

CHIEF EDITOR:
Sean P. Cavender

EDITOR / DESIGNER:
William J. Stewart



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A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS:

Thank you for subscribing to GROW magazine. We hope you benefited from our inaugural issue in July and are now excited to share issue #2 with you. If for some reason you did not have access to issue #1 (we did have some technical difficulties), you can find the content in the July 2017 archive of our website.

We have a good group of writers this quarter who have penned an excellent set of articles. We're thankful for their participation in this project. Our desire is to provide material that will dig into the meat of God's word and help us all to GROW in faith. This is not a "preacher's magazine" – it is a publication by Christians for Christians, with a view towards building faith. If you deem the content helpful, you are free and encouraged to forward GROW magazine to others. You can 1) pass on the notification email sent out each quarter; 2) post the website or individual articles from it on social media; 3) print out individual articles (from the bottom of each page); or 4) print out or share the quarterly PDF from the site which includes all the articles in a single document.

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,
Sean P. Cavender
William J. Stewart

Justified Like Abraham

SEAN P. CAVENDER | BALD KNOB, ARKANSAS

Paul's epistle to the church at Rome declares God's salvation and the extent of His grace. Justification is by grace through faith for all men. Paul's primary example for how God justifies men by grace through faith is Abraham.

To understand Romans 4, it is best to see how it relates to the opening chapters of the epistle. The first three chapters of Romans prove all men have sinned (Romans 3:9, 23), all are worthy of death (Romans 1:32), and there is no defense or appeal that might rationalize our sin (Romans 3:19). All are guilty of sin and all need God's amazing grace.

God is just and the justifier (Romans 3:26) – He is just in condemning sin, but He is also the source of salvation and liberty. God provides the way for sinners to be justified from guilt, saved from wrath, and forgiven of sins. The blood of Jesus Christ is the means whereby God saves sinners (Romans 3:22, 24-25). The death of Christ, where His blood was shed, is a demonstration of God's righteousness (Romans 3:22; 1:18). God in His sovereign authority has declared how sinners can be saved: by faith in His Son. Therefore, those who believe in Christ and His atoning blood may have their sins forgiven.

One major objection Paul anticipated from his readers was the Jews' confidence in the Law (Romans 3:19-21). However, the law of Moses could not save and gave no reason to boast (Romans 3:27-28). As a writer, Paul moves his audience from perceiving God's work as a system of works to a law of faith. The law and system of faith which Paul defends is actually a fulfillment of the Law (Romans 3:31). The Law was a witness and testified to salvation by grace through faith (Romans 1:17; Habakkuk 2:4).



1 via Amanda Kline | Freemages.com

Paul turns to the example of Abraham (Romans 4:1-4). By going to the Old Testament, and particularly the book of Genesis (authored by Moses), Paul is demonstrating the purpose, usefulness, and weakness of the Law while establishing the law of faith. By examining the life of Abraham, Paul strips his opponents, the Judaizing teachers, of their arguments. Paul appealed to the father of the Jews (Romans 4:1) to demonstrate how he was justified by faith, not by works (Romans 4:2-3).

However, the usefulness of Abraham's example cannot be overlooked. Not only was Abraham the ideal example to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. Abraham was justified while uncircumcised (Romans 4:10), qualifying him as an example for Gentiles. God justifies all, Jew or Gentile, whoever believes in Jesus Christ.

RIGHTEOUSNESS WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM

“For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Now to the one who works, his wage

is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness," (Romans 4:3-5, NASB).

Paul began his defence of justification by faith with Genesis 15:6, which declares Abraham a righteous man because of his belief in God. His faith was counted to him as righteousness. The word imputed, or counted, means to be accredited; it is a banking term. Since Abraham believed, God accounted Abraham as righteous.

This credit placed on Abraham's account was not due to anything Abraham had worked for himself or earned. He did not work as one who was due his wages. He believed God, so faith was accounted to Abraham apart from works (Romans 4:4-5).

Many people struggle with Paul's argument in Romans 4. Adherents to the doctrine of salvation by faith alone have mishandled this text, and many Christians struggle with the text as a result. The concept of works has troubled and shaken some people's faith. Many try to define the word "works" in this passage to mean "something you do," or some kind of spiritual activity. As genuine believers, we ought to understand our salvation was not earned; we did not work to achieve our salvation. Salvation is by God's grace – we must not be shy from understanding grace, nor from declaring it openly. However, it is essential we examine the context of Romans 4 to understand how Paul is using the word "works."

Paul is defending justification by grace, proving salvation is by faith without respect to the deeds of the law of Moses. The apostle went on to contend that boasting was excluded because a person is saved by faith, apart from the works of the law (Romans 3:27-28), "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).

Abraham was not justified by his flesh, since he was uncircumcised when he was declared righteous (Genesis 15; Romans 4:1-2, 10). It was not by works of the law since the law of Moses came 400+ years later. For the Judaizing teachers who demanded Gentiles observe circumcision and the law of Moses, Paul's argument is deafening – Abraham was not saved by the flesh; he was not justified by keeping the law. He was justified by faith!

Seeing Abraham's faith demonstrated, God blessed Abraham and declared him righteous (Romans 4:3). The Lord no longer held sin against Abraham's account, but made him righteous (Romans 4:7-8). Righteousness was imputed to Abraham through God's forgiveness. The forgiveness of sins is an act of God; it is a demonstration of His mercy and grace.

Salvation and forgiveness of sins are the result of God's grace and man's faith.

WALK IN THE STEPS OF ABRAHAM

The blessing of forgiveness, justification, and salvation are not only for those who are circumcised, but for all men (Romans 4:9-11). Abraham became the father, not of the Jews only, but also of the uncircumcised Gentiles. For those who follow in the steps of father Abraham, justification by faith may be applied.

Bear in mind, Paul is writing to saints in Rome. They were saved, believing in Christ as the Son of God. The Roman epistle exhorted these believers to a more perfect understanding of the gospel, and encouraged them in the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). Paul exhorts the believer to "*follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham*" (Romans 4:12) He wants us to follow the example of Abraham's life!

Abraham lived a life of obedience – "*By **faith** Abraham **obeyed** when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going*" (Hebrews 11:8, ESV). Abraham was not a first-time believer in Genesis 15; it represents a step in the growth

of his faith, but he had demonstrated faith prior to this.

The Hebrew writer refers to Abraham leaving his home by faith (Genesis 11:27-32; 12:1-6). He built an altar and worshiped God (Genesis 12:8; 13:18). He believed God's word and the promise of an heir (Genesis 15:6). He was circumcised when God commanded it (Genesis 17). Abraham's faith became so great, he eventually offered the son of promise on the altar in Genesis 22. Abraham grew in his faith and trust in God's grace. He walked in obedience, humbly submitting to God.

Romans 4 is a passage which affirms salvation by God's grace. It also defends justification by faith. The quality of Abraham's faith (and by extension, what our faith should be) was not an inactive, trust-only, mental acknowledgment. Justifying faith is an obedient faith. Belief trusts in God's promises and acts in harmony with God's will. This is evident from Abraham's life – he trusted in God and acted accordingly.

Consider the nature of Abraham's obedience. It was genuine, not ritualistic; it was devoted, not half-hearted; it was a decision, not merely a habit. Gospel preachers have long and rightly affirmed what Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). True love for God is evidenced by our compliance with God's word. Some hearers may have wrongly assumed obedience by rote and ritual would be satisfactory to God, or God must accept it. Others may have wrongly judged we need less preaching on obedience and more preaching on grace, or trusting God. Both extremes have missed the point! We must have a faith that obeys. Biblical obedience must be genuine, devoted, godly, and make a conscientious decision. Abraham believed God, obeyed God (even in the difficult times), and was justified by his faith.

BELIEVERS WALK LIKE ABRAHAM

Justification begins with faith in God, but it embodies so much more. It calls for true



2 Sweet Publishing / FreeBibleImages.org

faithfulness, a concerted effort to live in the service of God and His Son. Having faith in God is not about a single moment in time, but is a comprehensive way of life; involving faithful duty and service to God throughout our lifetime.

After we are baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3-4), we are raised to walk in newness of life. It is a genuine believe in Christ which results in the penitent sinner submitting to baptism in water for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Only then may we enjoy the blessings of justification, salvation, and righteousness. Those who have not been buried in the waters of baptism remain unjustified and dead in sins.

"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14, NASB)

The children of God are to be led by the Spirit and continually walk by the Spirit of God. We are led by the Spirit when we actively walk by the law of the Spirit (Romans 8:2) and determine not to fulfill the desires of the flesh (Romans 8:12-13). Having the mind of the Spirit will cause us to submit to the law of God (Romans 8:6-8).

THE LEGACY OF ABRAHAM

Abraham left an amazing legacy of trusting in God and believing in the power of His grace. Emulating Abraham's life must be one of the ways the Scriptures give us hope and exhortation (Romans 15:4). However, the

promise of God through Abraham's Seed that all nations might be blessed – that Seed, was and is Jesus Christ. Just as Abraham believed in God's promise of sending a Savior, we must believe in Jesus Christ. He died and was raised from the dead for our justification. We must have the faith of Abraham – and when we do, we can have the assurance of salvation, just as it was "credited to him [Abraham] as righteousness."

"Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:23-25).

** All passages quoted from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.*

A Church's Profile: Antioch

SEAN CAVENDER | BALD KNOB, ARKANSAS

The idea of profiling is sometimes met with resistance and controversy, and yet it takes place all the time. We may examine the behaviors, opinions, statements, and dress of a person and arrive at some conclusions based upon our keen observation. Sometimes we are right; other times we are wrong.

In the Bible, several examples have been preserved for us. We can read and understand what people did, why they did it, and the results of their choices. In other words, we profile them. And in doing so, we are able to accurately understand the kind of character they had. This is true for both individuals and groups of people.

For congregations of God's people, it would be wise to closely examine the character of New Testament churches. If we understand what early local churches did then we will learn from their examples. We'll learn what we ought to do, or what we ought not do. Perhaps the most effective local church we can read of in the pages of the New Testament was the church in Antioch of Syria.

THEY PREACHED TO THOSE WHO NEEDED THE GOSPEL

After the death of Stephen and the persecution from Saul of Tarsus, the Jerusalem church was dispersed (Acts 8:1-4). However, the dispersion did not silence the preaching of the gospel. Instead, it carried the gospel to places it had not yet been. However, a problem became evidence, "those who were scattered" were "speaking the word to no one except the Jews" (Acts 11:19).

Then some of the dispersed Christians who arrived in Antioch began to do something that had never been done by any local church – they preached to the Hellenists (Acts 11:20). Hellenists were Jews who had adopted Gentile



3 via Gerd Altmann | Pixabay.com

practices, like speaking the Greek language. The Lord blessed them in this work and "a great number believed and turned unto the Lord" (Acts 11:21).

When we abandon our prejudices and simply allow the word of God to be proclaimed, then the truth will be effective. The first century Christians were limiting the scope of the gospel to those that were just like them: people with the same ethnicity, members of the same socio-economic class, or those of the same race. These are still the issues that limit the work of local churches today.

What would happen if we abandon prejudice and just go out preaching the gospel to anyone who will hear us? Would the hand of the Lord be with us? Would many turn to the Lord? The gospel is designed to unify all people by faith in Jesus Christ. The distinctions that divide people in the world should not be found among God's people (Galatians 3:28).

The church in Antioch made its mission to further the gospel throughout the world. They sent Paul and Barnabas on a preaching trip (Acts 13:1-3; 14:26-28). The apostle Paul continued to preach the gospel on subsequent trips, being sent by the disciples in Antioch

(Acts 18:22). This church understood the importance of going into all the world and preaching the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15).

Antioch's dedication to spreading the gospel is a great example for us. In Acts 19:20 the Scripture states, "so mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed." This dedicated group of Christians in Antioch had a mighty impact upon the expansion of the Lord's kingdom. Just consider what you can do in your local town!

THEY SENT RELIEF TO NEEDY BRETHREN

The church in Antioch, being filled with both Jews and Gentiles, heard of the needy disciples in Jerusalem and helped them (Acts 11:27-30). They gave as they were able and in proportion to their income (Acts 11:29; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2). They gave cheerfully and out of brotherly love; they were not forced nor compelled to provide for these brethren (cf. 2 Corinthians 9:7).

Churches should be concerned about the welfare of Christians in other areas. It is our duty to look after physical needs (not luxuries) during times of hardship (Romans 15:27). When disasters (flood, famine, fire, etc.) affect faithful brethren, local churches should be willing to help. Motivated by love and compassion, we should see that needs are met.

When we share with one another, help one another, and give to those in need, it reinforces our bond of fellowship. We are made "partakers" of one another (Romans 15:27). The church in its infancy exemplified this (Acts 2:41-47). Churches should not be stingy with their money, but should be eager to help Christians as they have opportunity and ability.

THEY DEVELOPED TEACHERS FOR THEMSELVES

The church in Antioch was not solely dependent upon the apostle Paul. In fact, Paul and Barnabas were gone from Antioch often, whether delivering collected funds to minister to needy saints in Jerusalem, or preaching the gospel in other areas on preaching trips. Acts

13:1 mentions only five men in the church at Antioch, including Paul and Barnabas. The three who remained in Antioch were capable teachers, committed to doing the work of Christ (Acts 13:1).

Churches need to urge their members to develop as teachers and preachers. The outcome will benefit the kingdom of God. When churches are committed to developing the talents of their members, responsibilities can be shared among several, and opportunities to employ those who are capable of teaching will be available.

Many churches fall into the trap of depending upon the preacher to do everything. Some expect the preacher to teach the Sunday morning Bible class, a Wednesday night class, preach two sermons on Sunday, make gospel meeting flyers, pass those flyers out, design visitor cards, fix the leaky water fountain, study in his office all week, have Bible studies with non-Christians, etc.. Just imagine what churches might expect of a great preacher and teacher like the apostle Paul, if he were present today! He might be expected to do all this and much more!

God's plan for the church has always involved shared responsibilities. Each local church is to have a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23). The work of the church is not the sole responsibility of the preacher. The Lord expects every member to do their part, which will cause growth and edification in the body (Ephesians 4:16). Some may dedicate their lives to preaching the gospel, but no one person can (or should be expected to) perform all the functions of the local church.

How many men are available in most churches today? Probably at least three! The church at Antioch functioned adequately and efficiently without Paul and Barnabas there. Many modern churches could take a lesson from the church in Antioch. Men need to step up, take initiative, study, learn and grow in knowledge. They need to develop themselves so they may teach. However, men will not do this unless congregations encourage, admonish, and challenge them to do so. Churches should

provide opportunities for men to grow and learn.

The pulpit at Antioch was not exclusively for Paul and Barnabas. They shared it with others who were capable of preaching and teaching (Acts 15:35). Just imagine the possibilities and opportunities if churches had three, four or five men capable of preaching and teaching God's word.

CONCLUSION

The church in Antioch leaves a grand example for churches today. Their example of faith,

commitment, growth and diligence is something the church of the 21st century should strive to follow. If more churches were like Antioch, just think what we could accomplish as we share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

** All passages quoted from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.*

The Difference Between Service & Worship

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

There is a growing movement in the religious world to broaden what is commonly identified as worship. Rather than it being limited to specific activities, many are embracing the idea that worship is a lifestyle; that every moment of our existence is to be an occasion of worship. It is certainly true that we are to always be in service to God, but service and worship are not synonymous. There is an important distinction to be made.

WORSHIP AS A LIFESTYLE?

The desire to worship the Lord is most commendable. Karl Barth, a twentieth century Protestant theologian wrote, *“Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can taken place in human life.”*¹ For the Christian, worship is a primary concern and activity of life. However, those who are of the “lifestyle worship” persuasion affirm that worship is not confined by time, place, or practice, but can be and is in all that we do.

One writer has stated, *“Worship is a lifestyle not an event.”*² Again, we read that worship *“...is not what we do, but who we are and what we are about, it is (or should be) our life ... Worship is the day to day relationship that we have with Christ.”*³ Singer and song writer, Michael W. Smith says of worship, *“Do it unto the Lord in everything you do ... your job, your friends, the guy at the Quick Stop, the guy at the little market you go to, whatever and wherever. It is the way you treat people. All of that is worship to me. Experiencing God’s creation.”*⁴

DEFINING WORSHIP

When people use words without really knowing what they mean, problems will come. The word baptism is an example of this. Most people in the religious world would agree with Collins



⁴ via Eli Monjaras | Unsplash.com

Dictionary, which says baptism involves *“...immersing the individual in water or by pouring or sprinkling water on the individual...”*⁵ Our English word comes from the Greek root *bapto*, which is defined as *“to whelm, i.e. cover wholly with fluid..”*⁶ Sprinkling a bit of water over someone’s head is no more baptism than water dripping from a faucet constitutes washing the dishes.

The Urban Dictionary, which is useful to see how people are using words today, gives the following as the top definition for worship: *“Surrendering to God. Humbling yourself for Him, so that He can change you and bring you closer to him.”*⁷ Absolutely, we must surrender to God and humble ourselves, we need to be changed and come closer to Him. But, here’s the problem – none of that is worship. This describes important aspects of the Christian life, but it is not a good description of worship.

The most common word for worship in the New Testament is the Greek *proskuneo*. Thayer defines it as *“...kneeling or prostration to do homage (to one) or make obeisance, whether in order to express respect or to make supplication.”*⁸ A careful consideration of

occurrences of the word in the New Testament will reveal it as a specific event (whether public or private) with specific actions (prayer, singing, praise), and coming from a specific posture (bowing, whether literally or figuratively). The idea of worship as a lifestyle is foreign to the New Testament.

THE BIBLE DISTINGUISHES BETWEEN SERVICE AND WORSHIP

All robins are birds, but not all birds are robins. All canoes are boats, but not all boats are canoes. All sandals are shoes, but not all shoes are sandals. The same is true about worship and service. All worship is service to God, but not all service to God is worship. The Bible makes a recognizable distinction.

In John 4, the Samaritan woman was not asking Jesus whether one should live on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem. Her inquiry was about where one ought to go to worship God. Under the Old Covenant, there was an appointed place for God's people to go to worship – Jerusalem; but that did not mean they had to live there. They could live wherever they pleased, but for the appointed feasts, they were to go to Jerusalem to worship God. That's exactly what the Ethiopian eunuch did, then he went home again to Ethiopia (Acts 8:27-28).

Consider Daniel and his friends. They served Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Daniel 1:3-7, 19), but they would not worship him nor his gods (Daniel 3:12-18). Nebuchadnezzar was not satisfied with their faithful service, he wanted them to worship, but they would not. Daniel and his friends understood the difference between service and worship; serving the pagan king was acceptable, worshiping him or his gods was not. Service and worship are not synonymous. They could serve Nebuchadnezzar, but they would not worship him.

I suspect part of the confusion about the biblical distinction between service and worship lies with some of the translations people are using. Consider Romans 12:1 from some of the most popular versions:

- “...*present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship*” (NASB)
- “...*present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship*” (ESV)
- “...*offering your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship*” (NIV)

These translations make it sound as though living a holy and righteous life is worship. It is not. This text doesn't have *proskuneo*, which we mentioned already as the most common Greek word translated as worship in the New Testament. The word here is *latreia*, which appears just 5 times in the New Testament, and is rendered “service” every time in the ASV, KJV, and NKJV. Thus, the NKJV reads, “...*present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*” Before going to the cross, Jesus warned the apostles, “...*the time is coming that whoever kills you will think he offers God service*” (John 16:2). Jesus used the same Greek word as appears in Romans 12:1. Surely the Jewish leaders didn't consider putting men to death a form of worship, but rather believed they were serving God in doing so (Deuteronomy 13:1-11; Acts 6:13-14; 7:57-58). They would certainly have differentiated this “service” from their worship.

A centurion described to Jesus the manner of service which he received from those who were under his command. He stated, “*I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it*” (Matthew 8:9). So is the nature of our service to the Lord. As the Lord speaks, so we do (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46). This faithful obedience is not worship, but is our “reasonable service” to God of heaven.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

So, why does this matter? First, it is important for us to understand what God's word says. We need to understand the message of Scripture. We need to be able to distinguish

between truth and error. If we are going to serve God faithfully, we cannot be moved by the doctrines and innovations of man.

One of the inevitable side effects of the “lifestyle worship” opinion is the significance of worship assemblies is diminished. If everything you do is worship to God, then does it really matter whether you assemble for worship with other Christians or not? If you are there, you’ll be worshiping God, but if not, that’s OK, you’ll still be worshiping. If day to day life is worship, then the assembly is irrelevant. Service is not worship. The church (Greek, ekklesia, a.k.a. assembly) is essential. Corporate worship is exemplified and commanded throughout the Bible. We need to live a life that glorifies God, but we must also be gathering together with God’s people for worship.

I will close with a word about private worship. We need to be careful not to limit our worship to 3 or 4 hours of assembly time with the Lord’s people each week. We ought to habitually set time aside to worship the Lord privately (Matthew 6:6). Recall, Jesus made it a habit to worship the Lord individually in the mountains (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12; John

6:15). May we take advantage of every opportunity, public or private, to worship the Lord.

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** All passages quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.*

Walking In The Steps Of Faithful Abraham

SHANE CARRINGTON | SULPHUR SPRINGS, TEXAS

The richness and depth of Romans 4 takes us through the sweeping ages from Abraham's faith to our own. As we encounter the patriarch we learn more about the portrait faith God intends our lives to reflect. Consider some practical teaching God wants us to produce in daily life.

REFLECTING ON ABRAHAM'S FAITH

When we reflect upon this patriarch, there are two things about his faith and three promises that stand out. These things serve as a backdrop to his honored place in Romans 4. As to his faith, he left his home for God. Period. No looking back. Lot, his nephew, made a poor choice of homes and lost much as a result. Lot looked to his own convenience and earthly prosperity in choosing a home. Abraham left a familiar place, moved hundreds of miles away from comfortable surroundings and family because he trusted God. Lot's choice, like many modern Americans, was driven by worldly comfort and potential earthly success. Abraham's choice, our model for faithfulness, was driven by trust in God's unseen promises. May we emulate Abraham.

Also concerning his faith, Abraham was also willing to sacrifice his promised son to God. Can you imagine? Many today struggle to say "no" to their children concerning anything they desire. Abraham trusted God's instructions, taking Isaac to the altar, considering *"that God is able to raise people even from the dead"* (Hebrews 11:19). The blissful eternity is by putting Him above them. May we emulate Abraham.

As to the three promises God made to Abraham (promise of a great nation, a land, and the Seed [Jesus], Genesis 12:1-3), these promises are connected to his faith and ours. He received these promises because of his faith (Romans 4:13-22). We receive the



5 via Ruth Lindsay | Pixabay.com

blessing of salvation, which these promises helped accomplish, through faith in Jesus (Romans 4:23-25).

God chose Abraham due to his faith. We receive God's blessing in Jesus through faith as well, for Abraham is *"the father of circumcision to those who not only are the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised"* (Romans 4:12). May we emulate Abraham.

GOD'S GLORIOUS GRACE

"For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace" (Romans 4:16a).

God manifested His glorious grace to, and through, father Abraham, blessing the patriarch, his family, and us. God promised Abraham his descendants would become a great nation (Romans 4:18) and inherit Canaan land. He anticipated the fulfillment of the promises; ancient Israel rejoiced in them.

Those promises would lead to the promise of Christ and humanity's hope in Him. Therefore, Abraham is the *"heir of the world"* (Romans 4:13) and *"the father of us all"* (Romans 4:16), whether Jew or Gentile. Our opportunity to be included in God's ancient promise of Messiah

is a gracious blessing God worked centuries to bring to fruition.

The promise of Jesus' coming finds expression in a particular phrase concerning Abraham: *"that he might be the father of all who believe.."* (Romans 4:11). Abraham's true family consists not just of some physically circumcised people (that is, physical Israelites), but *"all who believe without being circumcised"*: all people with true faith in Christ, whether Israelite or Gentile. Abraham is *"the father of us all"* (Romans 4:16) – *"a father of many nations"* (Romans 4:17). What a gracious blessing to be among that number!

God provided His glorious grace through Abraham's Seed, Jesus. Abraham's faith was *"credited to him as righteousness"* (Romans 4:22). Yet, through Jesus we are given access to the following:

"Now not for his [Abraham's, sc] sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification,"
(Romans 4:23-25).

Since Abraham's faith was *"credited to him as righteousness,"* ours will be as well. Why? Because Jesus fulfilled the promise God made Abraham (*"In your Seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,"* Genesis 22:18) – both, dying to deal with our transgressions and arising to make possible our justification – He allows us access to this life-changing and eternity-altering faith.

God's glorious grace has appeared providing salvation from sin, transformation into the image of Christ, and ultimate hope. What a blessed gift God supplied in His Son. What a blessing to participate in God's magnificent grace! Abraham cleaved to God's glorious grace. May we emulate Abraham.

WALKING, GROWING, GLORIFYING

Abraham *"walked with God"* (Romans 4:12), *"did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith"* (Romans 4:20), *"giving glory to God"* (Romans 4:20).

His walking, growing and glorifying models faith's true nature. Abraham's lifestyle of loyalty – faith/faithfulness – affected his attitude, strengthened him as God's servant, and led him to great hope. Mere mental assent has no such results. God spoke to him, he listened, left, learned, and increased in faith. Abraham glorified God through loyalty to Him.

Of what did Abraham's walk consist? Taking one step at a time. We want to cross all our bridges before arriving at them; we foster frustration and despair at potential obstacles while still at great distance. Abraham trusted God and walked, not knowing where God was leading. He walked because he trusted the One who led him. Thus, Abraham progressed, glorifying God along the way.

Many of us struggle, attempting to walk by sight rather than faith. Abraham glorified God, walking by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). He was *"fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform"* (Romans 4:21). Our assurance and ability to glorify God does not come through understanding exactly how God will work through every detail of our lives. Like Abraham, our assurance and ability to glorify Him comes through confidence in Him, heeding His instructions, and submission to His holy will. He will lead us through ups and downs, but He will lead us where He wants us, eventually leading us home. Abraham trusted this, walked, grew, and glorified God. May we emulate Abraham.

CONCLUSION

God called Abraham to leave his home and gave him promises. A few hundred years later, God fulfilled the great nation and land promises to his posterity, Israel. Two thousand years after God made the Seed promise Jesus finally arrived. God did not reveal His timetable to

Abraham; God does not reveal His timetable to us.

May we emulate Abraham. Trust in God, put one foot in front of the other, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus, glorifying God through godly living, and anticipate with joy the hope of going home. Abraham *“was looking for the city which has foundations,*

whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10), *“fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform”* (Romans 4:21). So are we. Find assurance in Him and be strengthened, knowing God’s work in father Abraham.

** All passages quoted from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.*

Evangelizing In The 21st Century

KEN McDANIEL | SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

Did someone say, “the times they are a-changin’?” Yes, and he immortalized the phrase in a 1964 folk song that captured the sentiment of a nation undergoing radical transformation. The times were changing then and they have not stopped yet. Sadly, the revolution of “moral freedom” begun by that generation has culminated in a society that has little knowledge of God and is seemingly indifferent, leery of Christianity and “organized religion.” This is vividly illustrated by the fact that only 20% of Americans can be found in “church” on Sunday morning and between 8,000-10,000 churches a year are closing their doors.¹

How does this impact our evangelistic work? How do we approach people who seem to have little interest in what we have to share?

First, realize **all is not as bad as it seems**. Though people are leaving old, traditional denominations, or avoiding them from the start, it does not mean these people cannot be reached. Gone are the days that any church could survive simply because they offered worship services. The societal pressure to be a “church-going Christian” no longer exists. Thus, people are not going to attend church services merely because of a sense of guilt. To attract and retain worshipers today, a church must be “alive.” There must be a genuineness to their worship and an apparent love in their hearts. Also, the sermon must be well prepared and a message delivered that explains the Bible, drawing the hearer closer to God. It must evidence genuineness and love on the part of the speaker. The point is, people do not feel pressure to go to church. If they attend, it is because they are seeking God and the first thing they are going to try to determine is if the church they have visited is able to help.

Secondly, effectiveness in leading people to God means we must possess these same general characteristics ourselves. **It is obvious**



6 via Milt Ritter | Pixabay.com

that people today are cautious and skeptical and rightly so. Society has not seen true Christianity. Their exposure has been to countless denominations manifesting division, competition, and often carnal appeal—from religious leaders lording their misplaced authority over congregations, to so-called Christians attending church on Sunday and “living like the devil through the week,” to fake miracle workers, snake handlers, date-setters, and the list goes on. If all I had ever been exposed to were these miserable imitations of Christianity, I would want no part of it either and would be skeptical of those associated with it. So, we must look inside; we must make sure we are nurturing holiness and purity – not as a façade, but with a conscience toward God (1 Timothy 1:5). We must make sure we truly love those around us (Luke 10:25-37; Romans 12:9). We must make sure we truly love, honor, and reverence our God (John 14:21-24; Hebrews 12:28). Equally important, we must be humbly confident in our faith, ready to give a kind and caring answer for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Still, how do we reach out to those around us with the gospel of Christ? What are the most effective ways to appeal to them? First, any decent, honorable, and Scriptural way of approaching people is better than silence and inactivity. **Since people have grown cautious**

and skeptical, credibility is at a premium.

Now, more than ever, we should expect to have little impact upon total strangers (though in Springfield, Illinois, we are receiving many visitors from our Facebook, Meetup, and door to door work). The credibility we need and should desire comes from genuine godly living (Titus 2:9). I have seen this over and over through the years: someone comes to services, a small group Bible study, or agrees to a visit, because they trust the person inviting them (consider Acts 10:2,24). The more we are respected for our quiet, godly lives, the more impact we will have.

Realizing this, we provide our members at Springfield with regular opportunities to invite their acquaintances. During the week, we have two small group Bible studies where we try to address topics of interest to the community. We also plan, advertise, and provide professionally designed invite cards for “Special Topic Sundays.” Again, our goal is to present a lesson that will pique the interest of those invited. To determine this, we have even gone out into the community doing surveys. We soon plan to initiate an ongoing survey where we have the community choose the topic for one of our sermons each month (with follow-up being crucial). Ultimately, nothing will take the place of personal interaction and study. Develop relationships — go for coffee together, invite them to dinner, a cookout, game night, or so on. Carefully, but unashamedly, insert spiritual comments. Answer questions when they arise. Provide information to help: tracts, lessons, articles, and probably most effective now, web links. Should the relationship and interest develop

well, ask for a study; and be prepared to take them from where they are in their knowledge to where they need to be.

Yet, don’t be afraid to invite strangers. We do it every week. We use invite cards the size of business cards, and we hand them out with a smile and an invite everywhere. People do come; not often from those invites, but occasionally they do come.

Finally, brethren, **we cannot afford to misread the times.** Many, it seems, having surveyed the spiritual landscape, have given up before they even started. That is a mistake! The reality may be that fewer people are interested, more are skeptical, and some difficult to approach. However, if those who are seeking God are looking for a church that is “alive,” where the people are genuine, where they love one another, a place where there is community, and where the preaching helps them learn the Bible and come to know God, then it should be our time to “shine.” Let us make sure we are what we should be, the congregation is what it is supposed to be, and let us reach out with the saving gospel of Christ. Those who have ears to hear will hear.

1. churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/164787-thom-rainer-13-issues-churches-2013.html

** All passages quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.*

Distractions

JOHN MADDOCKS | TORONTO, ONTARIO

I was born in 1962. I grew up in a time when there were no cell phones, personal computers, gaming systems, nor DVD players. Yes, we had TV, but those were the days before cable TV and Netflix, so viewing options were very limited. My family did not have a colour TV until I was 9 or 10 years old. Now, you can watch whatever show or movie you want, any time you want, and you can even do that on your smartphone. If you have a research paper due, just turn on your computer and Google whatever subject it is that you are studying and you will find a world of information at your finger tips. If you want to play a game, there are any number of gaming systems available, and if you don't have one, then you can play on your PC or your smartphone. The technological world has advanced in amazing ways in the 55 years since I was born.

This growth has resulted in some tremendous benefits for mankind. For example, many amazing web sites have been developed and by these efforts the gospel has been shared with people in all the countries of the world, even places where Christians are severely persecuted. With the Internet, many have received an education, including the ability to audit classes from some of the world's greatest universities. With web sites like YouTube you can learn to do almost anything, and visit places in the world you might never be able to see. By use of the Internet, you can learn a new language, learn to cook, or learn sign language – the sky is the limit.

But these technological advances have also led to great harm. Pornography is rampant and readily available, regardless of a person's age. This has caused untold harm and devastation to many lives. Terrorists use the Internet to spread their vile ideologies and recruit new adherents. They use modern technology to communicate with one another and coordinate their terrorist activities in different parts of the



7 via StockSnap | Pixabay.com

world. And if bullying wasn't bad enough in person, cyber-bullying is criminal. Just as the sky is the limit when it comes to technology's benefits, abuse of technology can plummet and devastate.

So, what's the point of all this? In one word: distraction. With the advent of things like cell phones, PCs, gaming systems, and DVD players, the distractions available to us have multiplied exponentially. Sadly, the more some have become distracted by such things, the more their spiritual lives have suffered. Maybe you see yourself suffering as a result of these distractions. I know I have.

In Matthew 22 Jesus is being questioned by a lawyer. In verse 35-38, we read:

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.'

Distractions are nothing new. Yes, they have evolved over the course of time, but they have always been around. To love our God the way

Jesus reminded us we should, we must seek to remove distractions from our lives. Distractions are not in and of themselves evil. At times, we need distractions and they can be a source of great refreshment (things like vacations, hobbies, clubs, etc.). However, when distractions become our focus in life, we are in trouble. When much of our free time is spent gaming, hobbying, and vacationing, we set ourselves up for spiritual failure.

Distractions are a problem, no matter what stage of life we might find ourselves in. Young, old, middle aged – none are immune from their siren call. By definition, a distraction is a thing that prevents someone from giving full attention to something else. For the Christian, it is our God who deserves our full attention. We certainly have responsibilities to our employers, employees, spouse, children, parents, siblings, and other family members. We may have other responsibilities such as school and to our friends, but even these responsibilities need to be dealt with God always in mind. The same is true when we are vacationing. We do not go on vacation from God. Vacations are not a license to do things that are contrary to God's will. If we are involved in a club or a sports team, whatever we are doing, God must always take center stage.

In Philippians 3:7-11, Paul wrote:

*But what things were gain to me,
these I have counted loss for Christ.
Yet indeed I also count all things loss
for the excellence of the knowledge
of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I
have suffered the loss of all things,
and count them as rubbish, that I*

*may gain Christ and be found in Him,
not having my own righteousness,
which is from the law, but that which
is through faith in Christ, the
righteousness which is from God
by faith; that I may know Him and
the power of His resurrection, and
the fellowship of His sufferings,
being conformed to His death, if,
by any means, I may attain to
the resurrection from the dead.*

These are not the words of a man distracted by anything. Paul was focused, just as we need to be focused, on gaining Christ. You'll remember that Paul encouraged Timothy with these words:

*Be diligent to present yourself
approved to God, a worker who
does not need to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the word of truth.
(2 Timothy 2:15)*

Timothy needed to be spending time in God's word; we all do. In order to do that effectively, he needed time free from distractions, where he could devote himself to study and meditation. Brethren, there are times we need to turn off our phones, PCs, gaming systems, DVD players, and Netflix. We need to do this in order to give time to our God, attention He deserves to receive. God is worthy of this sacrifice we offer Him. We need this undistracted time with God and His word in order to be the people of God that we know we should be.

** All passages quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.*

JANUARY 2018 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

William Stewart will focus on Jesus' role as Mediator of the New Covenant and the significant imagery used in Hebrews 9:15-23 concerning the establishment of the New Covenant.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Keith Sharp will discuss the challenges and logistics of the Lord's work in a congregation that does not have elders.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

Jeremy Woodman will consider the importance of our worship in song, and how to derive the greatest benefit from such.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

Sean Cavender will use Hebrews 9:14 to focus on our calling in Christ Jesus to serve God.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

John Hains will urge us to make our lives and use our homes as opportunities to share the gospel in our community.

BEYOND THE BASICS

John Hines will encourage us to increase in our understanding of God's word, to dig deeper into the Scriptures.



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