



Epistle to The Romans



Lesson 5: Romans 4, God's Greatest Gift

Review

Chapters 1 and 2 dealt with reality that we are all part of a fallen race:

- † Pagan Man - The creation is enough.....Guilty!
- † Moral Man - Doesn't live up to own conscience.....Guilty!
- † Religious Man - Commitment and sincerity..... Guilty!



Chapter 3 dealt with God's Greatest Problem: to compromise His hatred of sin would be to compromise His own character. How can a just God justify sinful man? How can He permit man to enjoy the destiny God made for us? This is the dilemma!

It may be that the Deity can forgive sins, but I do not see how. Socrates to Plato, 360 b.c.

Preview

In Chapter 4, Abraham and David speak to Israel about God's Greatest Gift. This chapter will demonstrate the unity of the Old and New Testament together.

- 📖 How was Abraham saved (Before the Law)? He was the founder of the Hebrew race and considered the most consummate and venerated Jew.
- 📖 How was David saved (Under the Law)? David was Israel's greatest king.

Abraham and David were held in higher esteem by the nation Israel than any other two whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament. Abraham was the founder of the Hebrew race, was saved forty years before the law was given. In a sense he was saved as a Gentile. David was Israel's greatest king.

Basis for their justification: Abraham (before the Law) Rom 4:1-5 and David (under the law) Rom 4:6-8.

We are going to find that there are two kinds of people on planet Earth. Those who have no interest in keeping the law, and those that try to build their future by keeping the law.

Read Romans 4 verse 1

This is the first of six occurrences where Paul uses the question, "What shall we say then?" (Rom 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14, 30).]

He refers to Abraham as our forefather. The word used means "First Father." Undoubtedly this was to distinguish Abraham's physical ancestry from his spiritual fatherhood, mentioned later in Rom 4:11-12, 16.

The phrase “Pertaining to the flesh” should read “What then shall we say then that Abraham hath found according to the flesh.”

Cloudy Ethics

Like most Old Testament figures, we have to understand the Abraham was not perfect. He made many mistakes. Abraham receives a lesson in ethics from Pharaoh (Cf. Gen 12:10-20.). Evidently Abraham’s wife was a very attractive woman. He was fearful that if he introduced her to Pharaoh as his wife, they might kill him to get her. So, by introducing her as his sister he (Abraham) wasn’t a threat. When Pharaoh finds out he get very angry. He can’t believe Abraham would do that. Pharaoh considered it unethical. Abraham wasn’t really lying as she was actually his half-sister, but he was splitting hairs here. He was using it as a ruse or a ‘white lie’ that was intended to deceive. Yet he later pulls the same stunt in Gen 20 with Abimelech, King of Gerar. You would have thought it he would learned it. There was a subsequent silence from heaven for 13 years...). Related? Maybe?

Despite the negatives, like us, there are many positives to be celebrated.

Read Romans 4 verse 2

What kind of people were reading this? A mix of ordinary believers, amidst lots of confusion: Cf. Acts 15:1ff. [Works or faith? (legalism = works + faith).]

The Jews were proud of Abraham and themselves. The Rabbis had taught that Abraham had a surplus of merit from his works that was available to his descendants. Paul built on that idea and agreed that, assuming that Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about (cf. boasting or bragging in Rom 2:17, 23; 3:27). But, Paul insisted, his boasting could only be before other people, not before God, because despite his best, Abraham still fell short before God.

How Was Abraham Saved?

Read Romans 4 verse 3

Gen 15:6: Abraham was reckoned to righteousness by his faith when he was still on Gentile ground, two chapters before the covenant sign of circumcision was placed upon his flesh.

Steps of faith of an uncircumcised Abraham (from his “call,” Gen 12, to his circumcision, Gen 17): At the time Abraham was “saved” he wasn’t “Jewish”!

Abraham’s Steps of Faith

Steps of faith of an uncircumcised Abraham: from his “call” in Gen 12 to his circumcision in Gen 17.

- 1) Revelation of the God of glory in Ur of Chaldees;
- 2) Obedience to God’s command to leave his country, kindred, father’s house; [tarrying at Haran until his father died (Acts7:4; Gen 11:3)];
- 3) Altar worship in Canaan (Gen 12:7, 8);
- 4) Choosing his portion with God [vs. Lot’s separation (Gen 13)];

- 5) Victory over the kings (Gen 14);
- 6) Received by Melchizedek, “God Most High” and rejecting riches from men (Gen 14);
- 7) Believing God’s word concerning his seed, counting on God to do the impossible, and thus “accounted righteous” (Gen 15).

The Council at Jerusalem: Acts 15

There was a major dispute, or two dilemmas over Gentile salvation: Paul, Barnabas, & Peter defend their case during a special council in Jerusalem before the elders; James presides.

Read Acts 15:1-4

Two Dilemmas

- 1) Do Christians have to come under the law to be saved?
- 2) If not, then what happens to Israel?

So, there are two issues: How can a Gentile be saved? and What’s to become of Israel? Many were under the impression that you had to become a Jew first before you could become a Christian.

Read Acts 15:5

This is not a small issue even today! There are Christians who get interested in the Old Testament and the get real involved with it. Yes, this can be very informative and constructive, but they get so enthusiastic that they put themselves back under the law. This leads to two kinds of Christians, those who have no grasp or understanding of the OT, which is tragic, or the over enthusiastic that try to keep the Torah and out themselves under the law.

Read Acts 15:6-11

Paul, Barnabas, & Peter said, “no way.” Peter makes the argument that why take these gentiles and load them down with baggage that we could not even handle? Paul, Barnabas, & Peter recount many examples of how Gentiles are being saved. Peter, speaking as a Jew, uses a great expression saying, “we need to be saved like them.” Talking about the Gentiles.

Read Acts 15:12-19

The quote James uses in Acts above deals with this second question (Acts 15:13-17). If you can be saved directly, what is to become of Israel. Paul addresses that God is not through with Israel (Rom 9, 10, 11).

Read Amos 9:11,12

We are currently in the Gentile (Church) age.

Justification by “Works”

Read Romans 4 verse 4

- If you are working, what you get for that is wages: if you are doing something for me, then I owe you a debt
- If I give you something you don't deserve = "Grace." Your "trying to deserve it" clouds the graciousness of my gift!

Reward of Grace vs Debt

Read Romans 4 verse 5

God insists on given you the gift when you do nothing but believe. If you try to add to that, you try to convert God's gift into wages.

Can the Bible contradict itself? Many people not understanding this, and other concepts, think that it does. It is one way in our society today that the Bible is attacked.

If the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense. Martin Luther

Rule of thumb. Interpret the obscure passages by the clear passages...



One of the most phenomenal proofs that God is the originator of the Bible is that you have 66 books penned by forty authors over 2000 years that have consistency in the whole. Try that today and see how it works.!

Paul vs. James? Do They Contradict Each Other?

Some people believe that Paul and James contradict each other and say opposite things.

Read James 2:14-22

James is arguing that works is an evidence of faith. Abraham was justified in Genesis 15 and "tested" in Genesis 22. Abraham was justified by demonstrating his faith.

Read James 2:23-26

- † True faith produces works (as a testimony); true works don't produce faith (just bragimonies)
- † Many preach "Guilt, fear, obligation". This leads to a big bonfire (**1 Cor 3:12-15**). If you are trying to earn your salvation it will fail.
- † Only by faith is the Holy Spirit released to work through the believer for enduring results.

How Was David Saved?

Abraham lived before the law...How was David saved? David lived under the law and understood: Israel's greatest king was also justified by faith alone.

Read Romans 4 verses 6-8

Vocabulary

- Transgression “Crossing over the line”
- Sin “To miss the mark”
- Iniquity “Twisted”
- Guile “Deception”
- Forgive “To remove a burden”
- Impute “To put on account”

Paul quotes Ps 32:1, 2: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” Augustine of Hippo had these words painted on a placard and placed at the foot of his bed where his dying eyes could rest upon them. Martin Luther loved what he called the “The Pauline Psalms:” Psalms 32, 51, 130 and 143. This teaches justification apart from human merit (“not impute” means “not take into account” (Ps 51:9; Isa 43:24, 25).

God’s whole point is that he is giving you a gift you don’t deserve. When you try to deserve it, you are impugning His gift. It would be like you giving someone you love a special gift on Christmas, or an anniversary and they try to pay you for it.

Transgression is a form of rebellion against God. Sin means to not live up to God’s standards. Iniquity describes what happens to the inner character of the sinner. Forgiveness is pictured by the Scapegoat on Yom Kippur (Lev 16:20-22; Ps 103:12; Jn 1:29). Impute is a bookkeeping term. When we confess our sins, God cancels our debt; no longer on the books.

Read Romans 4 verses 9-11

Salvation Not by Rituals

We call Abraham our “father,” not because we “become Jewish” by coming to Christ. He is the Father of the faithful because he had faith prior to being circumcised. Abraham was justified as a Gentile before he was circumcised; his age when he was declared righteous is not stated (Gen 15:6), but when Hagar bore him Ishmael, he was 86 (Gen 16:16). After that, God instructed Abraham to circumcise all his male descendants as a sign of God’s covenant with him...This was done when Abraham was 99 (Gen 17:24).

Therefore, the circumcision of Abraham followed his justification by faith by more than 13 years.

Read Romans 4 verse 12

Thus, Abraham is our father, too. He is the Father of the Faithful: of those who follow in the steps of faith. *Paul has turned the Jew’s boast upside down: it is not the Gentile who must come to the Jew’s circumcision for salvation; it is the Jew who must come to a “Gentile” faith: Abraham had faith long before he was circumcised...*

Rituals are not the means; only a testimony. *Baptism, too, is only a testimony.* Sacraments and ceremonies of the church, while useful when viewed in proper light, become ruinous when perverted into grounds for confidence.

Promises Given on Faith Alone

Read Romans 4 verse 13

What does being “heir of the world” mean?

- God’s promise (Gen 12:1-3) preceded the giving of the Law by four centuries (Gal 3:17).
- Believers of all ages are “Abraham’s seed,” for they enjoy the same spiritual blessing (justification) which he enjoyed (Gal 3:29).

Don’t Neglect God’s Plan

Read Romans 4 verse 14

- If Jews could become heirs by obeying the Law, then faith has no value: “void”; the noun means “empty, without content,” (1Cor 15:10, 58). Also, the promise is worthless: “has been made invalid.”
- Why? God hates your trust in “good works” rather than believing Him. Because you neglect all that God is, all that He has done, and desires for you...

By neglecting God’s plan you...

- 1) deny what it cost God to give Christ; the Father’s forbearance as His Son suffered...
- 2) deny what it cost Christ to put away sin at the cross; “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.”
- 3) deny what honor God has given Him “because of the suffering of death”;
- 4) deny what plans for the future God has arranged through Christ’s having made peace by His blood on the cross, to reconcile “things upon the earth and things in heaven, unto Himself.” There is a master plan that is far bigger than you and me, that you disown and separate yourself from if you neglect God’s plan. We need to come to Him on His terms, not ours!

Read Romans 4 verse 15

(Lit., “the Law keeps on producing wrath”) as a consequence of disobedience. No one can keep the Law fully; therefore God, in wrath against sin, judges those who disobey.

The law can only curse. It cannot bless. It intensified sin by giving it the specific character of transgression, an overstepping of a prohibition (cf. Rom. 5:13), making it the wilful violation of known law.

Why is this so important to us? If we come to God on the basis of the law, the only result can be wrath. Then we must be perfect on the basis of our own merit. Anyone want to volunteer for that?

You and I do not want justice. You want grace.

It’s the same principle—the same basis—that is the same trap for us. We, too, fall into the trap of attempting to rely on our own merit, rather than His.

The law cannot be the means of earning what was freely given.

Of Faith, By Grace...

Read Romans 4 verse 16

The minute that you are not bold in your faith, you are under the law.

“You don’t deserve it?” And you never will!

The human exercise of faith is simply the prerequisite response of trust in God and His promise. Since faith and grace go together, and since the promise is by grace, the promise can be received only by faith, not by the Law.

Read Romans 4 verse 17

Greek here literally means “God making alive dead ones, and calling things not being, being.” Cf. Gen 1:3, “Let light be.” And light was. Creating.

Paul then supported his conclusion in verse 16 with scriptural authority, quoting God’s covenantal promise from Genesis 17:5.

Another reason the promise is by faith is so that it may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring, not only the Jews (those of the Law) but to all who exercise faith in God. If the promise were fulfilled for those who keep the Law, then no Gentiles (or Jews either) could be saved!

But this cannot be, because “Abraham is the father of us all, that is, all who believe” (cf. “our” in v. 1; also cf. Gal. 3:29). Yet, Israel is also one of those nations.

Israel and Church Distinct

Don’t make an eschatological mistake: Abraham is the father of all the faithful—but that is not a basis to equate the Church with Israel. The fact that believers in this Church Age are identified with Abraham and God’s covenant with him does not mean that the physical and temporal promises to Abraham and his physical descendants are either spiritualized or abrogated. It simply means that God’s covenant, and Abraham’s response of faith to it, have spiritual dimensions as well as physical and temporal aspects.

The Jew is still a Jew and the Gentile is a still Gentile. Within the Church there is no distinction; the Church is a 3rd category which can include both (Rom 1:16; 10:12; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). Yet, Israel and Church are distinct. Different origins, different destinies.



God has not abrogated His promises to Abraham about his physical, believing descendants, the regenerate nation Israel, inheriting the land [Gen 15:18-21; 22:17]. These promises still stand; they will be fulfilled in the Millennium. This will be dealt with in chapters 9, 10, 11.

God of Resurrection

God is the God of resurrection. He works when nature is powerless. “Who calls into being things which do not yet exist.”

Read Romans 4 verse 18

(Quote from Gen 15:5). He believed despite a hopeless situation: Abraham was 100; Sarah was 90.

The promise of blessing through the Seed—which is Christ—is of faith that it might be by grace. And it is to all the “seed”—that is, to all who have faith. All such are “of the faith of Abraham.” He is thus the father of us all, who believe in Jesus. And so, the Word is fulfilled which declares, “I have made thee a father of many nations.”

Read Romans 4 verses 19 & 20

The only way you can glorify God is to believe Him.

Read Romans 4 verse 21

Fully persuaded means no room for doubt. He relied on the character of God. He knew that God cannot lie. He knew that God was also omnipotent.

Read Romans 4 verses 22 through 24

The definition of the Gospel in 1 Cor 15:1-4: note the importance of the resurrection!

Read Romans 4 verse 25

Verses 23-25 apply the truth about justification and its illustration in Abraham to the apostle’s readers—from the believers in Rome who first read this letter to all of us today. The divine declaration of Abraham’s justification was written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness. Such an act of justification, however, is not for everyone. It is for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead

Summary

In Chapter 4, Paul presented several irrefutable reasons why justification is by faith:

- 1) Since justification is a gift, it cannot be earned by works (vv. 1-8).
- 2) Since Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, circumcision has no relationship to justification (vv. 9-12).
- 3) Since Abraham was justified centuries before the Law, justification is not based on the Law (vv. 13-17).
- 4) Abraham was justified because of his faith in God, not because of his works (vv. 18-25).

Jesus’ resurrection validates the adequacy of the payment for us all. “Paid in full!” (Jn 19:30). The ransom has been paid. The divine justice has been appeased. The holiness of God has been vindicated. ...And the believing sinner is declared justified from all things. Such is the testimony of Chapter 4. We can’t add to it. It is blasphemy to even try.

Next Session

Read Romans Chapter 5: So, we have an eternal home in heaven waiting for us: What about the here and now? What are the benefits of salvation now?