

**THE ULTIMATE “SOMETHING FOR NOTHING”
ALDERWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH
Romans 4:1-15**

BIG IDEA: ABRAHAM IS THE QUINTESSENTIAL¹ PROOF OF THE FAITH PUDDING.

MEETING ABRAHAM:

1. *So important a role does he occupy in God's world-purpose, that his life and its lessons occupy third place in the New Testament, his name occurring no fewer than seventy-four times.²*
2. Friend of God:
 - **2 Chronicles 20:7** [in Jehoshaphat's prayer for military help] *O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?*
 - **Isaiah 41:8** *But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend.*
 - **James 2:23** *And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.*
3. **Joshua 24:2-3** *Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.'³ But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants.*

THE STEPS OF PAUL'S ARGUMENT:

1. THE BOOK OF GENESIS **AFFIRMS** ABRAHAM'S FAITH-RIGHTEOUSNESS
 - **Verse 3**, *What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*
 - Cf. **Genesis 15:4-6** *Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."⁶ **Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.**
 - This is the first explicit reference to Abraham's faith in God's promise to him.
 - **Previous editions** of the promise:
 - **Genesis 12:7** *The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*
 - **Genesis 13:14-16** *The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west."¹⁵ All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.¹⁶ I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.*
 - **Genesis 15:4-6 [SEE ABOVE]**
 - **Later editions:**
 - **Genesis 17:2-8** *I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him,⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."*
 - **Genesis 22:15-18 [sacrifice if Isaac incident]** *The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time¹⁶ and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,¹⁷ I will surely bless you**

¹ "Quintessence": (2) *The most perfect embodiment of something* (per Random House Webster's, 1995)

² J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Manpower* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965/1970), 13-14.

and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies,¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

- **The confirmation of the Covenant: The Cutting of the Covenant.**

- **Genesis 15:8-21** But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"⁹ So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.¹² As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a **deep sleep**, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.¹³ Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated **four hundred years**.¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will **come out** with great possessions.¹⁵ You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.¹⁶ In the **fourth generation** your descendants will come back here, for the **sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure**."¹⁷ When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a **smoking firepot with a blazing torch** appeared and passed between the pieces.¹⁸ On that day **the LORD made a covenant** with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates--¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites,²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites,²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

- **Cast in the form of ancient Near Eastern royal land-grant treaties.**³
- **Verse 17, Smoking firepot with a blazing torch: Symbolizing the presence of God.**
- **"May it be so done to me if I do not keep my oath and pledge."**
- **Verse 18, the LORD made a covenant**—Lit., "cut a covenant."
- **Note the unilateral, unconditionally of this covenant.**
 - **God made the covenant—not Abraham.**
 - **God walked the corridor—Abram was asleep.**

2. WORKPLACE VOCABULARY **SUPPORTS** ABRAHAM'S FAITH-RIGHTEOUSNESS

- Syllogism:
 - **Work** results in **wages**, which is an **obligation**.
 - **Faith** results in **righteousness**, which is a **gift**.
- **Verses 4-5,**⁴ Now when a man **works, his wages** are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.⁵ However, to the man who does not work but **trusts God** who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

3. DAVID **RESONATES** WITH ABRAHAM'S FAITH-RIGHTEOUSNESS

- **Verses 6-8, David** says the **same thing** when he speaks **of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:**⁷ "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."
- **Quoting from Psalm 32:1-2, Psalm 32:1-2** Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.² Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.
 - NOTE: Psalm 32 may possibly a companion Psalm to Psalm 51, regarding David's sin with Bathsheba and Uriah.

4. CIRCUMCISION DOES **NOT NEGATE** ABRAHAM'S FAITH-RIGHTEOUSNESS

- Verses 9-12, Is this blessedness only for the **circumcised**, or also for the **uncircumcised**? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.¹⁰ Under what **circumstances** was it credited? Was it **after** he was circumcised, **or before**? It was not after, but before!¹¹ And he received the sign of **circumcision, a seal** [MORRIS: a seal as a sign of attestation] 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.¹² And he is **also the father of the circumcised** who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the **footsteps of the faith** that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

³ NIV Study Bible

- Circumcision was initiated by God when Abraham was **99 years old** (see Genesis 17:24)
 - The set-up: **Genesis 17:9-11** *Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.*
 - The application of the "wideness" in **Galatians 3:6-8** *Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." ⁷ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. ⁸ The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."*
 - NOTE FROM MORRIS: Circumcision was not exclusively a Jewish practice. It was also practiced among the Egyptians, most of the ancient Semites, and the people adjacent to Israel except of the Philistines...it was the circumcision given by God as a sign that mattered.⁴
5. OLD TESTAMENT LAW ITALICIZES **THE NEED** FOR ABRAHAM'S FAITH-RIGHTEOUSNESS
- **Verse 13,** ¹³ *It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.*
 - Abraham lived 430 years before Moses and the Law (Galatians 3:17).
 - Law logically is antithetical to faith.
 - Law supplies the NEED but not the MEANS of salvation.
 - The Jews believed that faith was necessary for righteousness, but they viewed "faith" as a work, i.e., they defined faith as the keeping of the Law.
 - Darrel J. Doughty says, "the meaning of *pistis* ["pistis"="faith"] was well-determined by its place of central significance within Jewish religion. Traditionally *pistis* referred to the recognition of the one true God and to obedience to the will of God as expressed in his commandments..."⁵
 - Morris quotes Jewish scholar H J. Schoeps' objection to Paul's position: "...this new tearing asunder of polarities, this absolute opposition between faith, on the one hand, and the law, on the other, quite contrary to the continuous meaning of the Biblical narrative, has always been unintelligible to the Jewish thinker."⁶
 - **Verse 14-15,** *For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,¹⁵ because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.*
 - law brings wrath—Morris cites Hodge, *Hodge sees this as working out in two ways: (a) our imperfect obedience brings the law's curse on us, and (b) law "excites and exasperates the evil passions of the heart".⁷ In other words, ...law shows up our inadequacies and makes us see our need of a Savior.⁸*
 - And where there is no law there is no transgression.—Morris: *If there is no transgression, there is no need for salvation. Law shows us where we stand, but it does not save us.⁹*

HEARTWARMING INSIGHTS:

1. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH PROMOTES HUMILITY

- A. **Philip Yancey** picked up the story of a most unusual wedding banquet from the Boston Globe.
- Accompanied by her fiancé, a woman went to the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston and ordered the meal for her reception. The two of them pored over the menu, made selections of china and silver, and pointed to pictures of the flower arrangements they liked. They both had expensive taste, and the bill came to \$13,000. After leaving a check for half that*

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 202

⁵ Morris, 194.

⁶ Morris, 194.

⁷ Morris, 206.

⁸ Morris, 206.

⁹ Morris, 207.

amount as down payment, the couple went home to flip through books of wedding announcements.

The day the announcements were supposed to hit the mailbox, the potential groom got cold feet. 'I'm just not sure,' he said. 'It's a big commitment. Let's think about this a little longer.'

When his angry fiancée returned to the Hyatt to cancel the banquet, the events manager could not have been more understanding. 'The same thing happened to me, Honey,' she said, and told the story of her own broken engagement. But about the refund, she had bad news. 'The contract is binding. You're entitled to \$1,300 back. You have two options: to forfeit the rest of the down payment or go ahead with the banquet. I'm sorry. Really, I am.'

It seemed crazy, but the more the jilted bride thought about it, the more she liked the idea of going ahead with the party - not a wedding banquet, mind you, but a big blowout. Ten years before, this same woman had been living in a homeless shelter. She had got back on her feet, found a good job, and set aside a sizable nest egg. Now she had the wild notion of using her savings to treat the down-and-outs of Boston to a night on the town.

And so it was that in June of 1990 the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston hosted a party such as it had never seen before. The hostess changed the menu to boneless chicken - 'in honor of the groom,' she said - and sent invitations to rescue missions and homeless shelters. That warm summer night, people who were used to peeling halfgnawed pizza off the cardboard dined instead on chicken cordon bleu. Hyatt waiters in tuxedos served hors d'oeuvres to senior citizens leaning on aluminum walkers. Bag ladies, vagrants, and addicts took one night off from the hard life on the sidewalks outside and instead sipped champagne, ate chocolate wedding cake, and danced to big-band melodies late into the night. (Philip Yancey, "What's So Amazing About Grace?" *Christianity Today*, October 6, 1997, p.54-55)

- B. The Bible says that God's going to throw a big wedding banquet—And He's going to the streets for guests, too!

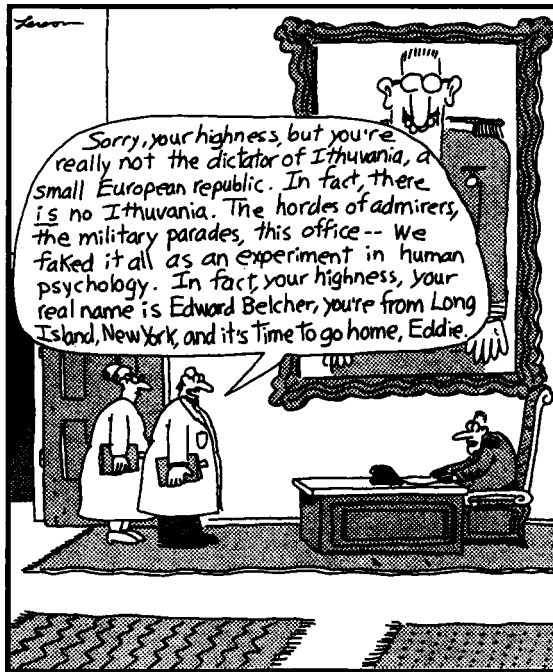
Cf. Jesus Parable: **Luke 14:16-24** ¹⁶ Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' ¹⁸ "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' ¹⁹ "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' ²⁰ "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' ²¹ "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' ²² "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' ²³ "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

Would you like to know how to be there someday? The Bible says you can! But the Bible also says that terms of the invitation are very specific. A lot of people who think they're going to be there, aren't going to make it. On the other hand, a lot of people whom we might think don't deserve to be there, are going to be dancing on the streets of gold.

- C. When it comes to God and His Heaven, we're all bag-ladies and vagrants, folks. We don't deserve to go to Heaven. When it comes to credentials to impress God, we're all destitute beggars.
- D. **Romans 4:1-5**, *What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? 2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-but not before God. 3 What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' 4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an*

obligation. 5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

- E. Now, from my perspective, **Abraham had a lot to his credit.**
- He heard the voice of God when most people in the world weren't even listening. Give him a good mark for **spiritual sensitivity.**
 - He left family, friends and job to follow God on a great adventure. Credit him with great **courage and self-sacrifice.**
 - He confessed the one true God when everybody else was bowing before idols. Abraham gets straight **"A's" in theology.**
 - Read about Abraham in the pages of Genesis and be impressed with a man of integrity, generosity, boldness and a stunning record of obedience to God. Surely this man was **paving his own path to Heaven.** Surely Abraham had something to crow about!
- F. Not so, says the Bible. At Heaven's admission gate, all Abraham's good works weren't worth a nickel. He was a *bag-lady vagrant*, too. He did nothing to make God obligated to him; nothing to force God's hand to turn the knob. He had nothing to boast about.
- **Jeremiah 9:23-24** *This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.*
 - **2 Corinthians 10:17-18** *But, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*
- G. Here's where most people make the greatest blunder of their lives. They think that they can do something themselves to earn their way to Heaven. They think they're actually doing pretty well. They look around, give themselves a pat on the back and, murmur, "*Congratulations, soul. You're not doing half-bad, certainly better than most, especially in comparison to some of those jerks that work on the third floor.*"
- H. But it's all an illusion, like this fellow in one of Gary Larson's Far Side creations:



- I. In place of the illusion of **human** sufficiency, the Bible **keeps pounding on grace**. That we get to Heaven not by trying to earn it, but by believing that God has paid our admission, by simply accepting the gift.
- J. All other world religions are illusory:
- Hinduism
 - Shintoism
 - Islam
 - Judaism
 - Mormonism
 - Jehovah's Witnesses
 - Buddhism
 - New Agism
 - Roman Catholicism
 - And a 100 other isms around the world.
- K. All those religious systems teach that you must DO to be saved. Biblical Christianity ALONE teaches that it is already DONE via Christ.
- L. *C. S. Lewis walked into a room where religious experts were discussing what was unique about Christianity. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace." (Young, Op. Cit, 53)*

II. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH PROMOTES JOY.

- A. The arrogant are never the joyful. The Pharisees certainly weren't. But, by human reckoning, they should have been deliriously happy, because they were so good. If any class of people ever thought that they were making it to Heaven through self effort, it was them.
- They made a spectacle of doing their prayers on street corners.
 - They had servants blow trumpets to call attention so people could watch them give money to God's temple.
 - They ostracized Gentiles,
 - looked down on the common Jews and
 - despised women as not even having a soul.
 - They were the separated, holy ones.
- B. But you will search the Gospels in vain for any reference to joy in a Pharisee. Instead, you will find jealousy, greed, anger, hypocrisy, manipulation and posturing, and finally fear and confusion.
- C. But people who know they are saved by the grace-gift of God have a joy about which the rest of humanity doesn't have a clue. That's what **verses 6-8** are talking about:
- 6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:*
- 7 "**Blessed** are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*
- 8 **Blessed** is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."*
- "Blessedness" in the Bible is a word that means "**happy**" or "**joyful**."
 - It is the emotion felt by the prodigal son who slinks home, broken and ashamed, only to be hugged by his forgiving father, wrapped in a fine robe, bedecked with an expensive ring and feted at a glorious welcoming home banquet.
 - It is expressed in the tears of the forgiven prostitute who cried on the feet of Jesus and washed them with her hair.
 - It is in the story of David, eaten within by the cancer of adultery and murder. What could David do? He couldn't undo his immorality. He couldn't unmake the illegitimate child. He couldn't bring Uriah back from the dead. He couldn't erase the secret knowledge lodged in the memory of his General Joab.
 - Do you hear any joy in this famous poem???
 - **W. E. Henley in his poem, I n v i c t u s.**

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my **unconquerable** soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloodied, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

- Or, you can take David's recommendation and accept God's solution for sinners.
 - You can freely have what you can't earn, what you can't even create in your own heart.
 - You can have release.
 - You can have forgiveness.
 - You can have the dirtiness of your most embarrassing sins covered by the blanketing blood of Christ.

III. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH PROVIDES SECURITY

- A. Law is **performance-based** and there is no security there.
1. *13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.
14 For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,
15 because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.*
 2. But notice the toxicity of Law: "law brings wrath" (v. 15)
 3. Perhaps no one ever pictured the **terror of being under Law** more vividly than 18th century New England preacher, **Jonathan Edwards**. His sermon text was **Deuteronomy 32:35**, "**Their foot shall slide in due time**" and his title was "Sinners in the Hands of Angry God," the most famous sermon in American history. Listen to what the worshippers in Northhampton heard that 1741 Sunday morning:
*"O sinner, consider the fearful danger you are in! It is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath that you are held over in the **hand** of that God whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it and ready even moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment."*
 4. Preaching like that blasted through the spiritual complacency of the early colonists and Edwards found himself in the middle of the remarkable spiritual revival that swept **through** New England called the Great Awakening." People were gripped by the enormity of their sin and cast their souls on the grace of

- God for salvation.
5. Wherever there is law, there is the breaking of law (**verse 15, "transgression"**). And the breaking of the law brings **punishment**.
 - So, if you insist in trying to earn your way to Heaven, you must try to keep the law.
 - But you can't, and you get caught by God, and you are under His holy wrath against sinners.
 - And if you don't escape the demands of the Law you will never make it to Heaven.
 - In fact, the only place to which you can earn your way is Hell, the one destiny we all deserve, "*the wages of sin is death*" (**Romans 6:23**)
 6. Unpacking "performance-based" scenarios
 - Your personnel file at work. You have your periodic reviews and a report goes in your file. It's all performance-based. It will be the basis of promotions, raises, retention.
 - You earn first-chair violin in the orchestra. But you can be challenged by the second-chair. If second-chair out-performs you, you move down and surrender your seat.
- B. Grace is **Promise-based** and there is bombproof security there
1. You might think in verse 13 when it speaks of Abraham and his offspring receiving the promise, that it is talking just about his son Isaac and his children and so on. Well, they are included, but the family God is talking about here is much wider than Semitic bloodlines; it is a faith family made up of any people who accept God's promise of salvation **through** Jesus Christ:

16 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.
 2. God promised Abraham the land of Palestine, and that he would have a son and become the father of a great nation (that's Israel) and that through him "**all the peoples on earth will be blessed...**" (**Genesis 12:3**)
 3. How did we all get blessed by Abraham? Because it was through **his lineage** that Messiah Jesus was born, Jesus in whom all the promises of God became operative.
 4. **Through** the broad landscape of all human history runs a great **divide, a watershed of destiny**.
 - It is Jesus Christ.
 - On one slope is Heaven and on the other Hell.
 - What will you do with Jesus?
 - Will you believe the promise of God and accept His salvation purchased by Jesus dying on the Cross?
 5. **John 3:16-18**, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*
 - There is promise or there is peril.
 - There is eternal life or there is eternal death.
 - There is Heaven or there is Hell.
 - There is forgiveness or there is wrath.
 - There is justification or there is condemnation.

CONCLUSION:

Hebrews 11:8-12 *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith Abraham, even though he was past age-- and Sarah herself was barren-- was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.*

Timothy G. Walton
November 23, 2008