But then along comes the apostle Paul who saw something that needed to be fixed. Paul made an important discovery when he studied the story of Abraham in the book of Genesis. Paul realized that it was simply not true that Abraham was justified by works. “What does the Scripture say?” he asked in his letter to the Romans. “Abraham *believed* God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (v. 3).

Abraham was made righteous by *believing God* and not by following the law. Abraham was justified by *his faith*, not by his good works. This was a radical innovation, along the lines of a pickup truck going electric. No one saw it coming, but it revolutionized the industry. Likewise, Paul’s idea of justification by faith (not works), can revolutionize our faith. If we accept Paul’s premise, we need to choose a new kind of vehicle: A Faith-150.

**The New Faith-150.** According to Paul,our “faith is credited as righteousness” (v. 5). This is a whole new concept, much like the Ford Lightning is a whole new kind of truck. This electric truck can pull 10,000 pounds of cargo up steep hills, and it can accelerate faster than a gas truck. It is also a handy source of electric power: on a work site, a construction crew can plug into the truck to recharge cordless tools, power air compressors, and supply electricity for larger equipment. And if power goes out at home, you can use the truck to keep your lights on for up to 10 days.

Paul’s focus on faith is a world-changing idea. Paul says a person may be made righteous by believing God, not by following religious rules. Anyone and everyone can be justified, not just the people who follow the law and do good works. “It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world,” says Paul (v. 13). That was the *old* Faith-150. No, Abraham and his offspring received the promise “through the righteousness that comes by faith” (v. 13). That’s the *new* Faith-150.

This world-changing idea is available to us all. When we climb into the Faith-150, we become “Abraham’s offspring.” We do not have to be Jewish. We do not have to be circumcised or eat kosher foods. We do not have to follow every religious law perfectly to be accepted. All we need to do is show “the faith of Abraham” (v. 16).

What is this faith? Paul says that Abraham believed in “the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were” (v. 17). Abraham believed in the same God who would raise Jesus from death to new life, and who calls into existence things which seem to be impossible. In Abraham’s own life, this means that he trusted God to give him a child, even though he was advanced in years and “his body was as good as dead” (v. 19). Abraham believed in the promises of God and was “fully persuaded that God had power to do what [God] had promised” (v. 21).

Abraham had faith in the God who gives life to the dead. He trusted God. He believed in the promises of God and in God’s power to fulfill those promises. Because of this, Abraham’s faith was “credited to him as righteousness” (v. 22). That is a powerful faith! Stronger than the charge in a Ford Lightning.

**Martin Luther Test Drives the Faith-150.** So, what does it mean for us to move forward with the kind of faithfulness that makes us right with God and gives us the power to do God’s work in the world. For starters, we believe in the God who gives life to the dead, the God seen most clearly in Jesus Christ. The Protestant Reformer Martin Luther made Paul’s insight the center of his theology, one that asserted we are saved by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus. Luther wanted to be a good and righteous person, so he confessed his sins frequently, often daily, and for as long as six hours at a time. But after confessing his sins, he would leave the church and remember other sins that he needed to confess. He tried the path of good works and discovered that he could never be good enough or do enough to save himself.

Then Luther read the line in Paul’s letter to the Romans that says, “the righteous will live by faith” (1:17). Luther realized that he was not made righteous by his good efforts, but only by his faith in Jesus Christ. “I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise,” said Luther. “This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.”

On a personal level, Luther felt reborn by this insight into the power of faith. He felt touched by the God “who gives life to the dead” (4:17). But on a historical level, the Protestant Reformation began when Luther made this discovery about faith. “If you have true faith that Christ is your Savior,” Luther said, “then at once you have a gracious God, [and] you should see pure grace and overflowing love.” This inspired Luther to go out and preach the gospel, a word which means “good news,” because he saw that the gospel was “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (1:16).

After we jump into a Faith-150 and trust Christ to be our Savior, we make every effort to support God’s work in the world. As Luther said, “Good works do not make a [person] good, but a good [person] does good works.” Luther elaborated: “Faith is a living, bold trust in God’s grace, so certain of God’s favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God’s grace makes you happy, joyful, and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures. The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith. Because of it, you freely, willingly, and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace. Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire!”

Good works are naturally going to flow out of a person who is saved through their faith in Jesus. Having faith in Jesus does not give anyone permission to sit back and refrain from doing good. Think of the Ford Lightning truck. Its electric engine makes it a truly innovative vehicle, one that can power a house during blackouts; but even though it is based on a world changing idea, the Ford Lightning still must carry tools, building supplies, mulch, and manure. If it did not tow heavy cargo up hills, it would not be a pickup truck.

Same for a Christian whose “faith is credited as righteousness” (4:5). Our faith in Jesus makes us right with God, and this assurance challenges us to show each other the same compassion and justice and mercy God shows to us. The heavy lifting of the Christian life involves feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, welcoming strangers, and visiting people in prison. If we did not do these good works, we would not be recognizable as disciples of Jesus. Everyone should, of course, feel free to choose the brand of pickup truck that is best for them; but when it comes to following Jesus, you cannot beat a Faith-150.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that like Abraham I have been justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, my God, and my Savior. Thank You that I am accepted in Christ and have been declared righteous - not because of what I have done, but because of trusting in what Christ did on the Cross for me. May my life become a living testimony to the truth of the glorious gospel of Christ to everyone I meet, and may all I do, be done to the glory of God. In Jesus' name I pray, and for His greater glory, Amen.

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**Faith-150**

Sunday, March 5, 2022 [Romans 4:1-5, 13-17](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+4%3a1-5%2c+13-17&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

One of the best-selling vehicles in America for the past 45 years is a pickup truck: The Ford F-150, to be precise. About one million new trucks hit the road each year. According to *Motor and Wheels* website, the F-150 is popular because it has an all-aluminum body, an available 10-speed automatic transmission, and a turbocharged engine. The truck has great fuel efficiency and incredible hauling capacity. The website says that it is “a symbol of American tenacity, grit, and honest living,” combining ruggedness with innovation.

Speaking of innovation, the Ford F-150 is going electric. The new truck is called the F-150 Lightning. Given the sales history of the F-150, you might wonder why Ford would want to mess with success. You know the old saying, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Ford executives knew that they would need to win over some serious skeptics with the electric version. Early reservations for the Lightning are promising. The company initially planned to produce about 40,000 Lightnings, but the truck was so popular that Ford stopped taking reservations after it received 200,000 orders.

**The Old Faith-150.** “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” That is what a lot of folks were saying about *good works* back in the first century. Within the Jewish faith, there was a long tradition of people being “justified by works” (Romans 4:2). They would study the laws of the Bible, including the Ten Commandments, and then do their best to follow these laws by remembering the Sabbath day, honoring their parents, and refraining from murder, adultery and stealing. All good things! The problem was, they believed that if they did these good works, they would be “justified,” which means being put in a right relationship with God and their neighbors.

The model for being justified was Abraham, a righteous man who was the ancient father of the Jewish people. Abraham is considered the symbol of Jewish righteousness, just as the Ford-150 is considered “the symbol of American tenacity.” Those who followed Abraham saw him as the finest example of being justified by works, and they followed his example. If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.