

**In The Steps of Faith**  
**Romans 4:9-17**  
**Berean Baptist Church**  
**Pastor Skylar Bernick**

**INTRODUCTION**

Abraham believed God – he took God at His word – and it was counted to him for righteousness. Nothing that Abraham ever did or said was as important as that one decision to trust God. That decision of faith was the foundation of Abraham's walk with God. In these verses, the Scriptures tear down everything, even good things, that might be confused for saving faith. This passage shows the power of the promises of God and the blessedness of a life built on those promises.

Symbols of faith and works of faith are good things but they must be built on the foundation of informed trust that saves a sinner by placing them securely in Christ.

*Walk in the faith of Abraham by placing all of your hopes in the promises of God!*

**Romans 4:9-12 By Faith, Not By Symbol**

Romans 4:1-8 showed how God's righteousness was given to Abraham and David without the works of the Law. But what about the most important symbol of their relationship with God: circumcision? Was it necessary for Abraham and David to be circumcised before they could be saved?

**Vs 10-11** No! Abraham was saved by faith long before he was circumcised. This is the heart of Paul's argument: Abraham was declared righteous by God (See Genesis 15:6, 16:16, 17:1-12) at least 13 years before God gave the covenant symbol of circumcision!

The symbol of Abraham's faith and God's promise is very important, but Abraham was saved and the promise made, years before Abraham took the symbol.

You are not saved by symbols, but what do we make of symbols of the faith? What use do we have for them?

**Vs 11** Circumcision was a sign and a seal, that is an outward symbol of an inward truth. In the Bible, this kind of "seal" is like a down payment. It is something done or given that promises something greater down the road.

Christians are sealed internally by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13 and 4:30) but the kind of sealing Romans four speaks of a powerful outward symbol of the internal truth. This same kind of sealing is also described in Revelation chapter seven:

“And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads (Rev 7:2-3).” This is an outward symbol of an inward, greater, truth.

Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the same kind of seal: outward symbols of inward truth.

Now we are dispensationalists, we don't buy what is often called “covenant theology” but dispensationalists recognize that there are covenants in the Bible. In fact, we divide the Bible according to two great covenants: “Old Testament” and “New Testament” based God's covenant promise; the word “testament” means a kind of “covenant.”

Circumcision was such a powerful symbol of God's covenant with Abraham that God said:

“This *is* my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised (Gen 17:10).”

And the Lord's Supper is such a powerful symbol of God's new covenant with all who call on Him that He said: “This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you (Luke 22:20).”

Outward symbols are important and powerful, they strengthen the walk of faith. But the outward symbols are meaningless if there is no faith within.

*Take the outward symbols of your faith seriously, they are important and can strengthen your faith! But also remember that they are just symbols and meaningless without the inward reality of trust in God!*

Abraham was justified by faith before he had the symbols of faith. His hope was not in the symbol of faith or his own background but in the promises of God.

**Vs 12 The father of all who “walk the steps of Abraham's faith.”** The phrase means to march in line with an army or to follow a leader. How do we follow in Abraham's footsteps? By believing God as he did. If you take God at His word as Abraham did, then you are a child of Abraham and you walk in your father's path.

Whoever you are, however, rejected you have been, however unimportant you feel, if you walk the path of Abraham's faith then you are a child of Abraham and a member of the most important family in history.

*Find comfort and joy in the fact that if you are in Christ, you are a child of Abraham.*

*Take up the symbols of your faith, but do not hope in those symbols. Place all of your hope in the promises of God!*

### **Romans 4:13-15 By Faith, Not By Works**

Abraham was declared righteous over 13 years before he was circumcised, but he had already done good works. So is it necessary to do good works before God declares us righteous? No! Abraham's hope was in the promises of God and God's promises stand even if human works fall.

**Vs 13 “the heir of the world”** To the Jewish Christians in Rome who knew the Old Testament very, very well, this statement would stand out. Abraham was promised a discreet area of land, he was promised to be the father of nations and kings, but never the entire world (Gen 12:1-3, 15:5–21; 17:4–8; 22:17–18). These are the promises that God made to Abraham:

Gen 12:1-3 a great nation, a great name, a blessing to all people of the earth

Gen 15:5-21 a biological son, innumerable descendants, and the promised land where 10 nations dwelt  
Gen 17:4-8 a father of many nations, and the security of his descendants

Gen 22:17-18 innumerable descendants who will have power over their enemies

“Heir of the world” is never promised but it naturally follows from the promises above. And notice the general direction of the promises. God's promises do not become more limited over time but more generous, he does not change his word but he does expand on it to bless the faithful even more.

**Vs 14** This point is much like Vs 10-11. Circumcision was over 10 years after Abraham was declared righteous by faith, and the Law (the ten commandments and all that follows from them.) came over 400 years after Abraham was justified by faith (Gal 3:17).

**“Faith would be made void and the promise of none effect”** because the promise was unconditional and the righteousness of the promise was a free gift. But the righteousness of the law is conditional, and if the promise depended on human obedience it would have failed as soon as humans failed.

**Vs 15** The promise is a promise of salvation by making someone righteous before God, but the main effect of the Law is damnation by convicting sinners before God.

The Law brings the wrath of God, but faith brings the forgiveness of God. The children of faith are no longer under the Law and so we are safe from the wrath of God that would come from breaking the law.

Abraham was justified by faith before he even knew about the Law. He did many good works after he received the promises of God, but his hope was in God's promises and not his own works.

*Do the works of faith but do not hope in your works. Place all of your hope in the promises of God!*

### **Romans 4:16-17 By Faith Not By Human Strength**

Abraham was already an old man when he received the promises of God. Abraham was promised a biological son when he was far, far beyond that hope by human strength. It is no accident that the promises of God were revealed to Abraham when all hope of human power was exhausted.

**Vs 16 Because** the promise is by grace, not works, it is certain and accessible to all of humanity. All people of all backgrounds, no matter their talents or limitations, have access to the same promise as Abraham if they will only take God at His word.

**“sure to all the seed”** Because we are so weak and so crooked, the only way that God's mighty and holy promise could be kept is to make it unconditional and based only on trust.

**who is the father of us all,** And all people who live by the faith of Abraham are children of Abraham? Whoever you are, however insignificant you think you might be, whoever has turned their back on you or forgotten you, if you trust the promises of Abraham's God, then you are a child of Abraham.

**Vs 17 God, who quickeneth the dead.** To "quickeneth" means to "make alive." There are many ways in which this is true. Abraham received the promises that he would physically beget the son of promises when he was as good as dead. And Christ calls those who are dead in sin to new life, eventually even bringing Christian physically back from the grave.

When Abraham's strength was gone and all his physical hopes spent, he took God at His word and so received the righteousness of God and a son beyond all hope.

*Be strong and do your best to live as mighty lights in the World, but do not hope in your strength. Place all of your hope in the promises of God!*

### **CONCLUSION**

What do you hope in outside of the promises of God? Religious symbols, good works, your own strength – which of these could save you from death?

Do you fear death, are you unsure of what will happen to you when you die, are you unsure of your place before God?

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11:25-26).”

Take God at His word and place your trust in His promises. Jesus has promised to forgive the sins of all who confess Him as Lord and trust in His resurrection. Trust His promises and seek forgiveness from Jesus based the free gift He offers you today! And live by the promises of God!

If you say that you trust the promises of God, how well do you know those promises? The promises of God in the Bible answer every struggle in the Christian life. Consider a few examples...

**Is your soul weary? Do you feel broken under the burdens of life? Jesus said...**

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt11:28-30).”

*Come to Jesus, take up His service, learn from Him, and you will find rest.*

**Does the world scare you? Does the direction of our country, or even your own failures, discourage you?**

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:1-3).”

*Believe in God and do not be dominated by the darkness of this age. Because Jesus will take you to a place where you belong, outside of this broken world.*

Do not let self-righteousness and self-reliance keep you from the blessed promises of God. Self-righteousness says “Thou shall...” and self-reliance says “I must...,” but faith says “God will...”

If you trust in His promises than carefully study those promises, apply them to your life, and you will be blessed. Study the Word, enjoy Christian fellowship, seek Biblical counsel and you will begin to find God's promise for every situation in life.

*Walk in the faith of Abraham by placing all of your hopes in the promises of God!*