

(1) What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about --- but not before God! For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6) Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but his due.

(5) And to the one who does not work but *believes in Him who justifies the ungodly*, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the one whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

(7) “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;
Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” (Psalm 32:1-2)

(9) Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How, then, was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had *by faith* while he was still uncircumcised.

(11b) The purpose was to make him the father of ALL who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised *who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith* that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

(13) For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the Law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the Law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the Law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

Think on These Things

- 1) What do you know about Abraham? See Genesis 11:31-12:5; 15:1-18 (especially v. 6); and 17:1-14. You can skim chapter headings from Genesis chapters 12-25 to see a bigger picture of his life.

Abraham is the son of Nahor, from Ur (near modern day Basrah, Iraq, close to the Persian Gulf). Lot is Abraham’s nephew, and Sarah is his wife. Nahor moved northwestward with the family to the city of Haran (~800 miles, near the southcentral border of Turkey, with Syria). Nahor, a Chaldean, was an idol worshipper, and he died in Haran.

After Nahor’s death, God called Abraham to leave Haran and go to a “land that I will show you.” At age 75, Abraham and Sarah, with Lot, traveled southwestward into Canaan where they began living nomad lives in tents (Genesis 11, 12). Briefly, during a famine, they moved into Egypt, then returned. God prospered Abraham and Lot so much that they had to separate their households. Lot moved onto the watered plains region of the Jordan Valley where the cities were (e.g. Sodom), and Abraham remained in the hilly land of Canaan.

In Genesis 15, God covenanted with Abraham to give him the land of Canaan, and also, through his own direct heir (Abraham was childless to this point), he would bring forth a people (the Jews). Abraham believed God, and “it was counted to him as righteousness.”

- 2) We learn an important truth from Romans 4:3. What is it?

God counted Abraham's "belief" as righteousness, not any kind of good works....

- 3) How can a person experience God's grace and kindness if it's not available to those who work hard to gain God's approval?

Ephesians 2:8-9 explains that grace is "God's gift" to men. We don't have to work hard to earn it. He has chosen to show favor to we who believe in the 'propitiation death' of Jesus Christ on the cross. We must become people of faith, and God will count it as righteousness to us, too.

Should Christians work hard to gain God's approval? Yes, it is how we earn heavenly rewards (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). But trying to prove ourselves is not how non-Christians are saved.

- 4) In vs. 6-8, David uses the word "blessed" several times, which can also be translated as happy. What things in our relationship with the Lord can lead to our happiness and blessing?

We have confidence in God --- who is faithful --- rather than our fickle selves! These verses clearly point to our unworthiness for God's favor, and yet we have it by faith. We can rely on God's promises for the issues of this life and the joys of the life to come.

- 5) The intent of v. 9 is to say, "Is this blessing only for the Jews (the circumcision)?" Paul answers this by pointing to Abraham. What came first, Abraham's circumcision or his faith? Review Genesis 15:6 and 17:9-12. What does this point prove?

Abraham's faith came first. Circumcision 'sealed' the covenant of God with Abraham and all of his descendants. Thus, 'saving faith' is the trait of Abraham we must all have, Gentiles or Jews. Circumcision is a special covenant for Abraham's descendants, but salvation is by faith!

- 6) Therefore, Paul presents a new conclusion about Abraham being a father. Who is Abraham the father of? Review Genesis 17:3-5 and Romans 4:11.

Abraham is the "father of all who believe", circumcised or not circumcised, from many nations.

- 7) Have you noticed from today's scripture that righteousness comes only one way? Two paths for humanity are discussed. What are the two paths, and which one is shown as the correct way? Is Christianity unique in declaring this as God's truth?

The two paths to righteousness under consideration are: Jesus' righteousness for me, on the basis of faith, or self-righteousness, what my own good works say about my life. Christianity IS unique in its claim that GOD has provided the remedy for sinful man: we just need to accept and trust Him for our salvation. All other religious faiths outline behaviors (works) that are required to make a person right with god...which may or may not be enough!

- 8) What does God's law bring to humanity? What do we not have if we do not have God's law?

God's Law essentially brings "accountability" (v. 15). Without God's Law, Romans teaches us that there is 'no transgression' in life. BUT, with God's Law --- defining right and wrong --- and accountability being applied to everyone, we are told that God's Law brings us His wrath! "HERE COMES THE JUDGE!"

People and situations I want to pray for this week: