

L E S S O N 1 1

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Reckoned as Righteous

Herbert Jackson, as a new missionary, was assigned a car that wouldn't start without a push. After pondering the problem, he devised a plan. He went to the school near his home, got permission to take some of the children out of class, and had them push his car off. As he made his rounds, he would either park on a hill or leave the engine running. He used this ingenious procedure for two years.

Ill health forced the Jackson family to leave, and a new missionary came to that station. As Jackson proudly explained his arrangement for getting the car started, the other man began looking under the hood. Before Jackson's explanation was complete, the new missionary interrupted, "Why, Dr. Jackson, I believe the only trouble is this loose cable." He gave the cable a twist; stepped into the car; pushed the switch; and, to Jackson's astonishment, the engine roared to life. For two years, needless trouble had become routine. Only a loose connection kept Jackson from getting the car's power to work.

Do you trust that God will fulfill His promise to work "for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28)? When God gives us a promise, we must have faith—to sincerely believe that God will do what He says; hope—to anticipate and look forward to God acting on His vow; and patience—to quietly wait on the promise. For God's power is there all the time, and He never forgets a promise! He won't overlook you, and He has an appointed time to act on your needs. Our job is to do all within our means to stay within the center of God's will.

- 1.** *What promises have you kept that you are proud to say you did?*
- 2.** *What are some promises you still need to fulfill?*
- 3.** *Why is God the one to trust for keeping promises?*

LESSON FOCUS: Trust that God can and will do what He has promised!

Righteousness Is Apart from the Law

Romans 4:13-15, KJV

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.

Romans 4:13-15, NIV

¹³It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Prior to our lesson's passage, Paul introduced Abraham as an example of one who was declared righteous by faith in God's promises and not by works of the law. In so doing, the apostle took his readers all the way back to when God reaffirmed His promise to Abraham. The Lord said to Abraham, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:5-6, KJV).

With this background, our Scripture passage begins with Paul's argument that God's promise to Abraham and his descendants did not come by keeping the law but rather because of the righteousness that was accounted to the patriarch by his faith in the God who gave the promise. After all, if the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and his descendants came by keeping the law, then faith in the Lord would be meaningless and the promises ineffectual. But such is not the case, because it is impossible for anyone, even Abraham, to keep the law perfectly, which is God's standard.

Additionally, Paul went on to argue that the law was never designed to make a person righteous. Instead, it is the agent that brings God's wrath on people. Before the law, people may have had an excuse. But the law took away all excuses because it clearly declared God's standard and expectation of people.

Its ultimate purpose would be to point people to Jesus (see Gal. 3:24-25). Therefore, only by faith in God's promises can a person be declared righteous.

4. *How was God's promise not received by Abraham and his descendants?*

5. *How, then, was God's promise received by Abraham and his descendants?*

6. *What does the law bring?*

Righteousness Is by Grace

Romans 4:16-19, KJV

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:

Romans 4:16-19, NIV

¹⁶Therefore, 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 have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

¹⁸Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

As the apostle continued his argument against keeping the law as the way of righteousness, he introduced the companion

of faith, namely the amazing grace of God. Whereas the law could bring only the wrath of God upon sinners, grace brings His mercy upon all who come to Him in faith.

Because salvation from sin is by God's grace through faith, everyone who comes to Jesus in faith can be saved. Not only those under the law of Moses, namely the Jews, but also Gentiles who were not under the law can receive God's gracious gift of salvation. The latter are said to have the faith of Abraham, who believed God's promise that Sarah would bear the child of promise despite the physical impossibility. He was about 100 years old, and Sarah was well beyond childbearing age. Yet, because God said it would happen, Abraham believed and, as a result, became "the father of many nations."

We, like Abraham, can trust that the Lord will keep all His promises. Against all hope, Abraham believed God's promise of an heir and thereby became the father of many nations. Likewise, considering all we know about our life-giving, Creator God, we too have "hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb. 6:19). And though not fathers of many nations, those who come to God by faith in His Son will be graciously adopted into His family and one day will reign with Him for all eternity. There truly is no better hope than that for us to which we can anchor our souls!

7. *What is grace?*

8. *Who are recipients of God's grace?*

9. *How did Abraham become "the father of many nations"?*

Righteousness Is Reckoned by God

Romans 4:20-25, KJV

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

Romans 4:20-25, NIV

²⁰Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

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.

²²This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” ²³The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, ²⁴but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

²⁵He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Our lesson’s closing verses give additional insight into how people are declared righteous and can be justified before a holy God. Righteousness is not something a person can attain in his or her own strength or merit. There is nothing that a sinner can present to God to obtain righteousness. God’s standard is perfection, so imperfect human beings have nothing in themselves to offer. Thankfully, our gracious, merciful God knows this and still loves us enough to provide the way for an unrighteous sinner to become righteous; and Abraham is our example.

With unwavering faith, Abraham was fully persuaded that God could and would keep His promise. Therefore, God credited or imputed righteousness to the patriarch. And such imputation or reckoning of righteousness was not only for Abraham. People today can also be reckoned as righteous by unwavering faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, namely, the Gospel (see 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Our Lord was delivered over to the Cross for our sins; but three days later, He was raised from the dead for our justification. Now, because Jesus lives, those who are in Him by faith stand in His righteousness, fully justified in the sight of our holy God.

10. *How is Abraham’s faith described?*

11. *What did God do because of Abraham’s faith?*

12. *How do people obtain righteousness today?*

Faith Does

For months, Cynthia was frustrated with her job. It was a toxic situation with her manager constantly belittling everything she did. Cynthia needed a new job, but also needed her present income to pay her bills. She didn't know what to do.

One evening as Cynthia was reading her Bible before bed-time, she read James 2:14-19. As she meditated on this passage, Cynthia realized that "faith does," meaning that if she had faith in God, her actions would clearly show that faith. Little did she know her faith would soon be tested. The next day, her manager informed her she had been let go.

Cynthia went home that day shocked and upset—but she also acted. First, she prayed that God would provide. Then, she reviewed her monthly expenses and savings. Finally, Cynthia created a list of what was negotiable and nonnegotiable in her next job.

For two months, Cynthia filled out job application after job application. She even had a couple of interviews but no offers. Cynthia became anxious as she saw her bank account dwindling below her monthly expenses. Every night she continued to pray and ask God what she should do next. Often, she felt as if God wasn't listening, but then someone would bless her with exactly what she needed to make it another day or week.

At what seemed like the last minute, Cynthia received an email inviting her to a group interview. The interview went well, and she was invited to submit a performance task for the job. After almost a month process, Cynthia received the offer to her dream job.

It was a difficult time, but God used His Word and other people to help meet Cynthia's needs. God had shown Himself to be trustworthy in her life as she placed her active faith in Him.

13. *What does "faith isn't faith without works" mean?*

14. *What role does knowing God's promises play when putting faith in action?*

15. *Have you ever stepped out in faith and done something that others would think unreasonable? Explain.*

Standing on God's Promises

We demonstrate our faith in God and His promises by how we live daily.

The fifth stanza of the hymn "Standing on the Promises" by Russell Kelso Carter reminds us that we have a good God who keeps His promises: "Standing on the promises, I cannot fall / Listening every moment to the Spirit's call / Resting in my Savior as my all in all / Standing on the promises of God."

► *Are you willing to daily trust God and His promises, even if nothing is going according to your plan? If so, list some promises here you can stand on as you live your life for Him.*

KEY VERSES

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

—Romans 4:20-21, KJV

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

—Romans 4:20-21, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Week of May 13 through May 19

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

Mon. Isaiah 26:1-11—Trusting in God Brings Perfect Peace.

Tues. Isaiah 40:1-11—The Penalty Has Been Paid.

Wed. Acts 2:1-4, 14, 16-24, 36—God's Spirit Poured upon All Flesh.

Thurs. Acts 2:37-47—The Firstfruits of Reconciliation.

Fri. Genesis 33:1-15—Brothers at Long Last Reconciled.

Sat. Psalm 29—May God Bless Us with Peace.

Sun. Romans 5:1-11—Peace with God through Jesus Christ.