

Justified By God's Promise

Romans 4:9-17

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Introduction: A promise according to Webster is: “a declaration or assurance that one will do a particular thing or that a particular thing will happen. A promise is an assurance, a pledge, vow, guarantee, oath, commitment, contract or covenant!

But what guarantees a promise? Every time I hear the phrase, “The full faith and confidence of the federal government” a chill runs up and down my spine. Why? Because the government seldom does what it says it will do. It does not spend the money it collects for roads on roads. It spends the Social Security it forces people to pay for other expenses. It gets caught again and again lying about what it does or does not do. It is in a word, “Unfaithful!” Which is another way to say “untrustworthy.” Is it any wonder that only 11% of the country trust the congress? They do not do what they promise to do! As a result....people have no faith in them!

God makes promises too! And sadly most people do not believe them either. And it is for the same perceived reason. They do not like or trust the one offering the promise. This is the point of Paul's explanation of the gospel in Romans.

Romans 1:20 ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

People will not trust someone they personally do not like. This is human nature the condition of all men by birth. God has revealed Himself in Creation. It is so splendid and ordered beyond any possibility of random chance that a little child knows someone had to make it....but not educated adults. They prefer the notion of random chance or alien life forms. Why? Because they do not like or believe the one who made all things. Their darkened hearts teach them to reason and learn apart from God.

Romans 1:21-22 ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools,

This then is the spring of unbelief. The evidence is abundant, but men do not like the source of it. In pride, men imagine themselves to have life apart from God. They do not need someone to give life or the oxygen and water needed to live. Men are like the stubborn toddler who declares defiantly”I CAN DO IT BY MYSELF!”

God tells us about a man who encountered God in a small village near the Persian Gulf. Like men today, Abraham was not seeking God. God sought him and revealed Himself to him! It is Abraham's response that is noteworthy and the point of today's text. He thought The Creator worthy of trust...and so believed Him when He spoke! This is the essence of Saving Faith. It has almost nothing to do with believing religious doctrines or creeds and everything to do with trusting the Creator of the Universe to tell the truth and to do what He promises to do.....in salvation and in judgment!

Romans 4:3 ³ For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

It is asserted in the Bible that salvation cannot be obtained by men, but is instead freely given to any person who believes God. God gives His own righteousness to those who trust Him with their eternal souls and lives. Faith cannot be added to any human work. It must replace all human work and rely totally in the character and worthiness of God alone! This is salvation by faith and it is apart from works. In our Scripture this morning the question is asked..."Who can come to God this way?"

Romans 4:9-17 ⁹ Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." ¹⁰ How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; ¹¹ and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, ¹² and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. ¹³ For **the promise** to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the **promise** is nullified; ¹⁵ for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. ¹⁶ For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed 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, ¹⁷ (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

How were men saved before Christ came from the Father to become our sinless, human sacrifice? Was religious observance of The Law the means God used? Absolutely not! Men have always been saved in exactly the same way! God makes this point crystal clear in this text....

- Salvation existed before the Law itself or its rituals [9-12]
- Salvation is extended to any who believe God's promise like Abraham did [13-15]
- Salvation is experienced by all who trust the life giver for their eternal life [16-17]

Salvation existed before the Law itself or its rituals [9-12]

Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? [9a]: This question is really about the value of "Faith Alone." Is faith enough or does it require the religious rituals and structure that the Jews by that time had put on it? "Circumcised" is synonymous with keeping the Law in Paul's writings. It was a watershed ritual in the mind of Paul's readers. Without it you could not be a child of Abraham...you could not be included in the covenant and therefore saved. Certain men followed Paul from city to city to refute the teaching that men are saved by faith apart from the works of the Law.

They compelled gentile men to come under the law in order to be saved by faith. Paul wrote the book of Galatians to refute this idea

Galatians 5:1-2 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. ² Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.

If a Jew intended to establish his own righteousness through observing the Law then Scripture affirms that it must be a perfect and total observance of the Law. Nothing short of that will suffice.

Galatians 5:3 ³ And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.

For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

[9b]: But the Gospel imparts an actual righteousness to men that has nothing to do with the law. It comes through faith in the God of Creation...the One True God. When any man or woman believes that God is trustworthy and good and puts their lives in His hands by believing His promises....God credits righteousness to their eternal account.

How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised [10]: This is where the proof of salvation by faith apart from works begins. If circumcision is a requirement for righteousness [or salvation] with God then let's consider Abraham. Everyone agrees, including those advocating for righteousness through the Law, that Abraham was righteous. He was godly and was the Father of the Jews! Did Abraham become righteous before or after he was circumcised? It was before he was circumcised. Then what purpose is circumcision?

He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised [11a]: So the circumcision was a sign. A sign of salvation is vastly different than the salvation itself. You only need to consider a road sign to understand this. The sign that says "Placerville 23 miles" is testifying to the reality of a place named Placerville. If you want to stop at the sign and live under the sign I guess you could....BUT....you would not be in Placerville and you would not receive any of its benefits.

This verse clearly says the "seal of righteousness is of faith." Abraham had faith and therefore righteousness at least 13 years before God told him to be circumcised as a sign or testimony to that saving trust he had in God. He received righteousness before he was circumcised!

So that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, [11b]: Abraham is the faith ancestor of all who trust only in God and not themselves for salvation. God did not link salvation with circumcision. In other words....salvation is offered to gentiles...to us....on exactly the same basis as it came to Abraham. By confident trust in God that reveals itself by obedient submission to Him The righteous obey because they completely trust the goodness and motives of God. Obedience is testimony to that saving faith. They have not

believed a certain doctrine. They have entrusted their eternal souls into the hands of the God of Creation. This is what James met when he said...

James 2:26 ²⁶ For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

And the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. [12]: Even if you are a Jew by birth and religion you must be saved by faith and not works of the law. A Jew cannot obtain the righteousness needed to be saved apart from faith. In this sense they are exactly like the gentiles. Even though God has given them many advantages and they are truly God's chosen people, that does not make them righteous. Righteousness comes through trusting God enough to depend solely on Him for your righteousness. It is His gift to them and it is not ever obtained by works.

God justifies the gentiles [who do not have The Law] by faith or trust in Him alone. He justifies the Jews [who do have The Law] by the exact same faith in Himself alone. So the Law cannot justify you even if you are a Jew. Justification is through faith alone which means apart from every human means and consideration and dependent entirely on the faithfulness of God to justify those who trust Him.

Salvation is extended to any who believe God's promise like Abraham did [13-15]

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. [13]: There is a shift in Paul's argument here. AND...it goes to the heart of the matter of salvation through faith alone. People say..."what do I have to believe to be saved?" BUT...the correct question is "Who do I have to believe to be saved?" The answer is God. Here Scripture speaks about "The Promise" that God gave to Abraham. And a promise is only as good as the person making it. We have already made this point earlier.

Abraham considered God trustworthy. He believed the promise that one of his descendants would be the heir to the world. It was a promise that had nothing to do with the Law or the keeping of the Law. It was just God's declaration to Abraham and he believed it because he trusted God and the character and goodness of God. Here Paul goes beyond circumcision to speak directly about the Law of Moses. When he wrote to the Galatians he was crystal clear about this saying....

Galatians 3:16-18 ¹⁶ Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. ¹⁷ What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

Abraham believed the promise of God that one of his own descendants would be the Christ. Although he and Sarah were too old for children they considered that God would

be faithful to His promise because they trusted God. They had faith in God who was faithful to tell the truth and powerful to carry out what He purposes to do.

For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; [14]: God does not allow for any mixing of works and faith. There is no combination of the two that saves. There is no need of Christ if you can be justified by The Law...

Galatians 2:21 - 3:1 ²¹ "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

This is the stumbling block for so many. "How can God justify me apart from my works? Do you mean to tell me that a person can commit all manner of sin and then just believe in Christ and go to heaven?" Yes that is exactly what the Gospel says....

BUT the word "believe" does not mean agreement with some doctrine on a church creed. It DOES NOT MEAN to pray a certain prayer. It means to come to the end of yourself. To consider everything you can possibly do to have no ability to absolve your sin. It means to forsake your own righteousness, religion and ritual and throw yourself entirely on the mercy of Christ who did live the righteous life that you needed to live. On Jesus who did die for the sins that you needed to die for. This is why this is Gospel. It is the good news that....

2 Corinthians 5:21 ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

For the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. [15]: Continuing to press the logic of his argument Paul points out the obvious. If there is no law against something then it is impossible to break it. Years ago you could not get a speeding ticket in Montana!!! They had no speed limit. A little closer to home...just a few years ago, you could not get a fine for being unbuckled, talking on your cell phone or texting while driving. What changed to make these activities criminal? Now there is a law. Now that these laws exist, the wrath of the government can come down on you for violating them. That is all the law can do! It cannot make you obey them it can only punish you when you don't.

Laws against murder to not make people loving. Laws against fraud and stealing do not make people honest. Laws against adultery do not make people faithful. They only reveal and punish their lawless behavior.

"The law has its place in the way God brings people salvation, but that place is not the provision of a means whereby people may so prove themselves virtuous that they receive salvation as a merited reward. Rather, law shows up our inadequacies and makes us see our need of a Savior. This is beautifully simple and quite compelling. "Violation" means overstepping a line, and thus for breaking a clearly defined commandment. If there is no violation, there is no need of salvation. Law shows us where we stand, but it does not save us." **Leon Morris**

Salvation is experienced by all who trust the Life Giver for their eternal life [16-17]

For this reason *it is by faith* [16a]: For all these reasons salvation must be by faith. It cannot be by law, circumcision, ritual, self-righteousness of any kind. Humans are simply incapable of righteousness and having The Law of God just infinitely magnifies that point.

In order that *it may be in accordance with grace* [16b]: Grace is what magnifies Christ because He saved us apart from our own merit and righteousness. God did not send Jesus because we deserved Him. He sent Him because we absolutely needed Him!

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

“Grace” means undeserved and unwarranted. It is related to the word “joy” in Greek and is therefore “Something that brings joy.” A gracious host or a dancer bring joy to those they influence.

Leon Morris says, “In a Christian context nothing brings joy like that great, inexplicable saving act of God in Christ in which he freely brings about our salvation without any contribution from our side. The term thus comes to us rich with ideas of joy and bounty. Grace may be specifically opposed to what is due or by works. The thought is of something completely unearned and unmerited.”

So that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, [16b]: Salvation through faith alone is the way God assures that salvation would come to the Gentiles. It was always God’s intention to save men from every nation tongue and tribe. Before the Son left heaven for Bethlehem, The Father to Him and said in Isaiah...

Isaiah 49:6-7 ⁶ "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." ⁷ Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel *and* its Holy One, To the despised One, To the One abhorred by the nation, To the Servant of rulers, "Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You."

Who is the father of us all, [16c]: This does not mean that the promises of Israel are transferred to the church. There is nothing in this text that even hints at that. It is holding up Abraham’s confident trust in the character and worthiness of God and His promises as the example and even definition of Saving Faith. To quote Webster once more...A father is “one who originates or institutes something” We use the word “father” like this in our own language and understand it perfectly....He was the father of modern science!” George Washington was “The father of our country!”

In the case of Abraham he was the original biblical example of Saving Faith and therefore the father of all those who possess that same kind of saving faith. Faith alone reveals and saves God’s people from every nation.

(as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") [17a]: God made this promise to Abraham in Gen. 17:5. This is the promise that Abraham believed, because he trusted God . Abraham is the father of any person who trust in God alone and not themselves. This was fulfilled not in human genealogy but in Christ. The Promise was and still is Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:13-14 ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE "-
- ¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

In the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, [17b]: Abraham received this promise in the presence of The God whom he trusted. It was a direct revelation of God to Abraham not some fuzzy thought or dream that he had.

Who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. [17c]: This is the life giving God. There was nothing deader than pagan Romans burning incense to and worshipping their king. A nation that amused itself watching people be eaten by lions and who invented some of the worst means of killing every known. But Paul was now speaking to living Romans. Those who had been called from death to life by Christ. He is the God who made the world from nothing. Christ Jesus was His Son and came revealing God to mankind. You will not go to hell when you put your trust in the source of all life. Jesus was emphatic about who He was and what He would do....

John 5:24-29 ²⁴ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. ²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; ²⁷ and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man. ²⁸ "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment.

CONCLUSION: There is no possibility of justification by The Law. Even though it was given by God. Likewise circumcision or any other ritual...even though given by God. Because these things cannot impart righteousness. The Law reveals our unrighteousness and nothing more. Circumcision has value only as a sign that a Jewish man had trusted in God alone for salvation. The same is true of baptism and communion today. They have no value apart from their intended purposes. They are testimonies to and worship of our God who saves us by faith apart from works.

The application to you is simple:

Stop trying to earn your standing with God. Christ has earned that for you and offered it freely to anyone who would trust Him fully. Place your eternal destiny into the hands of this one man because you know He is the only life giver.

Then live in this realization... Christ has loved you! That love has nothing to do with your worthiness to receive it. It has everything to do with His grace. He came giving

free salvation to the likes of us. It was all of Grace. It was given to us through the means of faith....which means that we have forsaken all other means to obtain it.

Rejoice in Christ's church which He created by Grace alone, through Faith Alone. You are part of this amazing living organism called Christ's body....The Church.

Ephesians 2:11-22 ¹¹ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision " by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands-- ¹² *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. ¹⁷ AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; ¹⁸ for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.