

Faith of Abraham

“Have you heard anything, yet?” Sharonda asked her friend Dana.

Dana shifted in her recliner and watched her friend unpack the rest of her groceries. Sharonda had insisted on accompanying Dana to the store. Dana had been home since March with doctor orders of no moderate lifting and excessive standing due to her scoliosis, which had worsened severely in the last 10 years.

Dana’s career as a registered nurse had ended. Her job could not accommodate her medical condition, and she was about three years from retirement. Dana’s long-term disability at work was being “reviewed,” and the procedure for applying for government disability benefits was arduous and painstaking.

Still, Dana remained confident in God. She did not know the way through the twists and turns in this season of her life. Indeed, she had never known the way. Dana had trusted and followed Christ for 50 of her 64 years. She worked. She planned. She saved. But most of all, she put her trust in Christ.

“All of this would have me a little stressed out,” said Sharonda from the kitchen. “I mean, you work all of your life, and then you end up not knowing what’s going to happen with your job and your life.”

“I don’t know what exactly will happen,” said Dana. “None of us do. But in faith, I know where I stand and in whom I believe—and that’s the Lord.”

- 1.** *What are some things people stand for?*
- 2.** *How do we stand by faith?*
- 3.** *How do we develop an unwavering faith?*

LESSON FOCUS: Through faith, stand before God like Abraham.

Abraham Believed God

Romans 4:1-3, KJV

1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Romans 4:1-3, NIV

¹What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ²If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

The church at Rome consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. In the first three chapters of his letter to the Romans, Paul established that neither group can attain righteousness with God through their own efforts—“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). This is the context in which Paul argued that Abraham’s faith saved him.

Abraham’s salvation was based on his belief that God would save him—not on the basis of anything he could actually do. So Abraham had nothing to boast about. A reconciled relationship with God requires untainted righteousness, which simply cannot be achieved through human efforts. This righteousness can only be “imputed,” or infused to those who own up to their sins, then appeal to God’s mercy for salvation. This is the saving faith displayed by Abraham. Paul quoted Genesis 15:6 to show that Abraham’s righteousness was “credited” to him, not earned in any way. Paul’s point is this: If Abraham could not save himself with his works, then you can’t either.

4. *Why would Abraham’s righteous works not count for his salvation?*

5. *What resulted from Abraham’s faith?*

The Blessing of Forgiveness

Romans 4:4-8, KJV

4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

Romans 4:4-8, NIV

⁴Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

⁷"Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

⁸Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them."

A central focus of the Book of Romans is the concept of justification in relation to the salvation of souls. There are three theological aspects to salvation: *justification* is a one-time event that happens when a person experiences saving faith, so that the redeemed individual is seen as legally and spiritually "declared righteous" in the eyes of God. *Sanctification* is the ongoing process of becoming more like Christ throughout our earthly existence. *Glorification* is the one-time event that occurs at the moment of resurrection.

Fallen human nature wants to insist that we can accomplish justification on our own through our good works. Paul wanted to challenge this popular false belief by pointing out its logical flaws. If a person can earn salvation by his or her works, then it's not a gift. In this line of thinking, there's simply no need for God's grace or mercy—entrance into heaven is simply something owed to the individual.

However, the author of Hebrews wrote that “without holiness no one will see the Lord” (12:14). The only exception, of course, is for the penitent sinner who pleads with God to be merciful in the heartfelt belief that Jesus is their only salvation from their sin, and thus surrenders his life to God. The result of this experience is justification.

Paul appealed to Psalm 32, one of the psalms of David. David understood that his sinfulness would repel him from the holy presence of God unless God, in His mercy, were to forgive and cover over the damage caused by his sins. The repentant sinner can not only experience the soothing forgiveness of God, but is welcomed into the presence of God, as a sinner saved by grace.

6. *Why is salvation described as a gift?*

7. *What is the relationship between God's forgiveness and blessing?*

The Father of All Who Believe

Romans 4:9-12, KJV

9 Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness

10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they

Romans 4:9-12, NIV

9Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. ¹⁰Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness

be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

might be credited to them.

¹²And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Paul then shifted his attention to the Gentiles. He went back to the example of Abraham. The sign of God's covenant with Abraham to make his descendants a nation to be known as God's people was circumcision. Abraham's moment of justification—his belief and trust in the one true God (Rom. 4:2-5)—happened *before* the rite of circumcision was given as the symbol of the Jewish nation and faith.

Abraham's descendants also needed that experience of belief and trust in the Lord in order to become a "child of Abraham" in both the physical and spiritual sense.

Paul added that circumcision was considered a seal of confirmation of the holy righteousness that had been imputed to Abraham. Paul later made it clear that the seal of the new covenant is not circumcision, but the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). Circumcision had set the Israelites apart from the Gentiles, but now that the grace of God had come to Gentile and Jew alike, circumcision was no longer needed as a sign of being chosen by God.

Now, according to Paul, circumcision essentially means nothing when it comes to salvation because Christians are set apart by the experience of justification by faith—just as Abraham was. He, then, is the spiritual father of all who follow Christ, because Abraham is the example we follow in matters of saving faith.

8. *What was the significance of Abraham's circumcision?*

9. *Who is the "father" of all followers of Christ?*

Righteousness That Is by Faith

Abraham didn't always get it right, but he always trusted God! "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death." (Heb. 11:17-19).

The Lord promised Abraham that the covenant would be through his son Isaac, so resurrection would be the only option if Abraham was expected to sacrifice Isaac. Of course, we know that God provided His own sacrifice—a ram caught in the thicket. The Lord tested Abraham's faith and love for Him. Abraham demonstrated that He loved God more than he loved Isaac—his one and only son.

In this life we will all have trials of faith, but settling in our heart that God is faithful is the only appropriate response for the righteousness that is by faith. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21). If God placed everything on the line that we would be reconciled to Him by the sacrifice of His one and only Son, then how can we question His love for us or faithfulness!

According to Hebrews 11, the heroes of faith saw these promises afar off and embraced them by faith. They never lived to see the Messiah, but they understood that the Old Covenant spoke of the promised Messiah; they believed God, and it was credited as righteousness.

10. *What is righteousness, and how can we have it credited to us?*

11. *What are the traits of the anxious and those not living by faith?*

12. *Do you believe you can stand before God in faith today? Explain your answer.*

Living Like Abraham

Abraham was considered the friend of God; you invest time in relationships that you cherish. Abraham trusted God in the days of adversity because he knew Him, and he knew Him because he fellowshiped with God. Abraham wasn't flawless in his life, but he had unwavering faith in God caring for him. And when it mattered most, he believed God! Will you believe God when it matters most? Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but God delivers us out of them all!

► *Would you say you have a non-negotiable, unwavering faith in God? If not, decide this week to develop such a faith and write here some things that would help you do so.*

KEY VERSE

For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness —Romans 4:3, KJV

What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." —Romans 4:3, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 19 through July 25

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Matthew 5:9-12—Blessed Are Persecuted Believers.
- Tues.** Philippians 1:12-20—Jesus, Not Suffering, Matters.
- Wed.** 2 Corinthians 11:21b-30—Suffering for Christ and the Church.
- Thurs.** Romans 8:18-25—In Hope Our Salvation Is Secure.
- Fri.** Romans 5:12-17—Free Gift of Jesus Brings Justification.
- Sat.** Romans 5:18-21—Grace Leads to Eternal Life.
- Sun.** Romans 5:1-11—Justified through Faith in Jesus Christ.