

**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**4** What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? <sup>2</sup> If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. <sup>3</sup> What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” <sup>4</sup> Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. <sup>5</sup> However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

<sup>13</sup> It was not through 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. <sup>14</sup> For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, <sup>15</sup> because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> As 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 things that are not as though they were.

**Dear Friends,**

Did you know that every church or religion in the world falls into one of two categories? It is either a church/religion based on works or based on faith in Christ. This isn’t something new. These two opposing ideas of salvation have been around once the world population began to grow and people turned away from God.

Even today, there are some large religious groups that have a great influence in the world, like Mormonism and Islam, that are built on what you do as an individual rather than faith in Jesus. These religions have rejected the work of Christ Jesus and the need for a Savior from sin and based all their hope on what one does.

Paul addresses these two ideas about salvation as he shows us, **“The Sharp Contrast Between Works and Faith.”** In this portion of scripture Paul will show us, **“That our Works can only bring Us Wrath and Condemnation,”** while, **“Our Faith in Jesus Brings us Grace and Salvation.”**

**I.** Paul begins this section with a question, **“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?”** In other words, did Abraham have something to boast about before God?

The Jewish people of Paul’s time thought Abraham certainly could boast because he had obeyed God many times. He moved his family without knowing where they were headed. He believed that God would give him and Sarah a son. He even was ready to sacrifice that son at God’s command. And God had blessed Abraham with wealth and servants.

Yet these same people forgot that Abraham wasn't always so faithful. Twice he passed off Sarah as his sister instead of his wife because he feared he might be harmed or even killed. He tried to help God in his promise to have a son by having an affair with Sarah's maid servant. He trusted that God would give him and Sarah a son but only after many personal assurances from God. Abraham had faith but he was also sinful and fell short of God's commands more often than he obeyed them.

The Jewish people thought that God owed Abraham heaven because of his works but Paul points out, **"<sup>13</sup> It was not through 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."** Abraham was right with God, not because he obeyed God's Laws but because of his faith in the promise of a Savior. He understood that if he could work his way to heaven, then he wouldn't need a Savior but Paul reminds us, **"<sup>14</sup> For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, <sup>15</sup> because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression."**

You see, the Law has a purpose. It shows us our sins and our need of a Savior. The Law shows us that we deserve God's wrath. Later in this letter to the Romans Paul would state the effect of the Law, **"The wages of sin is death."** (Romans 6:23) If we want rely on our works they can only bring us everlasting death in hell and no one wants that.

We all like to boast about what we have done – that's part of our human nature and at times we can caught up in thinking that God has to let us into heaven because of what we have done or at least because we have tried to do the right things. That appeals to our human logic but like Abraham our disobedience and sins far outweigh the good that we have done and so we too, deserve God's wrath and punishment. If we want to rely on the Law – that is on what we do – we are doomed but if we, like Abraham, recognize the promise of Jesus and hold onto it by faith, then God will bring us grace and salvation.

**II. <sup>3</sup> What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."** Abraham's faith made him right with God. In spite of all the good that Abraham did, it was only his faith that brought him righteousness. And so it is for us too. As Paul wrote, **"However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."** To the person who **does not try to work their way to heaven** but trusts in God for salvation – that person is saved by their faith. **That's us.** God justifies us – he declares us not guilty of our sins because of our faith in Jesus and our faith that Jesus paid for everyone of our sins, no matter how terrible they might be. We are forgiven.

Paul wraps it all up for us with these words, **"<sup>16</sup> 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."**

We are spiritual descendants of Abraham by our faith in Jesus and his promises. We have God's guarantee of forgiveness for our sins and eternal life in heaven because of our faith in Jesus. God's promises don't change and God's love for us doesn't change either. He wants all

people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth that only faith saves. We see that in our Gospel lesson.

If you ever wonder about God's love for you just think about our Gospel lesson for today. Jesus reached out to this Samaritan woman at the well. She wasn't living according to God's Word since she had had 5 husbands and now was living with someone without the benefit of marriage. Jesus pointed that out to her – the Law to show her her sin but he also used the gospel to reveal himself as the Living Water of Life – the Living Water that she needed.

He does the same for us – reaching out with the Law to show us our sin and the Gospel to reveal his love for us that brings us forgiveness for our sins.

We might be tempted to boast about all that we have done but may this portion of scripture remind you that it's not about what we do but about what Christ has done for us. May this portion of scripture remind you that you are right with God because of your faith in Jesus and may that bring you peace and comfort as you focus on God's great love for you. Amen.