



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 15



GOD'S PROMISE REALIZED THROUGH FAITH

^{4:13} 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. 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. Rom 4:13-25, ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

The Spirit, speaking through the book of Romans, is establishing the necessity and effectiveness of a righteousness that comes from God by faith. Men are not to philosophize or speculate about righteousness. No one is righteous by nature. Indeed, no person can become so through the energy of the flesh or keeping a code of law. Furthermore, the wrath of God is revealed *“against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”* (1:18). The initial revelation of that wrath took place

when Jesus Christ died. While bearing our sins in His body on the tree, the Son was *“cursed”* and *“forsaken”* by God (Gal 3:13; Matt 27:46). The ultimate and final revelation of that wrath will take place when the Lord Jesus returns in all of His glory (2 Thess 1:8-9).

During this *“day of salvation”* (2 Cor 6:2), a righteousness from God is offered to humanity through the message of the Gospel of Christ. That righteousness is appropriated by faith. This fundamental

aspect of the Gospel has been almost totally obscured by institutional religion. The thrust of Christian labors is often thought to be recruitment, or the making of disciples. While there is an element of truth to this view, it has been greatly corrupted by those committed to building the institution. Once the truth of discipleship is known, the critical role of obtaining a righteousness from God becomes apparent. In confirmation of this, ponder our Lord's comments about being His disciple.

- ▶ *“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he **cannot** be my disciple”* (Lk 14:26). No person can stand between the disciple and the Master. Personal earthly preferences cannot be allowed to compete with allegiance to the Savior.

- ▶ *“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, **cannot** be my disciple”* (Lk 14:27). Those who do not embrace the repercussions of following Jesus will not be received by Him. The world will become crucified to the real disciple, and he to the world.

- ▶ *“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he **cannot** be my disciple”* (Lk 14:33). Personal possessions must not be allowed the prominent place in the disciple’s life. Everything must be left to follow Him. This is a matter of the heart, not a mere external procedure.

- ▶ *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake,*

the same shall save it” (Lk 9:23-24). Bearing the cross, or willingly embracing the rejection of the world and its hardships resulting from faith, must be done on a daily basis. An attempt to retain ones own life in this world will result in its sure loss.

When *“making disciples”* is viewed from this outlook, a whole different perspective is seen. Attempts to make the Gospel palatable to alienated hearts will be seen as foolish and reproachful to Christ. Efforts to obtain mere numbers will also be seen as vain and out of harmony with the will of the Lord.

THE POINT

There is a significant point to these observations. They are not to be seen as a mere diatribe against institutional fanatics. The point is simply this. Unless a person is a real disciple of Jesus, according to His own criterion, the righteousness of God is not perceived as necessary. It may be viewed as interesting, but never as essential. The alarming lack of interest in this subject is indication of the failure of men to become followers of Jesus. They have not put everyone else, and their own life as well, in subservience to Jesus, and thus think nothing of obtaining a righteousness from

God. They have not taken up their cross daily, and thus do not have a dominating conscience of their standing before God. They have not forsaken everything, and therefore have no sense of their critical need of a righteousness from God.

The first three chapters of Romans address the need of following Christ and forsaking everything else. It accomplishes this by confirming the vanity and futility of all effort and relationships apart from Christ and a solid faith in Him. We only obtain significance before God, and are accepted of Him, when we are righteous. That righteousness can only come from Him through faith—faith that has come by hearing the powerful Gospel of Christ.

WHAT IS BEFORE US

Now the Spirit will show the relationship between a righteousness from God, the promise of God, and faith. He will trace the conferment of righteousness back to the promise of God. He will also confirm that only faith can take hold of the promise of God, which cannot be perceived or realized until the promise is believed. There is an interrelationship between the three that is most edifying. Promise, faith, and righteous are a threefold cord that cannot be easily broken (Eccl 4:12).

NOT THROUGH THE LAW

“^{4:13} 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.” Here is an expression that is pregnant with meaning. There is a threefold accent here that must be seen. **First**, the purpose of God. **Second**, Divine activity. **Third**, the individual realization of blessing. By **“the purpose of God,”** I mean what the Lord intended to do, independent of man’s worthiness or desire. By **“Divine activity,”** I mean God was on the initiative to fulfill His intention, declaring a promise that reflected His purpose, and which He fully intended to bring to pass. By **“the individual realization of the blessing,”** I am pointing out this is not merely a theoretical overview of

possibilities. It is not a theological tenet, to be debated by men.



This is a summary view of salvation—what God has all along intended for His children. It began with Abraham, but was not proposed to end with him. What was experienced by our father Abraham was an introduction of both the

reality and surety of what God determined for all He *“foreknew”* (Rom 8:29-30).

AN OVERVIEW

This is a most remarkable overview of the intricacies of God’s *“great salvation.”* Three key factors are cited: *“righteousness,” “the promise,”* and *“faith.”* All three have their origin in God Himself. The righteousness is *“from God”* (Phil 3:9). The promise was given by God (Heb 6:13). The *“faith”* was obtained from Him (2 Pet 1:1). From the higher view, Deity is the common factor in all of these things. From the lower perspective, they are all directed toward humanity.

The promise of God and the righteousness from God are both apprehended by faith. Further, the

promise of God relates specifically to the righteousness that comes from Him through faith. It is apparent that all boasting is excluded by this arrangement.

This is not a commentary on something exclusive to Abraham. Nor, indeed, does it refer to God's dealings with the Jews alone. This is an inspired explanation of how God accomplished His desire for humanity, who had sinned and come short of His glory. From any view but that of heaven, the situation is an impossible one. Yet, infinite wisdom and relentless love brought it to pass. All of this was done without God forfeiting or ignoring a single facet of His character. It was also accomplished within the circumference of the human will. No one has ever, or can ever, receive a righteousness from God that does not want it.

THE PROMISE

What is "the promise?" This is the Divine commitment to Abraham, given at different times with varying degrees of elaboration. The first expression of it is found in Genesis 12:2-3. "I will **bless** thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be **a blessing** . . . in thee shall all families of the earth be **blessed** ."

The fifteenth and seventeenth chapters of Genesis refer to this blessing as a "covenant" God made with Abraham (Gen 15:18; 17:2-21). This confirmed the determination of God to fulfill His good pleasure.

In the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, God again affirmed His intention: "in **blessing** I will **bless** thee . . . and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be **blessed** " (vs 17-18).

The "promise," therefore, was God's commitment to bless "all nations."

The relevance of this to us is confirmed in the third chapter of Galatians, where the covenant God made with Abraham is declared to be the New Covenant which we enjoy in Christ Jesus. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to

thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that **the covenant** , that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect" (3:16-17). The ultimate offspring of Abraham was the Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom the promised blessing is realized.

Furthermore, the New Covenant is, in fact, the first, or original, covenant, as this text declares. The Law, never intended to be a means of justification, "was **added** because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal 3:19). All of this emphasizes that God's intention was never to merely direct humanity. It has

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always been to bless them. In order for that to take place, however, He gave the Law to tutor men concerning their absolute need of a Savior and a righteousness from God.

THE HEIR OF THE WORLD

What an intriguing expression: "that he should be heir of the world." If you are ever tempted to think of salvation as something small and inconsequential, ponder the promise that Abraham would be "heir of **the world** ." Other versions read, "that **the earth** would be his heritage,"^{BBE} "to give **the whole earth** to Abraham,"^{NLT} "should inherit **the world** ."^{NJB}

The Genesis record of God's promise to Abraham does not speak of him being an "heir of the world." There we read the following expressions: "in thee shall **all families of the earth** be blessed" (12:3), "in thy seed shall **all the nations of the earth** be blessed" (22:18). The specific land promised to Abraham was Canaan

(Gen 17:8). The boundaries of the land were even specified (Gen 15:18-21). How is it, then, that the Spirit introduces the thought of Abraham being an "heir of the world."

The Fulness of the Promise

The Spirit is viewing the full extent of the promise to be realized through Christ Jesus. That dimension was so large it could not be expressed in spiritually primitive times. Men must be reconciled to God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit to comprehend the fulness of the promise made to Abraham.

The Psalmist expressed the promise more fully. ". . . but those that wait upon the **LORD** , they **shall inherit the**

earth . . . But the meek shall **inherit the earth** ; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace . . . For such as be blessed of him **shall inherit the earth** " (Psa 37:9,11,22).

The Lord Jesus also referred to this blessing. "Blessed are the meek: for they **shall inherit the earth** " (Matt 5:5).

In the book of Hebrews, the Spirit takes the matter even further. "It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified: 'What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet.' In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him."

Until that complete blessing, we

“see” the Lord Jesus, the glorified and consummate Man, crowned with glory and honor, superintending the whole world. He is God’s pledge of the time when the “seed of Abraham” will assume the government of the whole world.

If we doubt this will be the case, the Lord spoke through Daniel of this very blessing. “Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High . . .”^{NIV} (Dan 7:27).

Ultimate Objective

The term “heir of the world,” therefore, views the promise from the viewpoint of God’s ultimate objective. He has determined to gather everything together into one perfectly harmonious whole. There is a Divine purpose, designed in Christ, “to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ”^{NIV} (Eph 1:9-10). At that time, the promise that Abraham, including “his seed,” would be “heir of the world” will be fulfilled.

Other inspired expressions that speak of this glorious fulfillment are as follows. “If we suffer, we shall also **reign with Him . . .**” (2 Tim 2:12). “To him that overcometh will I grant to **sit with me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in his throne**” (Rev 3:21). “And he that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give **power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of My Father**” (Rev 2:26-27). “. . . and they shall **reign for ever and ever**” (Rev 22:5).

Oh, the wonder of the salvation that is “in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10). Believers must discipline their souls and minds not to think of salvation only in regards to the resolution of earthly circumstances, or the experience of Divine blessing while we remain “in the body.” Much of contemporary Christianity is on

this basis. For that reason, it is highly restrictive to the soul, hampering the human spirit, and hiding the good things of God. At some point our souls must soar higher than this world, and consider things yet to come. God has made promise concerning inheriting the whole world.

HIS SEED

God’s dealings with Abraham always include his “seed,” or descendants. “. . . My covenant between Me and thee **and thy seed** after thee” (Gen 17:7), “thou, **and thy seed** . . . you and **thy seed** after thee” (17:9-10).

In an introductory way, Abraham was promised the whole world. In the most precise way, the Lord Jesus, his “Seed,” is the appointed “Heir of all things.” In the inclusive sense, and because we are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6), we are also Abraham’s “seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

In the New Covenant, Abraham is not considered independently of his offspring. Ultimately, Abraham’s “Seed” was Christ Jesus. As it is written, “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy Seed, **which is Christ**” (Gal 3:16). Thus, in the most complete sense, the Lord Jesus Christ is the One “appointed Heir of all things” (Heb 1:2).

Lest some be tempted to think this circumstance removes the subject at hand from us, the Spirit affirms that our identity with Christ constitutes us Abraham’s seed also. “And if ye be Christ’s, then are **ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise**” (Gal 3:29). Thus those who are in Christ Jesus are also said to inherit all things. As

it is written, “He that overcometh **shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son**” (Rev 21:7).

A Brief Summary

In an introductory way, Abraham was promised the whole world. In the most precise way, the Lord Jesus, his “Seed,” is the appointed “Heir of all things.” In the inclusive sense, and because we are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6), we are also Abraham’s “seed, and heirs according to the promise.” The text, therefore, is most relevant to us.

NOT THROUGH THE LAW

The Spirit is showing us the contradiction of Law to faith in the matter of appropriating righteousness. The promise of Abraham becoming an “heir of the world” was not given upon the basis of law-keeping. In fact, the Law was not given until four hundred and thirty years AFTER the promise was made. The promise of heirship was not a reward for keeping the Law.

Applying Old Covenant Promises

The Law promised unparalleled prosperity to the one who was flawlessly obedient to its demands. The blessings would even “overtake” the people, **if** they hearkened to the voice of the Lord. “Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out” (Deut 28:2-6).

Some today are saying these promises apply to those in Christ Jesus. They reason if such were promised under the Old Covenant, how much more are they applicable under the New and better covenant. But their reasoning is flawed. First, the promises were based upon keeping the Law, not upon faith. Second, they had to do with this world, not the world that is to come. Third, God has provided “some better thing” for those

who are in Christ Jesus (Heb 11:40).

What is blessing in the city and in the field compared to being an *“heir of the world?”* Who is willing to compare the blessing of the fruit of our body, the ground, and flocks of animals with being an *“heir of the world?”* What person will turn his attention to the basket and the storehouse being blessed when God speaks of being *“an heir of the world?”* And who will settle for being blessed in coming in and going out when they can be *“an heir of the world?”* Such thinking is too small for those who have been reconciled to God. We can have higher thoughts.

Not only were these blessings

Not only is the promise of being an *“heir of the world”* not brought about by keeping the Law, it is not even in harmony with the principle of the Law. The Law postulates waywardness in man. It was given to convince of sin, and stop

FAITH > RIGHTEOUSNESS > HEIR

the boasting mouth. The Law presented moral challenges men could not meet. It provided a sacrificial system to address the imperfection of men. It did not speak of entering heaven, eternal life, or being reconciled to God. It provided no cleansing for the conscience, power for living, or Savior from sin.

thought. Its professed experts are masters of little things. Nearly the whole tenor of modern religion not only encourages minuscule thinking, but actually discourages deep thinking and extensive meditation. This is seen in the songs they sing, programs they promote, and the men they exalt.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH

How is that Abraham became qualified to be *“an heir of the world?”* It was because he was righteous, for only a righteous person can inherit the world. This righteousness, however, was not developed by Abraham. Rather, it was *“imputed”* to him upon the basis of his faith. He possessed the righteousness by imputation because he *“believed God.”*

Some might object that Abraham was NOT qualified to be *“heir of the world,”* but was totally unworthy of such a magnanimous blessing. From an earthly perspective, this is true. But there is another view—the TRUE one. Our text states the case clearly. He WAS qualified because he WAS righteous. Further, he WAS because he believed God! That is how the New Covenant works. **Those who believe on Christ are counted righteous, and those who are counted righteous are made heirs.**

In my judgment, the contemporary church is afflicted with the virus of small thought. Its professed experts are masters of little things. Nearly the whole tenor of modern religion not only encourages minuscule thinking, but actually discourages deep thinking and extensive meditation.

contingent upon the DOING of men, they also assumed enmity all around. They assumed the need for replenishment and the presence of death and corruption. Remove these factors, and they have no significance whatsoever.

Being an *“heir of the world”* assumes the removal of all hostile forces and the presence of perfect peace. There is no need for flocks to increase, or to store up food for the time of need.

Not Through the Law

Therefore, a promise of this magnitude—becoming *“an heir of the world”*—could not be realized through the Law. If men did not have their storehouse blessed through Law, how could they ever hope to inherit the whole world? You cannot earn the remission of your sins—the entry point of Divine acceptance. It should be apparent you cannot earn the world as your reward—the consummation of Divine acceptance.

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This all may appear rather technical and inconsequential, but we must not allow ourselves to think in such a shallow manner. If God could not make Abraham an *“heir”* without him being righteous, then we should certainly regard righteousness as being of the utmost importance. Also, if men cannot be *“made righteous”* (Rom 5:19) apart from faith, then a high priority must be placed upon believing God.

Because this subject will be developed at length in the succeeding passage, we will proceed to the next verse.

THE LAW VOIDS 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.” This is an unusually strong affirmation. Think of these statements: ***“faith is made void”*** and ***“the promise made of none effect.”*** The meaning is that BECAUSE faith is

made void, the promise CANNOT be fulfilled. Arresting words, indeed!

Other versions read, *“faith is made void and the promise is nullified,”*^{NASB}

“faith has no value and the promise is worthless,”^{NIV} “faith is useless. And in that case, the promise is also meaningless,”^{NLT} and “faith is worthless and the promise is without force.”^{NJB}

What is it that voids faith, making it useless? And how can a promise given by the Almighty God lose its effectiveness and become meaningless? Some would contend that neither things is possible. The Spirit affirms there is a condition that introduces both things into human experience. It is a tragedy that any person would embrace a theology that made the acceptance of these things unlikely, if not impossible.

If the inheritance is obtained through *“the law,”* or by a system of law-keeping, faith *“has no value.”* Because of that condition, the promise of God is *“meaningless,”* for there is no way for it to be realized.

The Law is Not of Faith

The Spirit is making a particularly weighty point. I fear it is little known, if recognized at all, in the church-circles with which I am most familiar. The Law is actually contrary to faith, and does not even allow for its entrance, to say nothing of its maintenance. This is not a mere human conjecture, but a Divine affirmation. *“And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them”* (Gal 3:12).

The Law did not depend upon believing, but on DOING. Faith was not required to do the Law. That is the meaning of the Galatians text. Other versions accentuate this reality. *“The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them,’^{NIV} ‘But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, ‘Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.’^{NRSV} ‘The law is not on the principle of faith; but, He that shall have done these things shall live by them.’^{DARBY} ‘The Law is based not on faith but on the principle, whoever complies with it will find life in it.’^{NJB}*

The Law did not require faith in

God or the anticipation of the Son of God. There was no commandment to believe God, and no promise given to those who did believe God.

Those who were under the Law were given no advantage in believing. This is confirmed by their rejection of the Savior of the world, Who came to them (John 1:11). Even when the thundering of the Law was still ringing in their ears, the Israelites were noted for unbelief, not faith. They perceived the voice of the Lord (which can be believed, as seen in our father Abraham) as the source of death, not life. Thus they requested of Moses, *“Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die”* (Ex 20:19).

The Law has nothing whatsoever to do with man as a believer, but deals with

If the inheritance is obtained through *“the law,”* or by a system of law-keeping, faith *“has no value.”* Because of that condition, the promise of God is *“meaningless,”* for there is no way for it to be realized.

him exclusively as a doer.

Faith Cannot Function Under Law

Because the Law *“is not of faith,”* and offers no sustenance for it, faith cannot function under the Law. As soon as the soul depends upon the Law, and consequently upon ones own doing, faith is voided or nullified.

The Spirit addresses this matter in Galatians also. Each time the attempt to appropriate righteousness through the Law is mentioned, extraordinarily hard words are used. *“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain”* (Gal 2:21). *“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace”* (Gal 5:4). Thus we have the effects of

trying to be justified under Law powerfully stated.

- ▶ Faith is made void and useless.
- ▶ The promise of God is without force and meaningless.
- ▶ Christ is dead in vain.
- ▶ Christ is become of no effect.
- ▶ Men are thus fallen from grace.

I ask you, is it possible for a more dreadful condition to be contemplated? Why is it that men continue to seek justification by means of the Law? Why do they approach salvation as though it were the result of adherence to a moral code? It is because they imagine they have more power than they really do. They have not perceived the invincibility of sin apart from faith. But God will have none of their reasoning. The Law cannot produce a righteous man, and no amount of human reasoning can change that fact.

THE LAW WORKS WRATH

However, the Law is not powerless. There is something it does, and very effectively. The *“law works wrath,”* or *“brings about wrath.”^{NASB}* The very moment a person begins to think righteousness can be produced by keeping the Law, the wrath of God *“comes.”*

The Law cannot bring grace to the soul, and how sorely grace is needed! But it is too heavy for Law to carry, and does not fit into the system of Law. One person has said, *“It is indeed the nature of every law to afford the opportunity of transgression.”^{ROBERT HALDANE}* No law makes provision for the exercise of mercy. It is inherent in law to demand perfect obedience. That is why is *“works wrath.”*

For a moment, let us ponder how the law works upon the conscience of men who seek justification from it. The more the Law tells what we ought and ought not to do, the more the sinful nature rises to prominence. As it is written, *“But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive*

apart from law; but when the commandment came, **sin sprang to life** and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death ^{NIV} (Rom 7:8-11).

With a specificity than is unparalleled, Paul confessed, "But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become **utterly sinful**" ^{NIV} (Rom 7:13).

When the Law entered, it brought no faith and produced no hope. Rather, it is written, "The law was added so that the

In such a case, the Lord does not look for a reason to save, but for a perfect and unwavering obedience. When it is not found, His wrath is focused upon the transgressor, for God has no other alternative.

Legal Systems

I must draw some conclusions from these weighty considerations. Too much theology does not reason upon the truth, drawing from it intended implications.

If the things that have been affirmed are true, then the greatest disservice anyone could bring to the sons of men is a system of Law for justification. When rule-keeping is introduced as the

work within the stricture of Law, for faith cannot survive there. You see, then, what a serious condition has been set before us.

NO LAW, NO TRANSGRESSION

Here is a statement virtually unknown in some circles. "Where no law is, **there is no transgression.**" The next chapter will affirm essentially the same thing. "For until the law sin was in the world: **but sin is not imputed when there is no law**" (Rom 5:13).

This statement is made in support of the affirmation, "The Law works wrath." It is as though the Spirit said, "Where law is, there must be transgression, and only where there is no law is it possible for there to be no transgression." **The very existence of the Law confirms the guilt of humanity.** It substantiates the propensity all men have to sin, which only needs an occasion to rise to the surface.

Thus it is written, the Law "was added **because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made**" (Gal 3:19). There was a limitation placed on the administration of the Law: "**until** the Seed to whom the promise referred had come." ^{NIV} Because of this circumstance, "the promise" could not be based upon Law, which was intended to be a temporary arrangement. It could only exist where sin and the sin nature was present. The inheritance, however, looked beyond the temporal realm, to the eternal order, when the promise of being an "heir of the world" would be fulfilled.

The "promise" is founded upon the removal of sin. To put it another way, the forgiveness of sin, the covering of iniquities, and the refusal of God to impute sin (4:6-8). As will be further substantiated in the next chapter, our standing before God is founded upon the **absence of sin**, not its presence. Law, on the other hand, is based upon **the presence of sin**, and the need to make it known.

It may be argued that the New Covenant still acknowledges the presence of sin. After all, provision is made for forgiveness (1 John 1:7,9) and an

First, faith cannot exist under such a system. That is why legalists are virtually void of Divine power. The "exceeding greatness" of God's power is exclusively toward those "who believe" (Eph 1:19). Thus law-binders are thrown into a serious quandary. They cannot become righteous because they do not have faith. And, they cannot have faith because they are under the Law.

trespass might increase" ^{NIV} (Rom 5:20).

See, then, the associations of the Law, and let them "sink down into your ears." Add these to the effects of the Law enumerated under the heading, "Faith Cannot Function Under the Law."

- ▶ Sin seized an opportunity through the commandment of the Law.
- ▶ Working through the Law, sin produces every kind of sin within the individual.
- ▶ When the commandment came, sin sprang to life and men died.
- ▶ The commandment that offered life through doing, actually generated death.
- ▶ The Law produced death.
- ▶ It caused the trespass to increase.

More specifically, the "wrath" mentioned is the judgment of God. The Law does not awaken the compassion of God, but His appraisal of the individual.

way of appropriating righteousness drastic consequences take place.

First, faith cannot exist under such a system. That is why legalists are virtually void of Divine power. The "exceeding greatness" of God's power is exclusively toward those "who believe" (Eph 1:19). Thus law-binders are thrown into a serious quandary. They cannot become righteous because they do not have faith. And, they cannot have faith because they are under the Law.

Second, any professed faith they are thought to possess is useless. Their empty intellectualism cannot reach into heaven, or take hold of the effectiveness of Christ's death. Thus, for them, Christ died in vain.

Third, their insistence on being justified by Law puts them outside the circumference of grace. Grace cannot

“Advocate” (1 John 2:1). Indeed, this is true. However, this is a temporary arrangement until we are delivered from “the body of this death” (Rom 4:25; Phil 4:20-21). In “the world to come,” every vestige of sin will be removed, and we will no longer contend with a recalcitrant nature. There will be no need for conviction or remission, for sin will not

exist in any form. Then the saying will be brought to its fulfillment: “Where there is no law, there is no transgression.”

This is precisely why the promise was given to Abraham **before** the Law, and was not based upon the Law. The purpose of God is “eternal” (Eph 3:11). The promise regards an “eternal

inheritance” (Heb 9:15) and “eternal life” (1 John 2:25). The realization of such a marvelous promise, therefore, cannot be on the basis of Law, for Law works wrath, not blessing. Further, the need for Law accents the need for something being received from God through grace. Law proves the impotence of men to measure up to the Divine standard on their own.

BY FAITH THAT IT MIGHT BE BY GRACE

“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.”

The reasoning of this section of Romans is so powerful, one wonders why the Christian world has not embraced it with heart and mind. Instead, it has become a battle ground for renegade theologians. Among other things, this confirms the utter corruption of “the carnal mind,” which is “enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). You can educate such a mind, even culturing it with religious discipline, but it still cannot receive the things of God. It is ever true, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).

IT IS OF FAITH

The “it” that depends upon faith is “the promise,” or more particularly, the consummation of the promise. The NIV reads, “Therefore, the promise comes by faith.” The “therefore” refers to the impossibility of such a promise being realized through the Law, which “works wrath.” The Revised version says the fulfillment of the promise “depends on faith.” The NLT reads, “So that’s why faith is the key!”

The clear implication is that apart from faith, it is not possible for this

promise to be realized. The promise of being an “heir of the world” will never come because we have fulfilled the demands of a law. It will only come when we believe the One who made the promise.

You should also see in this passage the applicability of “the promise” to all who are in Christ Jesus. This promise is for all the seed, not Abraham alone. Let no soul think of barely making it to glory, or having a “cabin in the corner of glory land.” Christ has ushered in an era where souls become “heirs of the world.” If you think in terms of such largeness, it will

situation can only be accomplished by the love of God. Apart from that, there is not one shred of hope for humanity.

Works cannot take hold of grace, for the law stands between the one working for salvation and the grace that is required. If one insists upon depending upon self-effort to gain the promise of God, then Law alone can administrate such an attempt. The Law cannot lift us. It can only point out where we are, and the utter hopelessness of our condition.

How different is the grace of God. It

Let no soul think of barely making it to glory, or having a “cabin in the corner of glory land.” Christ has ushered in an era where souls become “heirs of the world.” If you think in terms of such largeness, it will help to overthrow any trust in works. The promise is so extensive that it will not fit into the restricted bag of works.

help to overthrow any trust in works. **The promise is so extensive that it will not fit into the restricted bag of works.** You simply will not be able to think of being an “heir of the world” within the context of duty. But faith is well able to hold such greatness.

THAT IT MIGHT BE BY GRACE

Here we learn more of the nature of our Lord. Salvation **MUST** come by grace. It will not and cannot come by any other means. If Divine favor is not the spring from which life comes, it will not come. The Spirit has already proved that Jew and Gentile are alike under the dominion of sin. The extrication of men from this

is “through grace” that we believe, which is itself a most marvelous accomplishment (Acts 18:27). Tracing salvation back to its ultimate cause, the Spirit affirms, “by grace ye are saved,” and “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:5,8). There simply is no other way for sinners to be saved. God’s grace, favor, and mercy are the **only** root from which the salvation of sinners can sprout. It is the **only** well from which the water of life can be drawn.

And here is the marvel of it all: **only** faith can take hold of grace. The realization of the promise of being an

“*heir of the world*” comes through faith so that it CAN be by grace. Further, it must be “*by grace,*” for there is no other way for guilty sinners to be received by God. The grace of God “*brings salvation*” (Tit 2:11), but only those who have faith can receive it.

In this text, grace is contrasted with works. The Spirit has already affirmed “*There is none who does good, no, not one*” (3:12). Jesus Himself declared, “*No one is good but One, that is, God*” (Matt 19:17). Therefore, human goodness, or morality, cannot be the basis for salvation. This is the meaning of the Spirit’s words in Romans 11:6. “*And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*”^{NKJV} In confirmation of this circumstance, our text says “*the promise*” is appropriated by faith in order that God’s grace can deliver it in all of its fullness.

TO THE END

Over and above the personal realization of “*the promise,*” there is a Divine intention to be accomplished. The commitment is fulfilled by grace “*in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.*”^{NASB} The wording of the text may appear strange to some. Why doesn’t the Spirit say “not only those who are Jews, but also those who are Gentiles?” Since Abraham is “*the father of us all,*” whether Jew or Gentile, why contrast those “*who are of the Law*” with “*those who are of the faith of Abraham?*”

Those who “*are of the Law*” are the Jews. They were tutored by the Law, which was their “*Schoolmaster,*” to bring them to Christ. Faith “*came*” to them releasing them from the Law (Gal 3:24-25). While their faith made them children of Abraham, believing Gentiles actually had more in common with Abraham than the Jews. Abraham “*believed God*” without the Law, and before his circumcision. “*The faith of Abraham,*”

refers to this condition—believing God without being under the Law.

Only grace could bring those with the Law and those without it together. Only grace could make the promise of being heirs of the world secure to all the spiritual offspring of Abraham; i.e., both Jew and Gentile.

The Divine interest in “*all the seed*” receiving the promise is noteworthy. Many of the Jews felt this was not possible—that the Gentiles could not be accepted in their uncircumcised state. Thus some of the Jews aggressively taught, “*Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved*” (Acts 15:1). Conversely, many Gentiles of our time are dubious about those who are “*of the Law*” being saved, feeling they have been altogether cut off. There is a remnant in both categories, and God has established the means of becoming righteous so that both are ensured of their

promises were made. Works cannot unite us with him, for he was declared righteous BEFORE he worked. In him God first revealed this principle: “*God imputes righteousness apart from works*” (4:6).

Although I have mentioned this before, I am compelled to do so once more time. Salvation is not as simplistic as some have imagined. Although it is not so complicated it is difficult to appropriate, its involvements are marked by Divine complexity. Your salvation involves Abraham and the Jews as well as yourself and the Gentiles. Throughout the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, there is unfailing consideration of Abraham and the promises made to him. It contains Divinely appointed procedures that ensure that “*all the descendants*” of Abraham may take hold of the promise. It should be obvious that “*the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God*” are intricately woven throughout the fabric of this “*great salvation.*”

In this text, grace is contrasted with works. The Spirit has already affirmed “*There is none who does good, no, not one*” (3:12). Jesus Himself declared, “*No one is good but One, that is, God*” (Matt 19:17). Therefore, human goodness, or morality, cannot be the basis for salvation.

A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS

The Lord is ever mindful of His promise that Abraham would be the “*father of many nations*” (Gen 17:4,5).

Originally, the Lord said to Abraham, “*And I will make of thee a great nation*” (Gen 12:2). From the standpoint of the flesh, there was another great nation Abraham also fathered through Ishmael. After Hagar and Ishmael had been expelled from Abraham’s house, the angel of the Lord told Hagar, “*Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation*” (Gen 21:18). At least twelve nations sprang from Ishmael (Gen 25:13).

The most significant nations springing from Abraham, however, were spiritual. Although it did not seem apparent at the time God first made the promise to Abraham, that promise would be extended to the Gentiles, many of whom would be grafted into the Jewish tree springing from the root of Abraham (Rom 11:17). The vastness of Abraham’s seed cannot be numbered (Rev 7:9)

participation in the promise.

Faith is the factor that secures the promise for “*all the seed.*” As soon, therefore, as men begin to make “*works*” their emphasis, they at once deprive some of the “*seed*” of the intended blessing. By so doing, they become competitors with God rather than participants in His purpose.

Faith unites us with Abraham, “*who is the father of us all,*” and to whom the

Our text declares that Abraham being *“the father of many nations”* is realized by the promise being conferred **by grace through faith**. It is for all who believe. Or, as our text states it, **“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace.”**^{NIV} Believing, or possessing faith, connects us with Abraham. Consequently, it also brings to us the promise made to Abraham, that he would be *“the heir of the world.”*

BEFORE GOD

Abraham’s fatherhood is not to be considered after the flesh, even though many peoples sprang from him. His fatherhood is primarily *“before God,”* not men. The first phrase of verse seventeen is a parenthetical expression: *“(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations),”* confirming that Abraham’s fatherhood is based upon the promise of God. When this explanatory phrase is removed, the verses reads this way: *“who is the father of us all before Him whom he believed.”* Other versions read, *“who is the father of us all . . . in the presence of Him whom he believed,”*^{NKJV} *“who is the father of us all . . . in the sight of Him whom he believed,”*^{NASB} *“He is our father in the sight of God.”*^{NIV}

This is another way of saying Abraham is the spiritual father of those who believe on Jesus. This destroys any confidence in the flesh, so that the Jews could not boast in tracing their lineage back to Abraham—something they were prone to do (Matt 3:9; John 8:39,53).

Strange Reasoning?

This line of reasoning may appear strange to some. It is rarely heard in our time, yet is a vital aspect of viewing our acceptance in Christ. The idea is that in Abraham we behold the manner in which men are justified, or become righteous before God. There is where we can obtain a clearer picture of the cause of righteousness. When we ponder whether or not we are righteous before God, we must look to Abraham. He *“believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness.”* It is no different with you. Do you believe God? Have you embraced

the record He has given of His Son? Then He has given you righteousness. The blessedness David described applies to you. *“Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin”* (Rom 4:6-8).

GOD QUICKENS THE DEAD

BEFORE Abraham had offspring, God called him a *“a father of many nations.”* This was not an analysis of nations already in existence. Such appraisals belong to men, but **not** to God! The great God of heaven **“gives life to the dead . . .”** This was corroborated in the person of Abraham. When Isaac was conceived, *“he considered not his own body now dead”* from the standpoint of reproduction (Rom 4:19). Indeed, as the Spirit says in Hebrews, *“Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in*

creation, and there are aspects of the new order in which He also does this. The offspring of Abraham are a case in point. That is why it says of God, *“and calleth those things which be not as though they were”* (17b). This language does not mean God speaks as though they were in existence even though they are not. Rather, it means it brings them into existence from nothing. Other versions read, *“and calls into being that which does not exist,”*^{NASB} *“and calls into existence the things that do not exist,”*^{NRSV} *“and who brings into existence what didn’t exist before,”*^{NLT} *“and calls into existence what does not yet exist.”*^{NLT}

It is as though God rejuvenated Abraham and Sarah in their old age, enabling them to do the impossible. That rejuvenation did not come from medical wisdom, or any other form of worldly knowledge. By His mighty word, Abraham became capable of bearing children, and Sarah was no longer barren. **God called these conditions into existence.**

The Way God Speaks

This text also emphasizes that God spoke to Abraham in view of what He Himself (the living God) would do. **He did not address Abraham from the natural point of view, but from the standpoint of what He would do.** This is involved in a very wonderful expression concerning God’s foreknowledge. *“Known to God from eternity are all His works”*^{NKJV} (Acts 15:18).

The purposes of God do not revolve around what men will do, but what He will do. In our text, God addressed Abraham from the prospect of His own mighty work. He has never represented Himself as determining the future upon the basis of He foresees men will do.

A Source of Confusion

This manner of Divine speaking has been a source of confusion to many. When God speaks of us, He often does it in view of what He will yet do—not in view of the present circumstances. When He calls us *“sons,” “saints,” “heirs,” “kings,”*

Look what God has done with such a man! The record is intended not only to explain the origin of true righteousness, but to spawn hope and trust in the hearts of those desiring to be found in God’s good favor.

multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable” (Heb 11:12).

Look what God has done with such a man! The record is intended not only to explain the origin of true righteousness, but to spawn hope and trust in the hearts of those desiring to be found in God’s good favor.

Because this subject is further developed in the next verses, I will reserve further comments for that section.

CALLING THINGS WHICH ARE NOT AS THOUGH THEY WERE

God does not work things into existence, as men must do. He simply calls them into existence, determining they will come to pass. He did this in the first

“priests,” and other such things, He does so in prospect of what we will eventually be. We are all of these things now, but in an introductory manner. Just as Abraham begetting Isaac was only the beginning of God’s intended purpose, so our present status is but the “firstfruits” of the greater work that is yet to come.

The church has been seriously divided over the nature of salvation. Some have represented the purpose of God as already fulfilled completely, with little, or nothing, more to be done. However, just as Abraham’s fatherhood was not complete with the birth of Isaac, so our new birth is not complete with what we

presently enjoy. God is going to do much more with us, both in this world, and in the ages to come. He will yet “finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness” (Rom 9:28). He will “perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).

Faith can enable us to speak in concert with God, looking forward with confidence to what the Lord will yet do. With certitude we can say, “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” Yet, faith will not allow us to become complacent, supposing there is such safety in our state that we may become idle. **As soon as the professed follower of Jesus becomes idle, removing his**

hand from the plow, and ceasing to fight the good fight of faith, he is in the grip of unbelief. By its very nature, such a process is subtle. It is brought on when the soul becomes insensitive and lethargic, feeling at home in the world. This causes sleep to come over the soul.

God still “calls into being that which does not exist.”^{NASB} Blessed is the person who trusts in Him to do so. It should be evident that this is seen most clearly in God imputing righteousness to the one who dares to believe what He has said of His Son. Such a person will realize the bliss of sins forgiven, and the joy of being “made righteous” by a just and holy God.

RISING ABOVE THE REASONING OF MEN

“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.**” There is a sharp conflict between the wisdom and power of God and the wisdom of men. This dissonance is so pronounced that faith must rise above the natural order to take hold of the promise of God. As long as men think within the context of this world, they will not be able to receive the promises of God. Although reasonable in the Spirit, Divine commitments are totally unreasonable to the flesh. This is clearly seen in the case of Abraham.

AGAINST HOPE

Herein is a remarkable expression: “Who against hope believed in hope.” Here, two hopes are set before us, and they are antithetical to one another. To take hold of one requires that you let go of the other. Other versions read, “who, **contrary to hope, in hope believed,**”^{NKJV}

“In hope **against hope** he believed,”^{NASB} “**Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed,**”^{NIV} “**Hoping against hope, he believed,**”^{NRSV} “Abraham believed him . . . even though such a promise **seemed utterly impossible!**”^{NLT} “**Though there seemed no hope, he hoped and believed.**”^{NJB}

Here is an aspect of “the good fight of faith” – “**against hope.**” For something to be “against hope” means it is beyond anything man can conceive or nature can produce. There was no natural law or principle that could make Abraham a “father of many nations.” If that was going to happen, it must come from God, and God alone. There was no visible or rational grounds for hoping the promise of God would be fulfilled. If God did not make it come to pass, calling into existence things that not yet existed, it simply would not happen.

Our father Abraham went beyond

the sphere of natural abilities, and believed what God had promised. He did so in contradiction of all earthly hope or possibilities. This is the **ONLY** way he could become the father of many nations. As it is written, “**that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.**”

AN OBSERVATION

There is a strain of theology in our world that greatly concerns me. Having been subjected to it, and even embracing it for a while, I know of its debilitating effects. It is a theology that relies upon human wisdom and earthly analysis. It is built upon the logic of men and visible appearance. It produces people who never look for any supernatural working. Such always think within the confines of nature, looking to principles of logic, historical confirmations, and supposed precedents. It teaches people to live on the lower plain of sight and sound, with no regard to a God that calls into being things that do not yet exist. It relies upon language expertise, philosophical hypotheses, and historical analysis.

What value would such things have been to Abraham. What if he had approached the promise of God with such a frame of mind. He had no historical example that could confirm God’s

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promise. There was no form of earthly reasoning that would support the belief of that promise. In fact, to believe it, he had to proceed in contradiction of such things. *"Hoping against hope, he believed."*

There is a great need for this kind of faith today! In fact, no other kind of faith is acceptable with God. If Abraham is the *"father of all who believe,"* then his faith

is the only faith God will receive. Those who base their faith upon historical proofs and evidences really have no faith at all. If what they say is true, and I hope it is not, then they are not related to Abraham. In such a case, they are not justified, have no righteousness, and have *"no hope, and [are] without God in the world"* (Eph 2:12).

If this seems too strong, consider

that this is precisely the point the Spirit is making in this text. He is showing us how men receive a righteousness from God. In so doing, He is pulling down cherished walls of thought that have rendered the church impotent. God will have no pretension in His kingdom. If men do not come to Him like our father Abraham, then they cannot be received. His faith is really the only acceptable faith!

NOT WEAK IN FAITH

"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." The Spirit now details the manner in which Abraham responded to the promise of God. He reveals how someone *"weak in faith"* would reason, which is a very charitable view. By saying *"not weak in faith,"* the Spirit is not saying such a faith is acceptable. Rather, He is as assuming the desire of such to believe God and trust that His promises will be fulfilled in them. He therefore reasons with them in such a manner as will encourage a strong faith.

NOT WEAK IN FAITH

If *"faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen"* (Heb 11:1), then being *"weak in faith"* is **not** being convinced of the reality of such things, and having little or no assurance they can be experienced.

A person who is *"weak in faith"* falls backward when God utters great promises. The commitments of God are too heavy for *"weak"* faith to carry, and so they overwhelm the individual. Such a person is not to be considered a reject. Rather, believers are admonished, *"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations"* (Rom 14:1). Such an one is not beyond hope, but requires some patience from men and work from God. This type of individual is considered unusual in Scripture—a departure from the norm. In our day, those who are NOT weak in the faith have

become unusual.

HE CONSIDERED NOT

At once the critic of Scripture will point out that Abraham DID think about his own body and the deadness of Sarah's womb. Is it not written, *"Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall*

We can measure the degree of our faith by the amount of consideration we give to earthly circumstances. Those who think in terms of statistics, historical precedent, and natural reasoning are, at best, "weak in faith." This simply is not how faith reasons.

Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?" And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! (Gen 17:17-18). Does this not contradict the statement, *"he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb"*? Indeed, it does not!

This was not the **final** consideration of Abraham. God answered the thought Abraham had in his heart. *"Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac:*

and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year" (Gen 17:19-21).

Immediately, Abraham's faith rose to prominence, overthrowing the first thought he had. **When such faith arises, God has no regard for any previous thoughts.** They were *"fiery darts"* hurled at Abraham by the wicked one, and quenched with the shield of faith.

The Reasoning of Faith

Now, the reasoning of faith becomes the **only** reasoning. Contrary notions have been cast down and trampled under the feet of faith. **Never again is there a record of Abraham struggling with such a thought.** That very

day, in expectation of the fulfillment of the promise, Abraham circumcised himself, Ishmael, and all that were in his house (Gen 17:23-27).

Faith Measured

We can measure the degree of our faith by the amount of consideration we give to earthly circumstances. Those who think in terms of statistics, historical precedent, and natural reasoning are, at best, *"weak in faith."* This simply is not how faith reasons. There is such an alarming degree of this kind of thinking in the contemporary church that it is mind-

boggling. Saints must make war against these bastions of faulty thought.

Because of this, purely earthly forms of wisdom have risen to prominence in the church. These include psychiatry, strategists, fund-raisers, motivators, administrators, educators, etc. Whatever place there may be for some of these

approaches (and their placed are all open to question), it is certainly not one of prominence.

A Point of Concern

Due to the preeminence of these things, men cannot think of beginning a work for God without consulting the statistician or strategist. Large projects

are thought to require fund raisers. Successful preachers and teachers of the Word are imagined to be obtainable only through an approved educational process. But all of these approaches leave little or no room for God. They do not require faith, and do not have God at their center. It is difficult for me to believe they are honorable before the Lord.

STRONG, NOT STAGGERING

“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.**” Here the Spirit shows the opposite of being “*weak in faith.*” What is here declared is not the description of a super man, but the man who receives a righteousness from God.

STAGGERED NOT

Although the promise given to Abraham transcended the highest reasoning of flesh, yet it did not cause Abraham to “*stagger,*” or “*waver.*”^{NASB} The word “*stagger*” is a strong word. Coming from the Greek word *διεκρίθη*, it means to **doubt, hesitate, or waver**. It means to lose ones spiritual balance, so that the promise cannot be grasped. It involves drawing back from the promise, as though it was too good to be true—an impossibility.

“*Staggering*” involves applying human reasoning to the matter—judging according to the flesh. In fact, the root of the Greek word means evaluate, discern, distinguish. In this case, it is doing so “*according to appearance,*” something strictly forbidden by Jesus (John 7:24).

The reason why men “*stagger,*” drawing back from the promise of God, is “*unbelief.*” Those who believe God do not draw back from His promises, or resort to human reasoning to explain or refute them. Those who demand explanations and proofs for the promises of God are staggering at His word.

STRONG IN FAITH

But Abraham did NOT “*stagger at the promise of God through unbelief.*” Rather than God’s promise causing unbelief to rise, **it caused faith to grow greater in strength.** Several versions accentuate this wonderful truth: “***but was strengthened in faith,***^{NKJV,NIV} “***but grew strong in faith,***^{NASB} “***but he grew strong in his faith.***^{NRSV}

If it is true that man “*lives by every word of God*” (Lk 4:4), we should expect faith to increase when subjected to that word. The Word of God caused Abraham to trust the Lord more fully, more extensively, more consistently. His faith was fueled by the promise, and fortified by God’s commitment.

promises of God.

GIVING GLORY TO GOD

There is much talk these days about giving glory to God. For some people, this is limited to a song of purported praise, or giving thanks publically. There is certainly nothing wrong with either of these. In fact, we would rejoice to see more of that done. The greatest glory is brought to the Lord, however, when His people are “*strong in faith,*” or growing in faith. It is no wonder Paul rejoiced in the condition of the Thessalonians. He said of them, “*We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds*

To make sure faith does not grow strong, deprive the people of the Word of the Lord—particularly His promises. Do not tell them what God has determined, or the destiny He has planned for His children. Only speak to them of duty, and continually hold threats before their faces. Draw your words from the cistern of flesh, and appeal to the wisdom of this world. It will not be long until faith will become weak, and the people draw back from, God.

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toward each other” (2 Thess 1:3). Not content to let the Thessalonians remain in a static condition, Paul prayed for them. “*Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and **the work of faith with power***” (2 Thess 1:11). That is the kind of faith that brings great glory to God. It does so in the earth, and among angelic hosts in heaven. God never fails to honor such faith – never!

Giving glory to God involves drawing attention to His Person and work—and both are involved in faith becoming strong. **Faith does not grow strong by default.** Nor, indeed, can it flourish in a static or traditional environment. A person, for example, that insists on remaining in an environment where faith is never fed and nourished, will not become “*strong in faith.*” Such a person will be content to embrace a historical position, or mouth some pious platitudes that have been handed down through the organization. In contrast, God spoke to Abraham. Abraham listened and believed. Consequently his faith grew strong, and God was glorified.

It starts with an all-powerful God, reasoning that whatever He says He is fully able to perform.

There is certainly room for more of this kind of reasoning in our time. It will not come, of course, until the promises of God become the focus of our attention. As long as men contrive their own projects, then ponder whether or not God can or will assist them, remnants of doubt will linger in their minds. But when they consider what God has promised, faith will awaken and begin to be strong. It is, after all, by God’s “*exceeding great and precious promises*” that we become “*partakers of the Divine nature*” (2 Pet 1:4). Among the things inherent in that

but because he was “*fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.*”^{NIJ} Neither, indeed, did he have a lengthy exposure to many workings and words from the Lord. Compared to what we have heard through Christ, the words to Him were introductory and few. Yet his faith took hold of them, sensing the truth David would write more than nine hundred years later. “*The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times*” (Psa 12:6).

And how does God react to such faith? “*This is why it was credited to him as righteousness.*”^{NIV} That is, the solid persuasion of Abraham that God was able to do what He promises was itself the reason God credited his faith to him as righteousness.

Faith does not grow strong by default. Nor, indeed, can it flourish in a static or traditional environment. A person, for example, that insists on remaining in an environment where faith is never fed and nourished, will not become “strong in faith.”

FULLY PERSUADED

Faith can bring full persuasion to the heart, so there is no room for doubt to enter. **Believing God influenced the way Abraham thought.** As he embraced the promise by faith, he became “*fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*”^{RSV}

The meaning of the text is this. Abraham did not take the promise of God and sift it through human reason, testing to see if God was able to do what He said. He was unwilling to think of the promise of God in terms of probability or impossibility. Instead, faith governed his thinking, causing him to be “*fully persuaded,*” or “*fully assured,*”^{NASB} God was able to do what He promised. **He did not think so much of the thing that was promised as the One who made the promise.** That is how faith reasons.

experience is a solid persuasion of the ability of God to do what He promises.

THEREFORE . . .

“*And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.*” I do not cease to marvel at the dogmatic manner in which the Spirit makes this point. He will not let it go. You sense the Spirit knows this line of thinking runs counter to everything that is natural in men.

The faith that brings God’s righteousness to us is not mere intellectual assent. It is not a persuasion that comes from studying purported evidence that the Bible is true, and then formally acknowledging its truth. That sort of thing is altogether too common in our day, but it is not acceptable before God. Abraham did not believe God because he took a course in apologetics,

It is one thing to be convinced of the truth of God’s existence. That is good, and not to be despised. But such a persuasion does not bring God’s righteousness to us. Neither, indeed, is it enough to believe the Bible is true, although it is surely imperative that we do so. The faith that brings righteousness involves a full and dominating persuasion. In our case, that is being “*fully persuaded*” that Jesus Christ is precisely what God has declared Him to be, and that He is fully capable of bringing us to glory. Where that kind of faith is not present, men will not experience the righteousness of God. Until they depend upon Christ, relying upon His death, resurrection, and present life, they remain unrighteous. But where they dare to believe, they will be “*made righteous.*”

While that may appear inordinately strong, the following verses will substantiate that is exactly what the Spirit is affirming. He will make much of Christ, and how God has presented Him. Real faith will embrace it, and do so “*without wavering,*” or “*staggering,*” which is the only response that is acceptable to God.

NOT JUST A HISTORY LESSON

“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.*”

Here is one of the hallmark texts of Scripture. It proves the philosophy (for want of a better term) of Scripture. It also identifies the scope of salvation, and the

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centrality of God the Father. Here Scripture is lifted above the boundaries of history, and made relevant to our time. Among other things, it confirms that in the Divine economy **history is relevant only if it impacts upon the present.** It is not enough to merely know what happened in the past. In particular, the account of Abraham is not given to merely inform us of this great man—*“the friend of God.”* It is not a promotion of hero-worship.

NOT WRITTEN FOR HIS SAKE ALONE

Keep in mind, the writing to which the Spirit refers was, at the time Romans was written, approximately 1,500 years old. The book of Genesis was written somewhere in the mid-1400’s B.C. The book of Romans was written around 57 A.D. Jesus referred to the writing of Moses (Matt 8:4; 19:7-8; Mk 10:3-5; 12:26; Lk 20:37; John 7:23). When Jesus revealed Himself to the two on the road to Emmaus, He referred to Moses’ writing (Lk 24:27). Paul also referred to Moses’ writings (Rom 9:15; 10:5; 2 Cor 3:15; Heb 7:15).

There is absolutely no question about the validity of Moses’ writings, even though they originated well over a millennia before. They had been copied by hand, and even translated into another language. Yet, none of this is mentioned. The integrity of Scripture is assumed.

I mention these things because of the effects of higher criticism in our time. Men have allowed purported scholars to question the precision of Scripture. While it may all seem quite innocent, it has yielded an environment in which unbelief can and does flourish. No such approach is ever taken to the word of God in Scripture. There is no reference to original manuscripts, copies of Scripture, sloppy scribes, human interpolations, etc. If the Word of God is going to have its intended influence upon us, we must rid ourselves of any tendency to doubt its integrity. With absolute consistency, *“the Scripture”* is always presented as absolutely accurate and trustworthy.

Not for His Sake

The record of righteousness being imputed to Abraham is not intended to merely provide information on him. **It is a principle of Scripture that persons are mentioned within the context of redemption.** It is ever true, *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”* (Rom 15:4).

There is an intrinsic danger in approaching Scripture as mere history. We are to **learn** from the examples found therein, for they are strategically placed in Scripture. Through the various

There is an intrinsic danger in approaching Scripture as mere history. We are to learn from the examples found therein, for they are strategically placed in Scripture. Through the various personalities mentioned in Scripture God reveals facets of His Person and purpose.

personalities mentioned in Scripture God reveals facets of His Person and purpose. This includes Adam, Cain, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Moses, Pharaoh, David, and Nebuchadnezzar. In all of them we learn something of God that pertains to our salvation. They are all relevant to us.

In the case of Abraham, the record of him being accounted righteous is not written to acquaint us with him, or to show how God uniquely favored him.

BUT FOR US ALSO

Whatever we think of this account, we must not allow our thoughts to stop with Abraham. In our thinking, we must bridge the gap of time between Abraham, and ourselves. He is *“the farther of us all.”* The subject with which the Spirit is dealing is NOT unique to Abraham. He was a pioneer of things to come **TO US.** In him we see something that we are presently experiencing.

This should enhance our

appreciation of Abraham. **No person perceptive of the role of Abraham in God’s eternal purpose will stand in criticism of him.** His name is not to be subjected to reproach or shame. The dominant thing we are to recall about Abraham is this: His faith was *“imputed to him for righteousness.”*

It is with some degree of shame and contrition of heart that I acknowledge there were years in my own ministry where this truth was hidden from me. I also admit that I have been part of a movement that has made very little, if anything, of Abraham’s faith being credited to him for righteousness. By God’s grace, I intend to *“revenge my disobedience”* in this matter.

If the record of Abraham being accounted righteous is written for our sake, then we must make much of it. If our view of the salvation and Word of God does not require the consideration of *“our father Abraham,”* it cannot be right. Such a view is distorted, and will eventually lead to erroneous conclusions and misdirected conduct.

The history recorded in Scripture contributes to the development and proclamation of sound doctrine. **This is so because God’s dealings with men were dictated by His character, not their persons.** Those dealings represent a certain consistency in our Lord that must be seen in order for faith to grow.

An Additional Thought

One additional thought on this passage is in order. Among self-professed scholars, there is a frequent reference to “the author’s intended meaning” in Scripture. This “meaning” is thought to be at the root of Scripture, bringing out its true meaning. But what of the text we are considering? What of Moses’ record of Abraham’s faith being accounted to him for righteousness? Do you suppose that Moses’ “intended meaning” was to establish that this righteousness was also for succeeding generations? If so, he certainly gave no indication of such a personal intent—in any of his writings. His word was God’s word.

The Scripture must be viewed as primarily the Word of God. It is HIS meaning that is to be uncovered, whether the holy man moved to write the words knew it or not. While this may appear to be a small and inconsequential point, it will significantly impact HOW we read and comprehend Scripture. If we read it as a message from one of our peers—a fellow man—we will not derive the nourishment intended by it. But if we receive it *“not as the word of men, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe”* (1 Thess 2:13), it will nourish our souls.

TO WHOM IT SHALL BE IMPUTED

Herein is a wonderful thing. Those who imagine the first thirty-nine books of the Bible have little or no relevance to us, must take this passage into consideration. Here, what happened to Abraham is said to also happen to us. We obtain righteousness in the same way as our father Abraham, by having our faith accounted to us *“as righteousness.”*

It is not that **Abraham’s** faith is reckoned to us for righteousness, but the faith **we** possess is the basis of our righteousness.

The **“IT”** that is imputed to us is our faith. Thus the RSV reads, *“That is why **his faith** was reckoned to him as righteousness.”* It is no wonder such faith is called *“precious”* (2 Pet 1:1). Whatever brings the righteousness of God to us is a most inestimable treasure!

When the Spirit says *“shall be imputed,”* He is not referring meaning from our time forward—or the time of the writing of the book of Romans forward. Instead, He is speaking of Abraham being accounted righteous upon the basis of his faith. The Lord not only did this for Abraham’s sake, but in prospect of Abraham’s offspring, who would also believe God. The expression views Abraham as **the first of a vast spiritual generation**, of which believers in our day are blessed to be part.

IF WE BELIEVE ON HIM

Notice the precision in this text. It is not simply believing that God exists, or believing in Him in disassociation from the Lord Jesus Christ. *“But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, **IF** we believe*

on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

Abraham relied upon God bringing Isaac and a multiplicity of offspring into the world from nothing. We believe upon God as bringing Jesus back from the dead, and exalting Him to His right hand in the heavens. In Abraham’s case, the

effectiveness of Christ’s death and resurrection. It takes in the abandonment of all confidence in the flesh, and a wholehearted embrace of the Gospel.

Keep in mind, the type of faith being described is *“the faith of Abraham,”* not that of mere intellectual consent or agreement. In involves not staggering at

In His resurrection, Jesus came back from the battle with the powers of darkness, having plundered them in His cross (Col 2:15). In His resurrection He left the promised mortal bruise upon the head of the old serpent, sealing his doom.

impossible would occur in the future. In our case, it occurred in the past. In both cases, only God could bring the matter to pass.

We learn from this that our salvation hinges upon the resurrection of Christ. His death is validated by His resurrection (Rom 1:4). This is poignantly stated in Romans 10:10: *“if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart **that God has raised Him from the dead**, you will be saved.”*^{NKJV} Peter also made this association. *“Who by Him [Jesus] do believe in God, **that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God”** (1 Pet 1:21).*

What Does it Mean to Believe on Him?

To *“believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,”* is to lean the whole weight of our soul upon God, depending on Him to make us acceptable in His sight. It is to trust Him in the capacity of the Father of Jesus—the One who sent the Savior into the world, delivered Him up, raised Him from the dead, and exalted Him to His own right hand. It is to be *“fully persuaded”* this is sufficient to make God both just and the Justifier of the one who believes on Jesus.

Believing on God involves the persuasion of the truth of His record of Jesus. It also includes a reliance on the

the promise of God, but being strong in faith. It includes not considering fleshly oppositions, or arguments that contradict the truth of God. Wherever this kind of faith is not found, no faith can be found.

The twenty-fifth verse is one of the most precise statements of Christ’s work in all of Scripture. It compresses a great body of redemptive truth into a single sentence—something that could only be accomplished through the Holy Spirit. While this was something perceived by the Apostle, it is also something to which He was illuminated by the Spirit. There is no possible way for this statement to be concluded by observing Christ’s death. An historical perspective, or an analysis of words cannot yield this knowledge. It is something that must be revealed. *“Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”* Let us ponder the greatness of this expression. Here is food for faith.

DELIVERED FOR OUR OFFENCES

This is something that GOD did, not man. It is quite true that Judas betrayed the Son of man (Mk 14:41). It is also true that the people *“delivered”* Him to Pilate (Matt 27:18). Pilate also *“delivered Him to be crucified”* (Matt 27:26). It is written, *“the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him”* (Lk 24:20). But this is not the **“delivered”** of reference! **It is NOT what men did to Jesus that brought salvation within our reach, but what**

the Father did to Him!

The people did not “*deliver Him*” for the offences, or transgressions, of humanity. **That is something God did.** If God the Father had not “*delivered Him*,” the powers of darkness and all of humanity would have been impotent to harm a single hair of His head.

The Lamb of God was “*stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.*” **It is God** who “*wounded*” the Son “*for our transgressions.*” **It is the Father** who “*bruised*” Him “*for our iniquities.*” The “*chastisement of our peace*” was laid upon Him **by God the Father.** The “*stripes*” by which we “*are healed*” are not those inflicted by men, but those inflicted **by the Father**, who “*made Him to be sin,*” causing Him to be made a “*curse*” for us (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). It was **the Lord** who “*laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (Isa 53:4-6).

Viewing Christ’s Death Properly

This is why the Apostles do not make much of the fleshly sufferings of Jesus during His trial and on the cross. It is not that the agonies were not terrible beyond description. Nor, indeed, are we to avoid a consideration of them. However, **we are not saved by what men did to Jesus.** They were, to be sure, Christ’s “*murderers,*” as Stephen said (Acts 7:52). The Jews did “*kill*” Jesus, as Peter charged (Acts 3:15). Yet, as God’s “*Lamb,*” He was **offered up by God** for fallen humanity, “*delivered for our offenses.*” How vividly Peter declared this as illuminated by the Holy Spirit. “*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*” (Acts 2:23).

Our Offenses

The phrase “*for our offenses*” is a significant one. It means that **God made Jesus responsible for sin in its totality**, exacting the penalty for sin from His “*only begotten Son.*” Jesus was NOT a martyr, but a sacrifice—and there is a great difference between the two. A martyr is slain by His enemies. As a sacrifice, Jesus was delivered up **by God** because of our transgressions.

It is necessary to emphasize that God placed sin in its aggregate upon the Son. Sin was dealt with in mass, or in its totality. This is why Jesus is referred to as “*the Lamb of God which taketh away the SIN of the world*” (John 1:29). Jesus is also said to have entered the world to “*put away SIN by the sacrifice of Himself*” (Heb 9:26). God “*condemned SIN in the flesh*” of His Son (Rom 8:3). Jesus was made “*to be SIN for us*” (2 Cor 5:21). All of these emphasize sin in its entirety.

In order to make the matter more personal to us, Christ’s atonement is also associated with “*sins.*” This assists us to

It is the nature of sin that makes it so terrible. It is offensive to God, and attempts to overthrow His power and authority. Therefore, the word “offenses” is not a casual word. When we think of sin, transgression, iniquity, and the likes, our soul should shudder because of what Christ had to suffer.

consider our Lord’s death from a very individualistic viewpoint. Thus, we are told Jesus was “*manifested to take away our SINS*” (1 John 3:5). He “*died for our SINS*” (1 Cor 15:3), and “*gave Himself for our SINS*” (Gal 1:4). He also bore “*our SINS in His body on the tree*” (1 Pet 2:24). God sent His Son into the world “*to be the propitiation for our SINS*” (1 John 4:10).

Thus Jesus being “*delivered for our offenses*” is seen to be completely effective, dealing with all sin. It is also perceived as intensely personal, promoting thanksgiving and obedience—“*our sins.*”

The Heinousness of Sin

Among other things, this reveals the heinousness of sin, that required such a death. If the sin of Adam and Eve could cause death to be passed over the entirety of the human race, what was involved in

the sins of the whole world being placed upon Christ? It is awesome to consider!

If men are ever tempted to minimize sin, they are to consider what Jesus was required to do in order for their sin to be removed. Whether we are talking about the sin of Adam and Eve, the incredibly wicked reign of Manasseh, or the fierce opposition of Paul to the church, it all required the death of Jesus.

It is the **nature** of sin that makes it so terrible. It is offensive to God, and attempts to overthrow His power and authority. Therefore, the word “*offenses*” is not a casual word. When we think of sin, transgression, iniquity, and the likes, our soul should shudder because of what Christ had to suffer. A person who takes sin casually, easily explaining it away, is an ungodly person, and is crucifying the Son of God afresh, putting Him to an open shame.

The Nature of God

This also reveals the nature of God, who cannot overlook sin as though it were trite and excusable. In showing His glory to Moses, God revealed His absolute intolerance with sin: “. . . *and that will by no means clear the guilty*” (Ex 34:7). He confirmed the same through Nahum: “*and [I] will not at all acquit the wicked*” (Nah 1:3).

It is further said of God, “*You hate all workers of iniquity*” (Psa 5:5). This explodes the popular saying, God hates sin but loves the sinner. God makes no such distinction in this statement. Of the Son the Father said, “*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness*” (Psa 45:7; Heb 1:9).

If sin required God to “*deliver up*” His sinless Son, let no person make any attempt to explain their sin, or to justify their involvement in it.

The Indebtedness of Man

The delivering up of Jesus for “*our offenses*” has removed all obligation to the flesh. No person owes anything to the flesh. Our indebtedness is now to our Lord and Savior. Thus it is written, “*Therefore,*

brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh” (Rom 8:12). Because we have been *“bought with a price,”* we are to *“glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s”* (1 Cor 6:19-20).

No longer can we live according to the dictates of our lower and sinful nature. The time we spent in the flesh is sufficient. No more time is to be given to it. Thus it is written, *“For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries”*^{NASB} (1 Pet 4:3).

RAISED FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION

Because men do not speak often of

Once again, it should be noted that salvation is often approached with unbecoming simplicity, as if it is no small thing for a person to be justified. Anything, however, that requires the death of the spotless Son of God, and His return from the regions of the dead, is any thing but simplistic.

justification, they speak little of Christ’s resurrection. But this is not the case with the Holy Spirit. The matter of Christ’s resurrection is pivotal throughout Scripture, and particularly in the matter of our justification.

Once again, it should be noted that salvation is often approached with unbecoming simplicity, as if it is no small thing for a person to be justified. Anything, however, that requires the death of the spotless Son of God, and His return from the regions of the dead, is any thing but simplistic.

In the fifth chapter, the Spirit will remind us we are *“now justified by His blood”* (5:9). By this He means the death of Christ was the point at which God judged sin. The forfeiture of Christ’s life made it just for God to forgive sinners.

Repeatedly, we are told justification is *“by faith”* (Rom 3:28; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:24). That is, faith is the means through which we appropriate justification.

Romans 3:24 affirms we are *“justified freely by His grace.”* In our justification the will and favor of God are poured out upon us because of His abundant grace.

First Corinthians 6:11 says we are *“justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”* Our acquittal from sin is on the behalf of Christ, and is applied by the Spirit of God.

We are also said to be *“justified by Christ”* (Gal 2:17). Jesus Himself enters into the process, mediating the benefits of the Covenant to us.

How is it the Spirit here says Jesus was *“raised for our justification?”* Does justification really involve all of these things? Indeed, it does! It is no small thing for a guilty sinner to be freed from culpability and be made righteous **before God**. Our hearts should stand in wonder at it. Any approach to Scripture than minimizes the greatness of salvation should be abandoned with haste.

First, we could not have been justified if Jesus had not risen from the dead. His resurrection confirmed that our sins had been removed. It should be apparent to us that the *“work”* required for our salvation was not completed at Calvary. Before Jesus committed His spirit to God the Father, He said, *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30). What did He mean? He meant that the sacrifice was finished—that the work God gave Him to

do on the earth was completed. Even before He went to the cross, Jesus told the Father, *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”* (John 17:4). In this case, all of the preparations required for His sacrifice were completed. As well, He had faithfully kept those given to Him by the Father.

In His resurrection, Jesus came back from the battle with the powers of darkness, having plundered them in His cross (Col 2:15). In His resurrection He left the promised mortal bruise upon the head of the old serpent, sealing his doom.

His resurrection was also the gate through which Jesus entered into the heavenly sanctuary, where His blood was presented, *“having obtained eternal redemption for us”* (Heb 9:15). Now men are justified from heaven, where the risen Christ is ministering—in *“the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man”* (Heb 8:20).

Without the resurrection of Christ, *“your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins”* (1 Cor 15:17). If Jesus is not risen, we have no message to deliver, and all preaching is vain and pointless (1 Cor 15:14). But if Jesus is risen from the dead—and He assuredly is—then our preaching is **not** vain, our faith is **not** vain, and we are **not** still in our sins. *“He was raised for our justification!”*

It is no wonder that the Spirit speaks of our salvation with such a triumphant note. *“Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us”*^{NKJV} (Rom 8:34). He truly was *“raised for our justification,”* i.e., that we might experience being *“made righteous.”* Until Jesus returned from the dead, the righteousness of God could not be conferred upon the sons of men. But Jews has been *“delivered up,”* and *“is risen indeed”* (Lk 24:34), and thus the promised justification has become a reality in *“all who believe.”*

CONCLUSION

This passage has revealed the nature of the faith that saves. It is the

sort of faith that Abraham had, who is *“the father of us all.”* It **does not**

stagger at the promise of God, but is strong. It does not take into account

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impossibilities that flesh poses, or consider circumstances that contradict what God has pledged to do. Saving faith, if I may use that term, is **“fully persuaded that what God has promised, He is able to perform.”**

THE GREAT REVELATION

This is the faith Abraham possessed in primitive times, before the Law, and well before any significant elaborations on the New Covenant, as in the book of Jeremiah (31:31-34). If anything, in this **“day of salvation,”** faith is larger under Jesus. There is a greater degree of trust because of the fuller revelation of the One on whom faith moves us to rely. The greater extent of the revelation of Divine intent causes faith to abound even more.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED

This text has also more clearly shown to us what it means to be saved. There is a certain shallowness to the common approach taken to salvation that is uncomely for saints, and reproachful to Jesus. While salvation, or the deliverance of God, involves extrication from sin, it also involves translation into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. What we have received is infinitely greater than what was taken from us.

We have received a righteousness from God that qualifies us to be heirs of the world. Our real inheritance is the world to come, not this one. **One of the great restrictions of a Law system is that one cannot think big enough to give honor to God.** Since the Law is not of faith, it cannot produce a longing to inherit the whole world. But faith produces that longing, and strengthens one to live in joyful anticipation of it. There is a tremendous penalty—perhaps even an eternal one—to be paid for minuscule thinking about God’s great salvation.

TENDENCIES THAT LIMIT

The tendency to relate salvation only with the remission of sin is not commendable. There is a blessedness that finds God unwilling to impute sin to those who believe. But there is also an imputation of His own righteousness to those who have faith. The possession of faith—the kind of faith Abraham

had—brings to us a righteousness that will stand in the courts of heaven.

THE LAW AND FAITH

There is also the incompatibility of faith with a system of Law. Here is a point that thoroughly destroys the legalistic approach to God. **“If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.”** Faith cannot function under Law, and the promise is completely ineffective within a system of law. A person lives by faith, or he cannot live at all before God. He cannot live by doing, or by works. The promise is either given to those who believe, or it cannot be given at all.

THE GRACE OF GOD

The grace of God is also integral to salvation. Grace brings salvation to us, or we do not receive it at all. What is more, only faith can appropriate grace. No amount of doing, however arduous, can cause the grace of God to be poured out upon us. We also see this in Abraham.

REQUIRED WORKS

Our salvation required two great works which were absolutely beyond any human capabilities. Jesus had to be delivered by God for our offenses. He also had to be raised again for our justification. If either of these had not occurred, we could not have been justified. God Himself had to accomplish them both, thereby confirming they were in strict concert with His will, and brought satisfaction to His heart. This aspect of faith is affirmed with unusual power in the tenth chapter of Romans. **“But the righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down) or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the**

dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame’”^{NIV} (10:6-11).

If salvation were by OUR works, we would be required to bring Christ down from heaven that He might die. Then, we would have to go down into the abode of the dead, and bring Him back. Under no circumstances can the death and resurrection of Christ be eliminated. They are an absolute requirement. Since neither of them could be instigated by our power, it should be evident that they are works of God. The point of the text just quoted is that the Gospel apprizes us of

There is also the incompatibility of faith with a system of Law. Here is a point that thoroughly destroys the legalistic approach to God. “If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.” Faith cannot function under Law, and the promise is completely ineffective within a system of law. A person lives by faith, or he cannot live at all before God.

them both. If we will believe and acknowledge them, we will be saved. The message is near to us—within the grasp of faith.

FULL PERSUASION

Only faith can cause us to be **“fully persuaded,”** without a tinge of debilitating doubt. Because faith fastens on the good word of God, and because it sees God as the preeminent, it is convinced God is able to perform what He has promised.

Here is something the wisdom of men in all of its facets cannot accomplish. It cannot touch the heart, or cause confidence and assurance to surround the conscience. Equally true, those who labor under the Law are deprived of these indispensable qualities. Both the wisdom

of men and enslavement to Law produce fear and doubt. They are not able to move out upon the promises of God, but regard them from a purely intellectual point of view.

God is greatly to be praised for such a marvelous salvation. He is also to be glorified by the kind of faith that perceives and rejoices in these realities. Make it your aim to testify of these things,

for they are not commonly known. But everywhere there is a tender heart, it will be warmed and satisfied with the greatness of this message. Faith and hope will grow strong when hearing this word.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 8/11/2000. Continuing in our studies on Romans, we will cover 5:1-5, "THE TRIUMPHANT NATURE OF FAITH." Having put down a firm foundation, the Spirit now begins to affirm our status in Christ Jesus. He does so with remarkable power, leaving no room for doubt to take hold of the tender heart. These are things every person in Christ needs to know and retain in their hearts—living under their powerful influence. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God.

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