

Part Nine –

Abraham, “*Father of the Faithful*”

Paul in this chapter speaks of Abraham for three reasons:

1. **The Jews regarded Abraham as the great founder of the race**, and the pattern of all that man should be.
2. **Abraham was an example of simple trust and faith in what God promised**, which was a contradiction of the legalistic approach of devout Jews.
3. **When talking about an abstract idea like faith you needed a physical example to grasp the abstract idea.** Paul was a wise teacher who knew that when he spoke about Abraham he was on very familiar ground to every Jew.

Here in this passage we are discussing the root difference between Jewish and Christian Faith.

Jews basically considered a man had to earn God’s Favour.

The basic thought of Christianity is that a man can never earn God’s Favour; all he can do is stake everything on the faith that God’s promises are true.

We as Christians are no longer criminals seeking to obey an impossible law, but lovers offering our all to one who loves us even when we never deserve that love.

Romans 4:1 [NIV] *“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?”*

Question asked *‘How did Abraham achieve righteousness with God?’*

Very important for Jews and Christians to understand this.

Genesis 15:5-6 [NIV] *“He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars, if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”*

Abraham in this passage has been having a discussion with God about the promises God had made to him. Knowing that all of them depended on Abraham having an heir, and as yet he had no heir.

Abraham’s faith was **not** limited to believing that God existed, but extended to believing what God said and promised.

Abraham at this point **did nothing** but believe God.

Both Paul and James in their writing point out that this is how Abraham achieved righteousness, **not** earned, **not** anything he had done, but credited to his faith.

“Counted” – châshab [khaw-shab] regarded - reckoned - imputed.

Romans 4:5 [NIV] *“However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”*

The first thing we have to do to receive God’s righteousness is **not** work at being righteous, but just trust God.

Romans 4:16 [NIV] *“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring — not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.”*

This is the pattern and example of Abraham the *“father of the faithful”*.

Does this mean that Abraham never made any mistakes after this?

I’m glad it doesn’t, for that would put us all in a difficult position.

If we read on in Genesis we find that Abraham made some serious mistakes.

Genesis 16:1-6 [NIV] *“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; so she said to Abram, “The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her.” Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.” “Your servant is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai ill-treated Hagar; so she fled from her.”*

Abraham and Sarah decided to take the initiative into their own hands and have a child through Hagar, Sarah’s maid.

In the life of faith **we never take the initiative**.

The initiative must always come from God.

John 5:19, 30 [NIV] *“Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, **the Son can do nothing by himself**; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.” ... “**By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.**”*

Jesus followed this pattern. He only did what he saw the Father do.

The **only** safe way to live a life of faith is to always allow God to take the initiative.

Every time we do our own thing, as Abraham did in this instance we likewise end up in trouble.

Genesis 20:1-2 [NIV] *“Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, “She is my sister.” Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.”*

Abraham told a half lie about Sarah and permitted her to be taken into a Gentile King’s harem, which was **not** the way a good husband behaves.

We are told that Sarah was a model wife and submitted to her husband Abraham’s command in faith and God intervened.

God did **not** approve these two aspects of Abraham’s conduct, but his faith was **still** reckoned to him as righteousness.

This fact is tremendously important for you and me.

Once we truly put our faith in the sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah and believe that on that basis we are righteous before God, we are righteous.

This does **not** mean we will never make mistakes and sin; but our faith will still be reckoned as righteousness as long as we continue to believe in the atoning power of Jesus Christ's Blood.

The real danger is that we give up our faith.

Luke 22:31-32 [NIV] *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”*

The time of the Last Supper before Jesus's Crucifixion; He told the Apostles that they would all forsake Him, which they all denied, especially Peter.

Evidently Satan had asked to “*get at*” all the Apostles [the “*you*” is plural in Greek].

Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would **not** fail, then **when** converted [receiving the Holy Spirit in a new birth] he would encourage the others.

Jesus did **not** pray that Peter would **not** deny Him, given Peter's character [without Holy Spirit] and Satan's onslaught it was inevitable that Peter would fail.

Jesus was and is [thankfully] a realist.

He knows we are but flesh with all its weaknesses.

After giving in to our weakness we will be terribly ashamed; feel the bottom has dropped out of life; but we must never give up our faith.

Christ is telling us if we hold on to our faith in Him He will see us through.

The course of events in Peter's life proved this to be true; the same can apply to all of us now.

Whatever trials and tests we face in the future, always remember this, never give up our faith in what God has done and will do through Jesus the Messiah [Saviour].

This is the way to have the peace of mind that Jesus says we can have.

John 14:23-27 [NIV] *“Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. **He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.** These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. “All this I have spoken while still with you. But **the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

This is one of the benefits of “*walking in faith*” or “*walking in the spirit*”; the goal we are working towards in our study of Romans.

Romans 4:6-8 [NIV] *“David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”*

Paul now brings in the example of David.

[Quote from **Psalm 32:1-2**]

Three parts to this blessing:

a) “*transgressions*” [lawlessness] have been forgiven

- b) “sins” [failing to hit the mark] covered [forgiven or concealed]
- c) “sins” [failing to hit the mark] not counted against him [credited to our inventory, not listed against us]

When we realise these facts we can never say that God’s Love for us is only conditional.

The only reaction we can have to such supreme love is to live a life seeking to reflect and return that love in all we do.

Romans 4:9 [NIV] *“Is 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.”*

Paul returns to Abraham to deal with the question of *“did Abraham have to be circumcised before righteousness was imputed to him as a result of his faith in God?”*

This is a vital question for **all** who come from a Jewish [or any other legalistic] background.

For example, is our faith reckoned as righteousness **only** after baptism?

I believe this is **not** true according to what Paul says here.

We are reckoned as righteous the moment we have faith in God’s Sacrifice through Jesus our Messiah.

But I also believe that baptism is necessary as an outward acknowledgement of the faith we already have. [More on this when we come to Chapter Six of Romans].

There is a difference between John’s baptism and Jesus’s Baptism.

John’s baptism was for sinners who had confessed their sins.

In Christian baptism we are united with Jesus in burial and resurrection because we have been made righteous.

It is the fulfilling [completing] of our righteousness and a resurrection to a new life. [We will see this when we come to study Chapter Six of Romans.]

Romans 4:11-12 [NIV] *“And he received the sign of circumcision, 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 might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.”*

Circumcision was the seal of his righteousness.

This makes him father [in faith] to both Jew and Gentile.

Promise was to a multitude of **nations** not just one nation, to become spiritual descendants of Abraham through faith in Abraham’s seed [Jesus the Christ].

The vital factor in our promised inheritance through Abraham is faith in his seed [Jesus Christ] **not** any outward sign, such as circumcision, but our then *“walking in the footsteps of the same faith as our father Abraham had...”*

We are saved by faith alone **not** faith plus something else.

Always be on our guard against people who want to add something to our faith in order to be right with God [righteous before God] for this is **not** scriptural.

God is tolerant in other areas but always insists in this one condition; this is one thing all Christian denominations must have in common.

There is variety in God's physical creation but as far as I understand, all physical living creatures also have water as a common factor.

God enjoys spiritual variety in His spiritual creation as long as we **all** have this one thing in common.

Faith in Jesus Christ's Sacrifice.

In the next study we will deal with the steps that Abraham took in faith so that we can *“also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had...”*