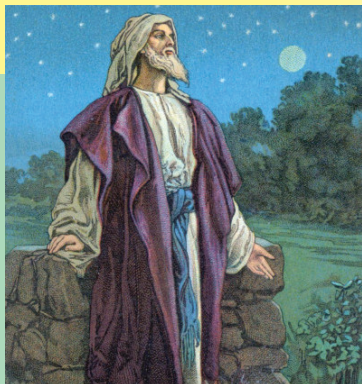


A FORTIORI ARGUMENT OF ROMANS 4:3



Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). For what does the Scripture say? “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3).

OVERVIEW: (1) a promise of blessing in this life is made to Abraham by God, (2) Abraham has faith in God's promise, (3) God credits righteousness to Abraham's bank account in heaven, and (4) Abraham will enjoy in the next life (millennial kingdom and new earth) the credit (rewards) given by God for his righteous acts of faith in this life

PROMISE OF MANY DESCENDANTS IN GENESIS 15:5–6 AND ROMANS 4:3: The promise of many descendants to Abraham in Genesis 15:6 is a promised gift, not a command to work. Abraham believed this promise and God credited righteousness to his heavenly bank account. Righteousness is probably metonymy for rewards; that is, faith is the right response to all of God's promises—no matter how impossible they may seem. The word “account” implies some kind of money or property added to a ledger and laid up for the future. This money, treasure, or property is a gift (not payment) for believing improbable promises; that is, promises that require a lot of faith in God's character (such as his veracity and omnipotence). Similarly, the gift for believing the gospel is eternal life—the greatest gift of all (2 Cor 9:15). *Principle:* God gives gifts for believing his promises and we will enjoy them forever!

RIGHTEOUS ACTS OF FAITH AND RIGHTEOUS DEEDS: We must distinguish between righteous acts of faith (Rom 4:3, 5) and righteous deeds or works (Titus 3:5; 1 John 3:12). Both are rewarded by God. Righteousness was credited to Abraham's eternal bank account for believing an implausible promise, a promise of countless descendants like the stars in the sky when as yet he had none (Gen 15:2–3) and a barren wife (compare 11:30 with 15:4 and Heb 11:11–12)—a promise he would not see fulfilled in his lifetime (Heb 11:13).

BANK ACCOUNT IN HEAVEN: To what is righteousness credited? To our bank account in heaven (Phil. 4:17). This account (*logos*) is where heavenly treasure is recorded—a ledger or written record (*logos*) of how rich you are toward God. Believing a salvation promise is probably recorded in the Book of Life (Psa 69:28; Rev 20:15); believing non-soteriological promises and doing good works are probably recorded in the Books of Works (Neh. 13:14; Rev. 20:12–13). There are at least six columns for entries in the ledgers called the Books of Works: (1) the date, (2) an itemization of the good works foreordained for each person by God (cf. Eph. 2:10), (3) a checklist for work accomplished (and opportunity lost), (4) a record of every non-salvation promise believed, (5) suffering endured (Psa 56:8), and (6) the amount awarded for each promise believed and each good work performed. It's a running tally of all the promises believed and work done for the Lord and is the basis for receiving rewards at the judgments of the righteous. *Principle:* God gives gifts for believing his promises (Rom 4:3–5; 6:23; Eph 2:8–9) and payment for work performed in his service (Rom 4:4; 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Tim 6:18). Both may be classified as rewards—rewards for faith and rewards for service or good works.

RIGHTEOUSNESS IS METONYMY IN WHICH THE CAUSE IS PUT FOR THE EFFECT; THAT IS, RIGHTEOUSNESS IS PUT FOR GIFTS OR REWARDS GIVEN BY GOD FOR RIGHTEOUS ACTS OF FAITH: The many descendants promised in Genesis 15:6 are a gift from God and not something Abraham had to work for. God can promise gifts to us or command work from us. No work is required to receive promised gifts, but faith is required—even a lot of faith if receiving the promised gift seems unlikely or humanly impossible (as in Gen 15:6). Now, as we have seen, God credits righteousness (probably some kind of gift or reward) to our heavenly account for believing improbable promises of future gifts—an eternal reward for having great faith and trusting him. In other words, you get a double blessing for believing God's promises: you get the promised gift in this life (descendants for Abraham) and righteousness (probably metonymy of the cause for a future reward) credited to your bank account in heaven for the next life (as in the case of Abraham).

ARGUMENTUM A FORTIORI, A MINORE AD MAIUS: The promised gift of eternal life by believing in the work of Christ is the hardest promise to believe (Matt 7:13–14; Mark 10:23–26; Luke 13:23–24; 1 Cor 1:23), and is rewarded the most—with the imputation (by divine decree) of God's righteousness to us (positional righteousness). It's hard to believe simple faith provides acquittal and forgiveness for the blatantly guilty. Other seemingly improbable promises such as Genesis 15:6 are easier to believe, and are rewarded on the same basis—the imputation or crediting of righteousness to our heavenly account as gifts (experiential righteousness). Paul's argument in Romans 4:3 is a *fortiori*, in particular, a *minore ad maius* ‘from lesser to greater’: if righteousness is credited to our account for believing easier promises, how much more will righteousness be credited to our account for believing harder soteriological promises?

POSITIONAL, EXPERIENTIAL, AND ULTIMATE RIGHTEOUSNESS: Righteousness is first promised (positional truth), then performed as righteous deeds (experiential truth), and finally completed when our souls are free from sin natures and united with resurrection bodies (ultimate truth). That is, we are *declared righteous* at the moment of salvation (imputed righteousness, Rom 3:22; 2 Cor 5:21), can *live righteously* now (be righteous, 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; Titus 2:12; 1 John 3:10), and be *made righteous* in the future (perfect righteousness, 2 Tim 4:8).

LAW OF FIRST MENTION: Genesis 15:6 is the first verse in the Bible to show the relationship between faith, imputation, and righteousness. It's a general principle to be developed in the future—Paul adding soteriological implications.

PROMISE OF A SON IN GENESIS 17:15–22, 18:9–15, AND ROMANS 4:18–22: In this passage, righteousness is credited to Abraham's account for believing another promise of God. Paul again quotes Genesis 15:6 and applies it as a general principle to a later promise (at about age 100). The twice repeated promise of a son (Gen 17:15–22; 18:9–15) was very difficult to believe but “with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform” (Rom 4:20–21). Like the promise of many descendants (Gen 15:6), this promise of a son is not the moment of Abraham's salvation (imputed positional righteousness) but another crediting of righteousness (imputed experiential righteousness) in the form of gifts or rewards added to his heavenly bank account—perhaps things of value used in the next life such as gold, silver, precious stones, money, and property. In the same way we give gifts for a proper response and wages for work completed, God gives gifts for faith and wages for work.

PROMISE OF MANY DESCENDANTS IN GALATIANS 3:6: Paul again uses Genesis 15:6 as a general principle to support his argument that we have received the Holy Spirit “by hearing with faith” (Gal 3:2) and “that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (3:14). In other words, he again uses a non-soteriological verse (Gen 15:6) to prove a soteriological point through a *fortiori* logic—from the lesser to the greater. If righteousness was credited to Abraham's account for believing a hard promise, how much more will righteousness be credited to our accounts for believing “the promise of the Spirit through faith” (3:14). The indwelling Holy Spirit is received at the moment of saving faith. It's hard to believe that God himself wants to live inside our sinful bodies to perform his ministries of indwelling, helping, baptizing, leading, guiding, interceding, illuminating, and teaching the Truth.

OTHER VIEWS: It's not necessary to change the content of faith from the work of Christ on the cross to any promise of God (so C. R. Stamm, *Things That Differ*, ch. 1). Nor is it necessary to make faith in the promise of Genesis 15:6 the point of Abraham's justification or salvation (many commentators). No doubt he was saved years before. He began as an idolater (Josh 24:2, 14–15) and probably converted before his call (Gen 12:1–5; Heb 11:8–10). Was he not saved when he told Melchizedek: “I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’” (Gen 14:22–23)?