
24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.
25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

This passage concludes Paul's presentation of Abraham as the foremost example of justification by faith. An analysis of this section reveals vital characteristics of Abraham's God-given faith which resulted in salvation. First, Abraham believed God's promise that he and Sarah would have a son despite the human realities (e.g., barrenness, advanced age, etc.) that made such a promise improbable (**verse 18**). They were far beyond typical child-bearing years, but Abraham "hoped against hope," believing that God would honor his faith with the son of promise and make him the father of many nations. Second, Abraham believed God without allowing doubt to undermine his faith or become discouraged because of his and Sarah's aging bodies after waiting for more than four decades (**verse 19**). Such faith challenges modern believers who get impatient and frustrated by simple tasks like waiting in a supermarket line or telephone queue. Third, Paul explains that instead of becoming

discouraged or wavering in his faith, Abraham became more robust in faith and, thereby, pleased God (**verse 20**). Abraham was not a super saint.

He succumbed to human weaknesses on occasions, but his struggles with understanding how God would fulfill His promises only strengthened faith in Him. Finally, Abraham's faith was a complete faith. He remained fully convinced that God could do what He promised (**verse 21**). Abraham's intimate relationship and experiences with God matured his faith to a level of unqualified trust. As a result, God credited his faith to him as righteousness (**verse 22**). Paul summarizes this section by revealing that this benefit of righteousness-producing faith is for all who will believe in the God who raised Jesus from the dead (**verses 23-25**). Because of His grace, God allowed Jesus to be handed over as the sacrifice for human sin and raised from the dead for our justification. Jesus' resurrection proves that His justice was satisfied. Therefore, through faith, Jesus' righteousness enables you to be declared righteous before God.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How should knowing that you are considered righteous by God's grace through faith impact your relationship with Him and others?

A Closing Thought

People are accustomed to achieving success through personal qualities, like excellence, diligence, and intelligence. Acknowledging that God's gift of salvation requires no human effort is often difficult for some to accept. The attempt to add human steps to salvation has caused confusion, frustration, and disunity among believers. Paul addressed this issue in his letter to the Romans by using Abraham's exemplary of faith as the supreme example of achieving righteousness by faith alone. Paul proved that Abraham was justified based on his unshakable faith in God long before circumcision and the Law. God's gift of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ has not changed. He still freely justifies as righteous all who believe in Him and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives.

Your Life

Many, if not most, believers have wrestled with their surety of their salvation. The consequences of this "faith struggle" may tempt believers to doubt or try to please God by following nonbiblical rules and regulations. Understanding the doctrine of justification by faith is essential for every child of God. We receive salvation because of what we believe about Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, not by our virtues or good works. Righteousness comes by faith, and works of righteousness are the result, not the reason, for a life that is hidden with God in Christ.

Your World!

The focus of this lesson issues an important challenge for people of faith to follow sound doctrinal instruction about how salvation is received. If possible, do what you can to suggest, facilitate, or support more systematic doctrinal teaching on justification, sanctification, and their relationship to salvation. These doctrines are the basis of various ministries in the church, including Christian education, evangelism, discipleship, and new membership orientation.

Closing Prayer

Loving Father, we praise and honor You for making salvation accessible to all who believe in Your Son's redemptive work on the Cross by faith. We thank You for justifying us before You and fully commit to proving our gratitude and joy through the good works You created us to complete. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson addresses how to maintain spiritual strength and confidence even when we encounter failure. Read Romans 5:1-11.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, May 13	"Trusting in God Brings Perfect Peace"	(Isaiah 26:1-11)
TUESDAY, May 14	"The Penalty Has Been Paid"	(Isaiah 40:1-11)
WEDNESDAY, May 15	"God's Spirit Is Poured upon All Flesh"	(Acts 2:1-4, 14, 16-24, 36)
THURSDAY, May 16	"The Firstfruits of Reconciliation"	(Acts 2:37-47)
FRIDAY, May 17	"Brothers at Long Last Reconciled"	(Genesis 33:1-15)
SATURDAY, May 18	"May God Bless Us with Peace"	(Psalm 29)
SUNDAY, May 19	"Peace with God through Jesus Christ"	(Romans 5:1-11)

Notes

NIV

13 It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

14 For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless,

15 because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

17 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

Paul devoted the entire fourth chapter of Romans to Abraham to illustrate the central biblical principle that humanity's only path to being right with God is by responding to His offer of salvation by faith and not through any human effort. Jews believed that the patriarch, Abraham, was a supreme example of godly righteousness and biblical ideal of genuine faith. They also believed that Abraham's righteousness resulted from his righteous character. Paul presented his argument to dismantle this erroneous belief. First, Paul proved that Abraham's righteousness was by faith, not by keeping the Law (**verse 13**). The promises that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 were given centuries before the Mosaic Law was given, and Abraham believed them (see Genesis 12:4). Hence, these promises had nothing to do with giving or obeying the Law. In **verses 14-15**, Paul explains that if the Jews inherited God's promises to Abraham by obeying the Law, then faith is useless, and those promises are valueless. The Law only produced God's wrath because no one could keep it perfectly. In **verse 16**, Paul concluded that receiving the promised inheritance does not rest on following the Law but depends on faith and God's grace. No human effort can secure a divine inheritance because there is no living soul that can follow God without sinning. On its own merit, humanity would be completely ineligible to receive God's righteousness. Clearly, salvation is an undeserved gift guaranteed to all Abraham's spiritual descendants who exercise faith in God. If the promise was not by faith but by keeping the Law, then no one could be saved. Consequently, everyone coming to God is Abraham's spiritual offspring, making Abraham the father of all believers. In **verse 17**, Paul verifies the truth of **verse 16** by quoting God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:5. God has power to give life to the dead and to call into existence things that never existed. Paul was likely referring to God's enabling Abraham and Sarah to produce a child at their advanced ages and His divine guarantee that future nations would come forth through their offspring, beginning with the nation of Israel.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why is it hard for the human mind to process the doctrine of salvation by faith alone?