

Romans: Living By Faith

By James Boice

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That is true. I hope it's not because the subjects become increasingly demanding, but rather because the weekend is coming or something as important as that. We've been doing Romans. You know, if you have been here for the earlier sessions, and if not, we pick up today with chapter 4, we've already looked at chapter one in some detail in the very end of chapter 3, in some detail. And so there's a sequence here. We're dealing, as Paul himself does, first of all, with the need of the human race and the mess into which it's gotten itself because of its rejection of God.

We looked very briefly at the amplification of that by Paul showing that all are involved in that. Nobody can excuse himself or herself by saying, Well, that's true of other people, but I'm a moral person or that's true of other people, but I'm religious, and I'm going to be saved by my religion. All people are included in that condemnation. In the first part of chapter 3, when Paul begins to wrap it up just before giving his solution, he shows the extent of it, saying that it has so, the fall has so affected men and women that we can't understand spiritual things. We don't seek after God, and we don't even want to.

And then as we were developing that, we looked at the end of chapter 3, where God's way of salvation is spelled out, and we saw it in terms of the great theological concepts that Paul introduces, the idea of propitiation. That concept borrowed from the ancient world of sacrifices, the sacrificial system where the sacrifice turns aside the wrath of God. And we saw that that has brought into Christian terminology, but with this main difference, within the pagan world, it was

a worshiper himself who turned aside the wrath of God by presenting a sacrifice. And in Christianity, recognizing that nobody is able to do that, no sacrifice that we could possibly make is adequate to the need God himself provides the sacrifice, so God turns aside his own wrath and the person of Jesus Christ.

And then we looked at the concept of redemption, which is borrowed from the realm of commerce. It has to do with buying and selling, and in this case, to buy a slave out of slavery so the slave can be free. And that is what Jesus Christ has done for us. And then finally we looked at justification. That concept, which Martin Luther said and said rightly, is the very heart of Christianity, he says, in one place where the doctrine of justification stands, the church will stand. And where the doctrine of justification falls, the church will fall as well.

Now, that brought us at the very end of our last session to the matter of faith, and just to put this in context in terms of the flow, and also to link it up with what I'm doing in the plenary sessions, let me indicate, in case you've missed that, that in both of these sessions, I'm moving in a parallel direction. In Romans, we develop the problem, the solution, and then the personal response. And in the plenary session, I'm talking about the need in the world and then the solution for that. And in the final session today, I'm talking about a personal response. But here in the development of Romans, the personal response is faith and what I'm talking about in the plenary sessions is obedience. And those two actually come together because the great example that the apostle Paul gives you in Romans 4 of faith is Abraham and that's what I'm going to talk about in the other session that follows.

Going back to Genesis 22, where we have the climax of Abraham's faith. So there's some thought that goes into this. It all comes together. And I want you to see that. Now, at the very end of our time, last time we talked about faith, and I said it was an anticipation of what we were going to find in chapter 4. I'd like to read a little bit of chapter 4. I think reading virtually all of this chapter. I do this not because you wouldn't know what's in it. I think you would. But just as a matter of policy, when I do Bible teaching, I like to read the passage that we're studying just to say it's sort of a way of saying that it's the word we're interested in. This is not a lecture that hopefully comes forth out of a man, but it's an exposition of what God has said.

It may or may not be accurate. We want to be as accurate as we can, but it's the word that we hold before us. And that's why I read these passages. So let's do that. And then I'll talk about faith in a general way. And I'll talk about what this passage says about faith in the case of Abraham. And then we'll conclude with a great example of Abraham that's given by Paul at the very end of the chapter. What then, shall we say that Abraham our forefather discovered in this matter, if, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God. What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Now, when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation, however, to the man, it does not work but trust God, who justifies the wicked. His faith is credited as righteousness. 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 sin is covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count

against him. Is this blessedness only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised? We've been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him, his righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised or before? Was not after, but before, 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. To not only are circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father, Abraham had before he was circumcised. It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be the heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value, and the promise is worthless because law brings wrath and where there is no law, there is no transgression.

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. As it's 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. Against 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.

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead since he was about 100 years old, and that Sarah's womb was also dead 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. That is why it was credited to Him as righteousness. Now the words it was credited to him were written not for Him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness for us, who believe in Him, who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Now that's the chapter that we have before us as we begin, I pointed out at the end of our last study when we were at the end of chapter 3, that although that chapter is loaded with these great theological terms, all of which point to what God has done for our salvation, two of these great acts being performed by Jesus Christ, one in reference to God, the Father, and one in reference to ourselves, and one act performed by God on the basis of the propitiation provided by Jesus, He justifies the ungodly. As I say, although all these turns point to the work of God, it is nevertheless also indicated in the passage that there is something we're to do. And that something is described by the word faith. If you count it up in verses 21 to 31, you'll find that it occurs there eight times.

Now we don't need that reference or those references to remind us that faith is important. We're told in Hebrews, without faith, it's impossible to please God. We're told in Ephesians that we're justified not by works but by faith. It is true, but even that is not something that we can conjure up in ourselves. It comes as a result of God at work within us. But nevertheless, faith is something that we do. God does not believe for us. God makes it possible for us to believe. I believe that God, first of all, regenerates and out of the regenerated life, the new nature comes

the possibility of true faith. But nevertheless, it is our faith we must believe. And so that's the point at which that which God has done on our behalf now becomes ours personally.

The problem, of course, is that there are so many definitions of faith that it is almost impossible in some circles to hear a clear statement of what faith is. What is faith? Well, some people talk about it as if it were a subjective experience. That is an intensity of feeling, an experience of something so deep and convicting that we say, Well, I just must be a Christian because, well, after all, I've had that kind of an experience. I was talking to a young man after a series of meetings a number of years ago, and he came up to ask some questions, and I was talking to him. And I said, as I often do at the beginning of a discussion like that, are you a Christian? Yes, he said, I am.

And so I started from that point, we began to talk about some of the things I had said. And I was talking about the atonement of Christ, the fact that he died for our sins. And he said, Well, you know, I don't really believe that. And I pointed out that that has something to do with what it is to be a Christian. And he said, Well, nevertheless, I believe I am one. And then we talked about the resurrection. And while he didn't believe the resurrection, that was a miracle, as a matter of fact, he didn't believe in miracles at all. He was very materialistically oriented. And I said, Well, you know, Christians do believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as part of the very essence of the gospel. And he said, Well, that may be true, but nevertheless, he firmly believed that he was a Christian.

All he was talking about was this subjective sense that, of course, well, he must be a Christian. He wasn't anything else. And that was his background. And so he must be, if you'd say do you have faith? He would say, yes, I have faith that I'm a Christian. But of course, that's what Paul is talking about. There's a kind of definition of faith which is really the equivalent of an optimistic world view. It's the kind of faith that we work up in ourselves because we want to do, well. It's what a good salesman has. You ever studied sales theory? They will often tell a salesman before he goes out to sell his product. He used to look at himself in the mirror, and he used to say, I am a good salesman. I am a good salesman. And he would say that over a dozen times and he says, I'm going to have a good day. I'm going to sell five sets of encyclopedias today, and then you say it again and again.

Well, you got yourself all worked up. You believe in yourself, you know, you're going to succeed. And so you go out and you do it. And there are some people who say, Well, faith is like that. Now, I don't want to knock a positive self image and an optimistic outlook on life. I think that's a good thing, and certainly it works, but my point is that that is not what Biblical faith is all about. What is faith? Let me give it to you in three elements. First of all, faith always has intellectual content. This is what distinguishes it for mere feeling. You're going to have a feeling or an experience and have no intellectual content at all. Biblical faith is always related to the facts. It's belief in something. You see, it's not just belief for beliefs sake. It's not like saying, I believe in believing. It's always believing something.

And in this case, it has to do with the gospel that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to this Earth as a man, died in our place on the cross, rose again. According to the Scriptures, as Paul says in

that great passage in 1 Corinthians. 15. Now there's a lot more to it than that. The whole of the gospel is expounded in the New Testament, but the core of it is that content that concerns Jesus Christ and faith of its true faith has to begin at that point. But now true faith is not only an intellectual commitment, because as James writes in his letter talking about faith, that's the kind of faith even the devils have. As a matter of fact, if it is only intellectual knowledge or understanding, the devils perhaps have more faith than we do, at least in that respect, because they know a great deal more.

They've been around a long time. They're eternal beings in the sense that they were created long ago, and they have existed all of this time. And they've observed all these things and they know what happened in the lifetime of Jesus Christ. And we weren't there. We've come lately on the scene. So if it's just in terms of knowledge, the devils have more of that than we do. I would say that the devil himself is a far greater theologian than any one of us or any one of us will ever be, but they're not saved. So it's not intellectual knowledge alone. Something else is involved.

The second element is what John Wesley described as the warming of the heart. When he gave the account of his own conversion at that little meeting in Alders Gate in London, he said as he heard the reading of Luther's introduction to one of the great Pauline books that he felt his heart strangely warmed. Now Wesley had been a preacher before that. He'd been to this country. He carried on evangelistic meetings, but at that point, by his own confession, it was all in his head. He knew these things. He knew the facts, but it never touched him personally. And so that's what happened. Some people think of John Calvin as being a particularly cold intellectual individual,

and people who talk that way probably just haven't read much of Calvin. At least they haven't been able to read Calvin sympathetically.

You got to read Calvin on prayer, for example, what Calvin says about prayer is among the greatest things that he writes, and what he writes about faith is true as well. There's one point in his writings where Calvin is talking about faith, and he says, now all that remains for us is to let that which has been flitting around on the top of our brains seep down into our hearts. And I think that's pretty good. That's certainly something that we should all aim at as Christians. We want to be students of the word. We want to study theology and church history and all of those things as well, but it's not going to do us any good in terms of the living of our lives unless it seeps down into our hearts, which is where our lives find their source of motivation.

It's as we respond at that heart level to what we believe that our lives are really changed. So that's the second thing. And then the third thing, perhaps the critical thing is this. It also involves commitment. First, the knowledge of the head, then there's the movement of the heart. And finally, there is the engagement of the will. That's the point at which we say not merely I know these things or secondly, I know they're important and they touch me deeply, but I am going to follow Jesus Christ as my Savior. We make a commitment to him at that point.

I think there's a great illustration of this in marriage and the events that lead up to it, because in any good marriage, the man and the woman have spent some time before the marriage, first of all, getting to know one another, to find out whether the other person is the kind of person that they can live with in a marriage, the kind of person they want to live with, in whose company

they can grow as an individual. And that corresponds to the intellectual aspect of faith. There really is a certain amount of content that's involved. Then the second element is the heart element, and that's in marriage is what you call falling in love, and that precedes the marriage as well.

At that point, you see, you're not only saying to yourself, Well, here's the kind of person I think I would like to live with, or I think I could live with for a lifetime, but because you fall in love, you say, this is the person I want to live with for a lifetime. I just can't see myself spending my life apart from that person. But you see, even that doesn't make the marriage. You have the intellectual content, the heart response. But what makes a marriage is when the man and the woman stand in the church before the altar in the presence of the minister and exchange their vows. And at that point he says, I, John, take thee Mary, to be my wedded wife, and I do promise in covenant before God in these witnesses to be thy loving and faithful husband, in plenty, and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live.

And she looks into his face and she repeats the same words after him. Now that is, in a sense, what happens in faith in our engagement with Jesus Christ. He's the bridegroom, and he takes the vow first of all. And he says, I, Jesus, take thee sinner, whoever you may be, to be my wedded wife spiritually as the bride, which is the church. And I do promise in covenant in the presence of God, the Heavenly Father, to be thy loving Savior and bridegroom in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, for this life and for all eternity. And then the point in that service comes when we look into his face and we repeat the words after him, and we say, I sinner, take thee Jesus to be my Savior and my bridegroom, and I do promise in covenant of the

presence of God, the Heavenly Father, to be thy faithful wife and follower, your disciple in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, for this life and for all eternity.

And God, who the Father who presides over that ceremony, says, all right, I pronounce the man and wife, and we are joined to Jesus Christ for all eternity. That's when we take on His name, that's when we become a Christian, a Christ one because we are now, Mrs. Christian, where before we were Ms. Sinner, and that's what salvation is all about. Now, when Paul speaks of faith at the end of Romans 3, that is what he's describing. Now we come to the fourth chapter and to understand this fourth chapter, you have to understand that what he's going to do now is prove his doctrine from the Old Testament.

You see, he was writing to Jews among other people, and the Jews would say, Look, Paul, I don't care what you say. That's all very nice, but it's a new religion, and we are not committed to a new religion. We are Jews, and we base our understanding of our relationship with God upon the Old Testament. Paul speaks to these people now to say, look, that is the way everyone has ever been saved. Do you want to be saved like your forefathers? Do you want to look at Abraham?

Abraham, the great founder of the Jewish nation? First of all, the real Jews? Yes, they say that's what we want. Well, he says, let's ask the question, how was Abraham saved?

And so he goes to the Old Testament. He quotes Genesis 15:6, asking, what does the Scriptures say? And he answers, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now was that by works? No, he says, not by works, because if something is by works, it doesn't

involve imputation. That's what the word means. Somebody works for something, and you don't impute their wages to them. They just earn their wages. They deserve their wages. If you impute something to him, it's something that isn't earned. And so Abraham didn't earn his salvation, but rather he received it from God as an absolutely free gift.

He not only proves it from the case of Abraham, but in a little parenthesis, he proves it from the case of David as well. And the reason why he brings David in at this point is that he's doing two things. He's talking about imputation in two senses. On the one hand, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, and we receive it by faith. And on the other hand, the sin that we have accumulated is imputed to Jesus Christ, and that happens by faith as well. So it's a double exchange. Jesus dies for our sin, and we receive his righteousness. Now, David testifies to the one blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him. Because, of course, it has been put to the ledger of Jesus Christ, and he has died for it. That's the one hand.

And on the other hand, speaking of Abraham, blessed is the man to whom God imputes Christ's righteousness, which is what Genesis 15:6 is all about. Now he deals with two objections here, and I want you to see those as well. One is the objection that although that may be true for Abraham, it is not true for us today. The Jew speaking now, but rather the way in which we are saved today is by our union with Abraham through this right of circumcision. Or, as a matter of fact, that you would say, isn't it perhaps also true that Abraham was saved by circumcision? You say of Abraham, the righteousness of God was imputed to him because of his faith. But after all, God did tell him to be circumcised, and he obeyed God.

That may not be the works of the law in the fullest extent, the way we practice them today, but nevertheless, it was something that God told him to do, and he did it. How can you say in a situation like that, that Abraham was not saved by his works, at least in part? And Paul does a very interesting thing here. He argues temporally. He asked the question, when was it according to the story of Abraham that we find in Genesis that Abraham was circumcised? Well, you go back to Genesis to find out, and you discover that the point at which God gave the right of circumcision and Abraham and all his household were circumcised. That is described in Genesis chapter 17.

Now, Paul, ask if that's when Abraham was circumcised, let me ask the second question, when was Abraham declared to be justified? And the answer again, if you look at the text that he's quoted is that Abraham was declared to be a justified man in Genesis 15 in verse six. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now he said, look, just think about that in terms of the historical sequence. Abraham was declared justified by God in chapter 15. But it's not until chapter 17 that he is circumcised. Now, obviously, if he's already justified years before the circumcision, whatever circumcision means, it's not the basis upon which he was justified because he was already justified before he was circumcised.

What is circumcision then? A circumcision is a sign of what had already happened. It's a seal of what already happened. Those are the words he uses, but it's not the basis of the justification itself. And the same thing is true today in some way, by baptism, nobody is saved by baptism today. But baptism, just like circumcision, is a sign and a seal of the reality. The faith is to come first and then the sacrament. Well, Jew would say, what about the law? Every Jew knew that the

law was important. Isn't it true that we are saved by keeping the law? That, of course, is what Paul has been arguing about. And in verse 13 and following, he deals with that also, in the case of Abraham.

You see the way he does it here is interesting. In the previous paragraph, he's talking about circumcision in terms of this historical sequence. Abraham was first justified. Then circumcision was given, so obviously circumcision was not the basis of the justification. Now he could do exactly the same thing in talking about the law, couldn't he? Because the law came much later in the same time of Moses. And as a matter of fact, in the book of Galatians, this is exactly what he does in the third chapter of Galatians verse 17, he says the law came 450 years later. So since it came 450 years later, Abraham was not justified by the law because he couldn't be justified by something that didn't even exist in his day.

Paul could give that kind of an argument here. It's a good argument. He's already given that same kind of argument with circumcision, but as a matter of fact, he doesn't do it. And what he talks about here is something different. It's not so much when the law was given in verse 13 and following as what the law does, he says, you want to be justified by law, all right. The law requires that you keep it. What happens if you don't? The law itself gives the answer. The law pronounces a curse upon all who fail to keep it. The law, verse 15 brings wrath. So if you want to live by law unless you're able to keep it perfectly in all respects, it brings a judgment upon you and the wrath of God. Paul says, you can't have it both ways.

Either you have to live by law and experience what the law says, or you have to repudiate law as a way of salvation and live by the grace of God displayed in Jesus Christ and that's received by faith. So having dealt with the arguments, he now begins to talk about Abraham's faith and what he introduces in the latter half of this is a great argument from the case of Abraham. The very last verse is talking about the incident that involves the birth of his son. But to put it in context, you really have to go back to the beginning. You know, in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, there's a discussion of the faith of Abraham, and it says four times over in regard to Abraham by faith, Abraham did something.

Now, all of the other heroes of the faith that are introduced in that chapter are also introduced the same way by faith, Abel, by faith, Noah by faith and so on. When I guess to Abraham, it does it four times. And those four repetitions really give you a history of the growth of this great Jewish patriarch's relationship to God. The first time is when God came to Abraham when he was still in Ur of the Chaldeans. And it says There by faith, Abraham left and went out into a land that he didn't know of. God had just promised that he would bless him and so he believed God and went. Now that corresponds very much to the way we begin the Christian life.

Abraham was what we would call young in the faith at that time. He didn't have a great deal of experience of God, and God had not even revealed himself to him in an extremely gateway. God simply said, Abraham, I am calling you and I'm sending you into a new land. I'm going to do something entirely different with your life than you ever imagined prior to my call. That's what God does when he first calls us to faith in Jesus Christ. And that's what Jesus Christ talked about.

He said, You're going to be my disciple. You have to turn your back on your path. You have to die to your old life. I'm going to give you a better life, a new life.

But you don't know in advance all that it's going to be. All I call you to do is leave the past and follow me. And so Abraham, with that kind of definition of faith that I talked about earlier, understood what God was asking, responded to it on the heart level and made his commitment. And so he said to his entourage, God has spoken to me. He's called me to go into a new land, and I'm going to go. And so he set off. And that's what you and I have to do at the beginning of the Christian life. Now the second time that's mentioned in Hebrews is in terms of his staying in the land even when the going got tough. He did have troubles in those days. There was famine.

On a couple of occasions, he left the land of promise, and they were down to Egypt, which God had not told him to do. And he got into trouble. He wasn't perfect in his obedience. But he came back. God brought him back. And not only was there famine. That kind of difficulty, natural disasters. There were also manmade disasters, because on one occasion, five kings of far area of the world, far to the east of where he was, attacked the cities of the plain, carried off Lot, his nephew and families, and Abraham went after them, pursued them, attacked them by night in a surprise move, recovered the people and the spoils. But then was subjected to the possibility of retaliation from these Kings that were certainly far more powerful than he was.

And that's at the point in Genesis 15, where God comes to him and says, Fear not, Abraham, for I'm your shield, and you're exceeding great reward. He was to be Abraham's shield against any kind of revenge or retaliation. So during this period of Abraham's life, Abraham lived in the land.

And as we would say, he hung in there in spite of the difficulties. I'm convinced that a lot of the Christian life is like that. It's simply hanging in there, because that's where you really see the metal of Christianity. The world gives up. The world says, Well, you know, this isn't being satisfying to me. And maybe I can find something better if I do something else. The Christian hangs in there in the tough places.

And that's what Abraham did. That is a real growth of faith. It's not spectacular, but it's nevertheless a real growth of faith. And it leads to this great pinnacle of faith that we find mentioned by Paul here at the very end of the chapter. Now this is concerning the birth of his son. In order to understand the story in its fullness, you have to understand that before the birth of the son, Abraham was not known as Abraham, but he had a name that was actually slightly different. His name was Abram, and Abram mean father of many. And God had promised him many children, but for many, long years of his life, he had no children at all. Matter of fact, he was 75 years old when he left Haran, and he had gotten to be 86 years old without any children.

Now that would be a problem. Anybody who wanted children. It was certainly a problem to Abraham spiritually because God had said that he was going to send the Messiah through his line. And so all of his hopes of a deliverer were tied up with that line and the continuation of it through a son. But in addition, it must have been a great embarrassment to him in terms of the people he was dealing with in that day. Names were significant in that day. They can even be significant today. If somebody has a funny name, they get a lot of jokes about their name. But in that day names were significant. And Abraham was an important person. He traded in the great caravan routes of the east, from Hebron, and all these caravans would pass through. And

whenever they pass through, naturally, the people who led the caravans would pay their respects to Abraham, the father of the oasis, and they would ask, is, it would be polite to do in the east, Oh patriarch of the oasis, what is your name?

Abram would say, my name is Abram. Oh, Abram, I know what that means. That means father of many. How many children do you have? And Abram would have to say again and again, I have no children at all now, probably the owners of the caravans would be too polite, but the servants would find that to be hilarious. There'd be all kinds of jokes about it. There was one person who didn't find it hilarious, and that was Sarah, Abram's wife, because the question would be raised. You see, whose problem was it? Was it Abram? Was he impotent? Couldn't he engender a child, or was it Sarah? Was she infertile? Unable to conceive a child?

I think you have to read the psychology of the narrative because the point came in their relationship when Sarah, who probably wanted to settle the question once for all, said Abram, look, I have a servant girl here. Her name is Hagar. Why don't you take her and see if you can raise up an heir by her? That was permissible under the laws of the day. And the child that would be born if a child would be born would become the legal daughter of Abram and Sarah. But nevertheless it would be from Hagar, and Abram listened to his wife. He shouldn't have, but he did it on this occasion. He went to Hagar and they had a child. And the child was Ishmael.

Now, Ishmael was born when he was 86 years old, and when everything we can read in the story was a natural conception and a natural birth. And Abram was very proud. I don't know how many children you men are going to have or how old you are going to be when you have your

last. But if you are able to engender a child when you're 86 years old, that is really something. My hat off to you. That was the case with Abram. And now when those traitors came and they said, Abram, how many children do you have? He would say, Well, I only have one son, but you ought to see my son. Ishmael boy, is he good? And besides that, I had him when I was 86 years old. How about that?

And although it would still be a bit of an embarrassment, one son when you have a name that means father of many. Nevertheless, it was something he could live with. Well, the years went by. Ishmael began to grow. He was 13 years old. And when he was 13 years old, when Abram was 99 years old, God came to Abram and he said to him, Now, Abram, I haven't forgotten my promise to you, you're going to have a son. And Abram, when he heard God say that said, oh, I have a son. Ishmael. God said, I don't mean Ishmael. Oh, Abram said, I'm satisfied with Ishmael. The actual words there in the text say all that Ishmael might live before you. What he means is take Ishmael. Let Ishmael be the son of the promise. And God said to Abram, No, not going to be, Ishmael. It's going to be the son I promised. You didn't have to get me out of a fix.

I was quite able of giving you and Sarah a son. And that's what I intend to do. But said, Abram, look, I'm 99 years old. I can't engender a child. 99. And besides that, Sarah is unable to conceive a child. Her womb is dead. And God said, no. Nevertheless, that's what I'm going to do. I keep my promises. Furthermore, God said is a sign of the fact that I'm going to keep my promise. I'm going to change your name. Your name is Abram, and I'm going to change it to Abraham. That's where Abraham got the name by which we know him by today. Now, I don't know what happened, but I assume Abraham announced it. To change a name was important. To have a

name was significant, but to change it. Ah, and to change it when God told you to change it. Well, that's not something you hide under a bushel. He would have had to have announced it.

And I can imagine the setting. He would have gotten everybody together. He would have said, standing up by the campfire at night after dinner. I have an announcement to make. Oh, yes, everybody get quiet. They had great respect for Abraham. I have an announcement to make. And the announcement is this God appeared to me last night and God told me that I am to change my name and way in the back. You see, the servants must have started laughing. They must have said, no wonder he's going to change his name. Abram father of many. All those years was 86 years of age before he finally had a son. He had one son Ishmael. Wow. He's 99 years old. I wonder what he's going to change it to.

Maybe he's going to change his name to [inaudible] father of one. But instead of that, Abram says, I'm going to change my name to Abraham. Now that's an intensification of the first name. It's hard to capture that real easily in English. But if the first means father of many, the second really means something like father of a great multitude, father of nations you see, instead of just father of a couple of people. I guess at that time probably everybody laughed. They must have said to themselves, look at 99 years old, this old man, this crazy old man is beginning to get ideas. But it wasn't crazy from God's point of view. And Abraham had learned to see things from God's point of view.

And that is why here in the New Testament in the fourth chapter of Romans, where Paul sums it all up, he says, against all hope that is humanly speaking, Abraham in hope that is divine hope

believed. And so he became the father of many nations. Just as it had been said to him. The father of many nations, he became Abraham. God had called him Abraham. Now he actually became Abraham because he believed God who said to him, So shall your offspring be. And so without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead. Since he was about 100 years old, he knew that he wasn't blind to the facts. He knew that Sarah's womb was also dead.

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. That's where faith comes to you see. After a lifetime of living with God, what you learn is that God does what he has promised and he can always be counted to do that. You and I will say to ourselves at times all, but I wonder if he can in my circumstances. For those who are in strong in faith know that that's exactly what he did. I want to conclude by giving you one illustration from Paul's own writings from the book of Philippians and from the third chapter. This is Paul's own testimony, and the reason I go to this chapter is that I don't want you to think, having studied Romans 1 through 4, that what Paul is recommending to somebody else is something that he had not experienced himself.

There are several places in the New Testament where Paul gives his testimony. In Acts, for example, the testimony of his conversion is given at least three times in different ways. And that is what I would call an historical testimony is what most of us do today. If you're asked to give a testimony today, most people will say, Well, I grew up in a non-Christian family, and I had heard a few religious things, but I really didn't believe or know anything. And then a friend began to

witness to me, and I began to read a few books, and he took me to a church. And that's the way we tell our testimony today. And Paul does that as well.

But what we have here in Philippians is not an historical testimony but a theological testimony. What he's telling here is what happened to him in terms of his thinking and his trust. And what he says, you have to understand he's using an image here. He's talking about gains and loss. Verse seven, whatever was to my prophet, that is a gain and now considered loss for the sake of Jesus Christ. What he's talking about here is an image in which he says something like this. He said, like in my life, I had something like a balance sheet. I looked at religion like a businessman would look at his business. There was a great big line down the center of my life.

And on one side of that line, I had the word assets. And on the other side of that line, I had the word liabilities. And I thought the way you got to heaven was by getting more in the column of assets than you had in the column of liabilities. And that's just what people think today. Almost everybody thinks that today if they even think about heaven. Well you get to heaven is by being good, you say to them, Well, don't you do bad things? Yes, but I do more good things. So that's what they mean. They try to get a lot of assets to balance off the liabilities. Now Paul says, that's the way I thought. And if you had asked me in those days, what are your assets? I would have said, Well, I have as many assets as it's possible for a person to have. And he begins to list them.

I was circumcised on the 8th day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. In other words, he's saying, I have my Jewish heritage. There are four different things. I was a pure-blooded Jew. I was circumcised the sign of the covenant. I was from Israel.

Israel is a covenant name for the people of God. It was the tribe of Benjamin, one of the faithful tribes that remained with Judah in the south at the time of the Civil War. I had all of that going for me. That's my background. But now, in addition to the things I inherited, all of which are important, I had the things which I earned for myself. I became a Pharisee. Nobody had to be a Pharisee.

It was the strictest sector of the Jews. But I chose that. Secondly, I was zealous as a Pharisee. I didn't just join the club and sit in the back. I was up in the front benches working for the cause. If you don't believe I was zealous, you ask the church, I was persecuting them, putting them in jail, killing some. I was there at the death of Stephen. And as for legalistic righteousness, that is observing the law, the way we Pharisees understood it, I was faultless. I did absolutely everything I knew to do. So if somebody had said to me at that point, Paul, are you going to get to heaven? I would have said to them, if anybody is going to get to heaven, I, Paul, I'm going to get there because I have done everything that is possible for a person to do. But then he says, you see, something happened. And what happened is that I met Jesus Christ.

Verse seven. But I was on my way to Damascus, and Jesus Christ appeared to me in His glory. And for the first time in my life, I understood what real righteousness was. You see, up to that point, I've been comparing myself with other people, and I've been saying, Well, I'm better than them, so I must be righteous. Now, I saw Jesus Christ in His glory, and I understood that my righteousnesses were not righteousness at all. They were his filthy rags. I was just utterly vile in the presence of that righteousness. That's the first thing I understood. The second thing I came to understand that he really is who he claimed to be.

I had been thinking of him as an impostor, somebody who had been teaching a false religion when he said that he was God. But I discovered that he was. He is God. He is the Lord. And if that is true, then everything he said was true. And when he said that he was going to die for me on the cross in order that I might be saved, that was true. And if there's salvation to be found anywhere, it's to be found in Jesus. So he said something happened in my life, which was a Copernican revolution. I had had this long list of assets, and I had, well, maybe a few liabilities, but it's really the assets I trusted. What happened when I saw Jesus Christ in His glory is that I realized these things weren't assets. Not only didn't they add up to perfect righteousness, nothing I did would ever add up to that glory. But they weren't even assets.

For this reason, they were actually keeping me from trusting Christ. I was trusting those things. So even though righteousness is good in itself, you want to be as good as you can be. And that's what you're trusting. It's actually a bad good thing, because it's keeping me from salvation. So I did the only thing I could do. I took that whole column of assets and I moved them over into the column of liabilities you see. What things I had counted profit, I now considered loss. Why? For the sake of Jesus Christ. And what I wrote into the column of assets was this. Jesus Christ alone and that's salvation. That's the message of Romans 1 through 4.

We have it in a hymn. We say nothing in my hands I bring. Simply did I cross I cling. Naked? Come to thee for dress helpless. Look to thee for grace foul. I did the fountain fly wash me, Savior, or I die. Rock of Ages cleft for me. Let me hide myself in thee.

Boice: Romans Living By Faith

That's what Christianity is all about and those who believe it are transformed and become agents of transformation in the world. Let us pray. Our father, we thank you for these great teachings from the Book of Romans, and we ask you to bless them to our hearts. Thank you for those who have come and have participated in these studies and these days. Do bless them and bless all who have taken part in the Torrey conference this week. Granted, it might be significant in many, many lives for the sake of those individuals and for the sake of those they will influence in the world over the years to come. And we give you all the glory through Jesus Christ, our Lord Amen.