

**“The Righteous Will Live by His Faith”  
(Hab. 2:4)**

**Intro:** There is one verse that played a significant role in Paul’s thinking on a person’s relationship with God. Twice he quotes this verse in his letters and once the Hebrew writer also quotes this verse. Certainly any OT verse that receives this much use in the NT is worthy of special note. But what is that verse?

**It is a verse from what may be to us an obscure place—the book of Habakkuk. In chapter 2 the Lord makes this statement:**

*“Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.” (Habakkuk 2:4, NASB)*

**Tonight let’s take a more in-depth look at this verse. Let’s consider the context in which it is found and the message for Habakkuk’s day; and then the principle Paul derived from it and taught in the gospel.**

**The Context of the Quote in Habakkuk**

*Habakkuk is an intriguing book. One of its unique features is the fact that the whole book is a conversation between Habakkuk and God; and it deals with the problem of the seeming unfairness of God’s actions.*

In chapter one Habakkuk cries out to God because of the sins of his own people, Israel. Even he, a righteous man, suffers at their hands (Hab. 1:2-4)

*How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out to Thee, “Violence!” Yet Thou dost not save. (Habakkuk 1:2)*

God answers with the astounding statement that He will raise up the Chaldeans to punish the disobedient Israelites (Hab. 1:5-11).

*“For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs. (Habakkuk 1:6)*

Habakkuk is troubled by this revelation; it puts him in dilemma. Why would God look with favor on a wicked nation and allow a people more wicked to destroy a people less wicked? (Hab. 1:12-2:1).

*Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor. Why dost Thou look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why art Thou silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they? (Habakkuk 1:13)*

God responds to Habakkuk’s concerns.

God says, “You can write this down! The Chaldeans will get their just repayment for their sin.

In contrast God makes an assuring promise to the faithful.

*Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith. (Habakkuk 2:4)*

*This statement from God reveals one of the most important principles of God's dealing with mankind. But what does it mean, "The righteous will live by faith"?*

**An Important OT Message—"The righteous will live by his faith"**

*God's word to Habakkuk revealed an important message from His OT people. "The righteous" does not refer to people who never sin; but instead refers to those who humble themselves before the Lord.*

"The righteous" stand in contrast to "the proud, those swollen with arrogance."

This humility is shown by:

Acknowledging sin in one's life

Submitting to God's will in obedience

Respecting God's purpose in history

These are things that "the righteous" do, even though they may be imperfect.

***"Will live" refers to the deliverance that comes to the righteous.***

Though the Babylonians would draw near in destruction, God's people should not lose faith in the Lord's justice.

In this context, God was promising that His people who remained true to him would be saved in the day of wrath that was about to come upon Israel. Their very lives would depend upon honoring God's word.

***"By faith"***

This is the means by which the righteous man will live or be delivered. By trusting in God's power to deliver, he will be delivered.

In this case, the faithful were given a particularly challenging command. Their trust in God would be shown by surrendering to the Babylonians rather than fighting them.

This principle expresses clearly the basis upon which God extended His saving mercy—by showing trust in patient endurance until His purposes were worked out.

***But now consider that three times in the NT, this statement from Habakkuk is quoted to clarify God's way of deliverance or salvation for His NT people.***

**Three NT Applications of Habakkuk 2:4**

***Paul's application of the principle in Romans 1***

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17)*

Paul affirms that the gospel is God's power for salvation to the believer, whether Jew or Greek.

The “good news” is that there is a way of salvation through Jesus’ death on the cross. This message is God’s power to deliver the sinner from the wrath of God.

This deliverance was available to all who believe, whether Jew or Greek.

In the gospel, “the righteousness of God is revealed”.

Though rooted in God’s character, “the righteousness of God” is a righteousness that God reckons to us through forgiveness or covering of sin.

Consider Paul’s description: “*not having a righteousness of my own derived from law but that which comes from God on the basis of faith*” (Phil. 3:9).

This righteousness is “by faith”, that is, it results from trust in God’s power and provision in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

“Faith” in Romans refers to trust in God’s sacrifice that may be accepted and appropriated upon conditions God has set forth.

It is placed in contrast to “works” by which a person earns righteousness by perfect obedience to law.

“Unto faith” suggests the intention of the gospel message.

It is given in order that men may believe, resulting in righteousness and salvation from sin and eternal wrath.

“As it is written...” suggests that Paul’s statement is in harmony with what God has previously said through Habakkuk. Just as God through Habakkuk had promised deliverance for the humble who trusted in His power to deliver and thus lived in persevering obedience, so God, through the gospel, promises deliverance for the humble who trust in His power to save through His Son Jesus Christ.

### ***Paul’s application to the Galatians in Galatians 3***

In Galatians, Paul’s concern is that some of the Gentile Christians who have been saved by faith in Christ have been persuaded by Judaizing teachers to start keeping the Law of Moses in order to be saved. It becomes necessary for Paul to explain the difference between salvation by faith and salvation by works of the Law.

*For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.” Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “The righteous man shall live by faith.” However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “He who practices them shall live by them.” (Galatians 3:10-12)*

Let’s consider the three points in a slightly different order:

First, righteousness by the Law required that the person under the Law practice all the things that the Law had commanded without sin and in this way would “live by them.” As such, it was not a system “of faith” in God’s forgiveness, but instead a system “of works” based on keeping the Law without sin.

Second, failure to obey all requirements of the Law put one under the Law's curse upon the disobedient.

Third, even the OT made it clear that no one had successfully earned righteousness by works.

*Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith." (Galatians 3:11)*

Habakkuk's statement indicates that no one had deserved to be saved from wrath because of perfect obedience to the Law. Instead it affirmed that only those who trusted in God's power and provisions would be delivered.

Therefore Jesus took the curse of the Law upon the disobedient upon Himself on the cross in order that the disobedient could be righteous by faith!

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:13-14)*

The statement of Habakkuk shows that even the OT indicates that righteousness comes from God on the basis of faith, not earned by man's perfect obedience to the Law.

### ***The Hebrew writer's application of the principle in Heb. 10***

Later the Hebrew writer would write a word of exhortation to believing Jews who were turning back from faith in Jesus to Judaism, leaving the new covenant of faith for the old covenant of works. He reminded them of all that they had endured in the past for their faith in Jesus and how that if they would remain faithful they would be rewarded.

*Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. (Hebrews 10:35-36)*

Then the Hebrew writer gives the basis for his exhortation to keep the faith with endurance.

*For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. (Hebrews 10:37-39)*

The Hebrew writer understood that trusting God meant courageously obeying Him when the circumstances were frightening. When confronted with such threats, we can either face them courageously or shrink back in fear. If they did the former then they would be saved; if they did the latter, they would be destroyed. Thus he ends the chapter with this great affirmation of faith based on Habakkuk's statement.

*But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*

Consider Barker's comment on Habakkuk 2:4:

“Faith in God was the key to consistent living, even though violence abounded and justice was perverted (1:2–4). That short statement helps believers to persevere even though God chastens them (1:5–11) and they cannot understand his ways (1:12–17). It provides a solution to the doubt they sometimes feel in His all-wise providence (2:1–3), and helps them to understand his righteous judgments (2:4–20). In the final analysis, faith provides the key to understanding the Lord's sovereign purpose, and it leads men to worship (3:1–19).”<sup>1</sup>

**Conclusion: The message of Habbakuk 2:4 has lasting importance and application in our lives.**

*First let us thank God that He has made available to us a way of righteousness that does not depend upon our perfection, but upon His grace in Jesus Christ.*

*Secondly, let us live humbly, acknowledging our sins, obeying God the best we can, and submitting to His purposes in history.*

*Thirdly, let us courageously face whatever difficulties we may face knowing that shrinking back can only bring destruction, but faithfully persevering will bring salvation.*

**For indeed—“the righteous will live by faith!”**

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<sup>1</sup> Barker, K. L. (1999). *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Vol. 20, p. 326). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.