

Recalling Abraham's Faith and Righteousness

Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, we are told (Gen. 15:6). What did Abraham believe that led God to declare or "reckon" him righteous? Was it that God arranged payment for his sins? Not at all. The story makes it clear that Abraham believed God was going to give him a male baby, an heir, and through that baby a multitude of descendants who would possess the land promised to him. He trusted God, of course, but it was for things involved in his current existence.

He believed that God would interact with him now—just as those who later gathered around Jesus did.

In the face of such faith, God declared Abraham to be righteous. Does that mean he declared he would go to heaven when he died? Not precisely that, but certainly that Abraham's sins and failures would not cut him off from God in the present moment and in their ongoing relationship in life together.

But would he go to heaven when he died? Of course! What else would God do with such a person? They were friends... as we are to be friends of Jesus by immersing ourselves in his work (John 15:15). No friend of God will be in hell.

Certainly forgiveness and reconciliation are essential to any relationship where there has been offense, and also between us and God. Certainly it is Christ whom made possible such a transition, including forgiveness, through his life and death. We must be reconciled to God... if we are going to have a life together. But [it] involves far more than the forgiveness of our sins or a clearing of the ledger. And the faith and salvation of which Jesus speaks obviously is much more positive reality than mere reconciliation. The stories of Abraham and other biblical characters beautifully illustrate this.

The issue, so far as the gospel in the Gospels is concerned, is whether we are really dead to him. Do we walk in an interactive relationship with him that constitutes a new kind of life, life "from above"? As the apostle John says in his first letter, "God has given us a new kind of life, life that is in his Son. Those who have the Son have life" (1 John 5:11-12).

What must be emphasized in all of this is the difference between trusting Christ, the real person Jesus, with all that that naturally involves, versus trusting some arrangement set up through him—trusting only his role as guilt remover. To trust the real person Jesus is to have confidence in him in every dimension of our real life, to believe that he is right about a good deal of things.

The sense of irrelevance of what God is doing to what makes up our lives is the foundational law in the existence of multitudes of professing Christians today. They have been led to believe that God, for some unfathomable reason, just thinks it appropriate to transfer credit from Christ's merit account to ours, and to wipe out ours in debt, upon inspecting our mind and finding that we believe a particular theory of the atonement to be true—even if we trust everything but God in all other matters that concern us.

It is left unexplained how it is possible that one can rely on Christ for the next life without doing things that relate to Christian life".

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When all is said and done, "the gospel" [has become]... that Christ made "the arrangement" that can get us into heaven. In the Gospels, by contrast, "the gospel" is the good news of the presence and availability of life in the kingdom, now and forever, through reliance on Jesus the Anointed. This was Abraham's faith too.

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... The only description of eternal life found in the words... from Jesus is "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only real God, and Jesus the Anointed, whom you have sent" (John 17:3)... The biblical "know" always refers to an intimate, personal interactive relationship.

-Dallas Willard

1. What are your initial impressions of what Dallas Willard says?
2. Is anything particularly insightful or new? Why?
3. How does this change your perspective on ministry and evangelism?
4. Abraham became God's friend through his 25-year adventure of trusting God to provide. How does his life illustrate that we are to be friends of Jesus by involving ourselves in his work?
5. How do you respond to having an interactive personal relationship with God?