

FPFWC Christian Development



Standing in the Faith

May 2024

Spring Quarter

May 11, 2024

Lesson #2 - Counted as Righteous

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Romans 4:13-25

ICE BREAKER –

1. What does it mean to be fully persuaded to follow Jesus?
2. Why should we value God's Promises?

Key Verse: “ 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

LESSON BACKGROUND

Romans 4 is part of Paul's overall argument supporting his statement in Romans 1:16–17:

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Romans 1–3 explores God's primary challenge in keeping the ancient promises, namely, the profound sinfulness of all human beings (3:23).

Chapter 4 begins the discussion of the remedy to universal sin. Far from facing a hopeless situation, humans have a model available to them of how to approach God. That model is the life of Abraham. When God promised that He would bless the world through Abraham, Abraham chose to respond in faith (Genesis 15:6; quoted in Romans 4:3, 9, 22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23). Paul's readers, especially those of Jewish heritage, would have agreed that Abraham's legacy was important and valuable. The question in dispute is precisely what that legacy is. Paul argues that Abraham had a relationship with God because he placed his faith in God and trusted God's promises. Nothing else. In the New Testament, faith equals trust in God as the one who has promised to bless humanity. Jesus modeled that trust by submitting to His sacrificial death on a cross, being confident that God would work for good through Jesus' shame and suffering. That trust is the basis for any relationship with the same merciful God.

LESSON COMMENTARY

4:13–17. In 3:31, Paul gave the principle that faith establishes the true teaching of the law (see the comments there), and illustrates it in 4:13–25. **Not through the Law** (v. 13c) is developed in vv. 14–17, and **the righteousness of faith** (v. 13d) is developed in vv. 18–25. The **promise to Abraham** (v. 13) (Gn 12:1–3) could

never have been fulfilled if its fulfillment were **through** (by means of) doing **the Law** (v. 14). Everyone fails to obey the law, exposing oneself to God's wrath (v. 15). If obtaining the promises depended upon one's ability to keep the law, then the whole plan would be doomed. **Where there is no Law, there also is no violation** continues Paul's explanation regarding the reason that obtaining the promise is not through the law. His point here is similar to the one in 3:20 ("through the Law comes the knowledge of sin"). The purpose of the law is to define what constitutes a **violation** ("an intentional act of disobedience to a law or custom"), not to facilitate the fulfillment of God's promises. Paul did not mean that when there is no law there is no sin and no judgment (cf. the comments on 2:12–16; 5:13–14). His purpose here is to explain the function of the law, and its function puts it at odds with obtaining God's promise. **For this reason** (v. 16), **the promise is realized by faith ... in accordance with grace** (see 3:21–26). **So that** gives the purpose for God's design that salvation be by grace through faith, not by obeying the law, namely, that the promise may be fulfilled with certainty for **all the descendants**, Jews and Gentiles alike. Verse 17 indicates that Abraham is both the father of one nation, the Jewish people, and the father of **MANY NATIONS** (citing Gn 17:5). Although this is stating that there is but one spiritual people of God, ethnic distinctions are not extinguished. The **God** in whom Abraham believed is described as One who **gives life to the dead**, probably a reference to Abraham's and Sarah's inability to reproduce, but may include a glance at the resurrection of the dead, especially Jesus' resurrection (v. 24). God **calls into being that which does not exist**, a reference to the great nation of Israel and its impact on the entire world, which was not yet a reality when God spoke the promises to Abraham.

4:18–25. Paul has established that obtaining the promise of God was "not through the Law" (v. 13c; cf. vv. 14–17). Next, he developed the idea that the promise comes through the "righteousness of faith" (v. 13d) in vv. 18–25, with the emphasis on "faith" in vv. 17–21, and "righteousness" in v. 22. **In hope against hope** (v. 18) means "Abraham had hope contrary to all human expectations." Verse 19 explains v. 18. **His own body ... as good as dead** and **the deadness of Sarah's womb** recalls what Paul said about God **who gives life to the dead** in v. 17. One might argue with Paul and say that Abraham did waver in unbelief (v. 20). He did not waver, however, after God explicitly told him that Sarah would bear him a son (Gn 17:19). **Grew strong** would be translated better as "was strengthened." **And being fully assured** (v. 21) reflects Abraham's conviction that God was the kind of God who could bring about what He promised.

Beginning in v. 22, Paul explored Gn 15:6c on the theme of "righteousness." Cf. the comments on 4:3 for v. 22. In vv. 23–25 Paul showed how Abraham's experience was relevant to more than just him. Believers share in common with Abraham the reality of faith, the object of faith (God), and the futility of works of the law in order to be right with God. Christians **believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead** just as Abraham had faith in God "who gives life to the dead" by reviving the bodies of Abraham and Sarah. **Raised because of our justification** means that without the resurrection, no one would know that Jesus' death paid for believers' **transgressions**, and that they now have **justification**.

LESSON NUGGET – How can you be saved? Simply by believing God's promise as Abraham did. Faith and promise go together just as law and works go together. Abraham is the father of the Jewish nation physically, but he is the "father" of all believers spiritually (Romans 4:16; Matthew 3:7-9). At Calvary, our sins were put on Christ's account; when you trust Christ. God puts Christ's righteousness on your account (2 Corinthians 5:21). What can be more blessed than to know that your sins are forgiven?

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word for Today Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*