

Romans

November 15, 2009

Romans Four

Romans 4:9-15

This is lesson number 15 in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ”

Romans 1:16-17

In our last study we considered Romans 4:1-8 which is a clear statement of Imputed Righteousness or justification by faith alone as illustrated by Abraham and the companion doctrine of sin not being imputed as illustrated by David.

Justification by grace through faith alone is the single most important truth by which Christianity and the Gospel is defined.

Given that man is spiritually dead in trespasses and sin then it takes an act of God’s sovereign will to give the dead sinner life.

Any smattering of “human response” as to merit before God taints the transaction and destroys any hope of justification.

Brother Gables suggested “human response” as a synonym for works and it helps a great deal to explain justification.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works [human response], lest anyone should boast.

“Righteousness is what we want in order to justification; faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as testified in the Gospel, is the means through which we receive this righteousness. **Believing, then, is not the righteousness**, but it is the **means** through which we become righteous.” An Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans, Robert Haldane, The National foundation for Christian Education, 1970, page 163

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Saving faith is **objective** faith in Jesus Christ. By the grace of God, I am enabled to agree with my condemnation. By God's grace I am granted repentance and I turn from all known sin. By God's grace I look to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who shed His own blood for my redemption. In that **reality** of faith, God justifies the ungodly. Faith is a reality! Hebrews 11 contains a partial list of OT saints, the church of the redeemed.

Hebrews 11:1-12

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ² For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony.

³ By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "*and was not found, because God had taken him*"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. ⁶ But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

⁷ By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

¹¹ By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child* when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as many* as the stars of the sky in multitude – innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

By a sovereign act of God, according to **His purpose and His free will**, He freely [without cost] imputes the righteousness of God to an ungodly sinner! While the ungodly sinner was "dead in trespasses and sin," by His grace, He gave the ungodly sinner life, not by works [human response], but through faith! And in the same gracious manner He does not impute sin to the ungodly sinner, but to Christ!

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“I saw One hanging on a tree, In agony and blood;
He fixed His languid eyes on me, As near His cross I stood.
Sure never till my latest breath, Can I forget that look:
It seemed to charge me with His death, Tho’ not a word He spoke.
My conscience felt and owned the guilt, And plunged me in despair;
I saw my sins His blood had spilt, And helped to nail Him there.
Alas! I knew not what I did, But now my tears are vain:
Where shall my trembling soul be hid? For I the Lord have slain.
A second look He gave, which said, “I freely all forgive:
This blood is for thy ransom paid, I die that thou may’st live.
Oh, can it be, upon a tree The Savior died for me?
My soul is thrilled, My heart is filled, To think He died for me!

He Died For Me, John Newton

Now to continue with Romans 4:9-15.

Title: “Children of Abraham”

It is the nature of expository preaching that the preacher is always learning and adding to his repository of the truth of God’s word.

J. L. Dagg: “Preaching is explaining the word of God.”

It is my strong conviction that we should preach the Word of God, Book by Book, verse by verse. In my forty years of teaching I have systematically taught through the entire Bible at least three times. Each time I restudy a book of the bible in order to teach it I learn more and sometimes wonder where this “new” knowledge came from.

As an example, and it is a small point, but I had not emphasized the positive and negative aspects of imputation as it was expressed in the cases of Abraham and David in 4:3 and 4:8. Now I knew that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the believer and the sinner’s guilt is imputed to Christ, but had not seen how it was so clearly stated in this passage. Then as I thought about it there is another passage that also states the case on imputation in a positive and a negative sense.

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2 Corinthians 5:17-21

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. ¹⁸ Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The unregenerated unbeliever can never understand that justification is free and that he cannot do a single solitary thing to impress God. The understanding of grace comes with regeneration; you must be born again in order to see [understand] the way of salvation.

God said through Isaiah 55:8-11

8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.

9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,

11 So shall **My word** be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Romans 10:17

Hearing ? Doesn't everyone hear? Perceiving the audible vibrations and understanding are not the same thing.

Jesus said, on several occasions, “He that has ears to hear, let him hear.”

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It was my own experience, that when God the Holy Spirit began to convict me of my sin, and God the Father began to draw me unto Christ, that it was the preaching of the Word of God that was the efficient means used by God to save me.

When I started going to church on the first Sunday in 1968 for nine months, I listened to the Bible being preached. I did not want to submit to the Lordship of Christ, the command to repent and believe the Gospel, but I knew that what was being preached was the truth whether I ever agreed with it or not. God had mercy on me and He saved me. If God had used the same preaching to seal my just condemnation, He would still be God.

2 Corinthians 2:14-17

¹⁴ Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. ¹⁵ For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

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The following are observations from: Chapter 4:1-8:

- A faithful and correct presentation of the Gospel must include the work of the law in condemnation; the **wrath of God** is a present reality.

Paul, after declaring that he is not ashamed of the Gospel, spends three chapters on the wrath of God, bringing Gentile and Jew, indeed the entire human race under just condemnation.

- Works: Those acts of obedience and thoughts of faith, while they are a necessary consequence of being justified by God, offer absolutely no merit to God for us.

“... Faith without works is dead...” says James 2:20.

“... by the deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified in His sight.... ”

Romans 3:20

Yet many are taught that in order to be saved you must do some external and overt act, some human response, e.g. be baptized or belong to a particular local church.

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- As with Abraham, a person is justified “freely” {without cause} and the act of believing itself is not the righteousness, believing is only the means through which righteousness is given.
- The Gospel is **only** the manifestation of the promise of ancient Scriptures {OT}. The Gospel was prefigured in the Garden of Eden when God spoke to the serpent: “He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” The Gospel was given in a type in the skins that God used to clothe Adam and Eve; The Gospel was preached to Abraham; the entire Levitical sacrificial system under the ministry of Moses was the Gospel in type. Those who tell us to discard the OT are at best misinformed and perhaps are, in fact, heretics.
- Paul brings in Abraham and David to establish that the righteousness of God is imputed apart from works. Paul gives a positive and a negative example of imputation.
- Abraham believed the same Gospel that Paul is preaching, because there is only one Gospel. David understood that his sin would not be imputed to himself, i.e., not to David, but to Christ.
- That there has been only one Gospel from before the foundation of the world and that everyone who is saved or who ever will be saved, from Adam until the last one of God’s elect, will be saved in exactly the same way; through faith in Christ, and never because of works or ethnicity.
- That God does not make us righteous and then justify us; rather He imputes to us the righteousness of Christ. The Righteousness of God is imputed, not infused. Sanctification must never be confused with justification!
- Neither should sanctification be divorced from justification; without sanctification; there has been no justification.
- That God justifies the **ungodly**. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones says this may be one of the greatest statements in all of the Bible.
- Finally, that you can know you are saved only if you can trust Christ: plus nothing and minus nothing.

The passage we are dealing with today begins an extended discussion on the question: Who are the true descendants of Abraham?

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Romans 4: 9-15

Circumcision:

Paul is now going to show that Abraham is the father of all who believe the Gospel. Who are the true descendants of Abraham?
Who are “the Israel of God?”

Abraham is far more than the ancient ancestor of the Jews.
God’s covenant people are not determined by biological descent from Abraham, but by spiritual descent from him by the same faith.

The Bible makes a transition from biological descent to spiritual descent as defining those who are the “children of Abraham.”

4:9 “Does this blessedness....” The blessedness that David found: is it for the circumcised {Jews} only? Or for the uncircumcised {Gentiles} also, that is the non-Jews according to the flesh?

“For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.”

Once more we are reminded of how foolish it is to think that Christians do not need to know their OT. There is no way that you can have an appreciation of Paul’s argument here in Romans without a knowledge of the history of Abraham.

4:10 “How then was it accounted?”

When did Abraham receive the blessing?
When did God impute righteousness to Abraham?
After he was circumcised or before he was circumcised?

It occurs to me how obvious this argument is. Yet, for centuries men have not seen the obvious implication of this question.

The reason they can’t understand is found in 2 Corinthians 3:14-16 “ ***But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.***”

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What is the application?

There are those who teach that you are not saved until you are baptized. The same question must be asked of them. When did you believe? Before or after your baptism?

Baptizing unbelievers {infants} is another matter. I do not mean to offend, but rather to instruct, baptizing infants is not baptism. You must let the Scripture define the meaning of baptism.

The error of the paedobaptists is that they make circumcision the type of baptism and baptism the antitype. Since infants were circumcised then infants may be baptized. But baptism is the antitype of regeneration, not circumcision! That is what the circumcision of the heart means!

When was Abraham circumcised?

Some scholars allow 29 years between Genesis 15:6 & 17:11. In any case there is not less than a 14 - year span.

More than enough time to prove that his justification came before his circumcision.

4:11-12 Circumcision of all the males was commanded by God as a covenant sign to set apart those people who had been chosen by God to preserve His word.

Circumcision put a “seal” on what was already done.

To “Seal” means to authenticate.

Like the “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.” Good Housekeeping does not make the toaster but it approves the appliance and gives it a “Seal of Approval.”

John 6:27 Jesus says, “... *which the Son of Man will give you , because God the Father has set His seal on Him.*” Jesus is referring to His baptism when the sign of the Holy Spirit descended on Him as a dove. The seal expressed God the Father’s approval of His Son.

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Ephesians 1:13-14 *“In Him you also trusted after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”*

So again, “Seal” means to authenticate; to approve.

Abraham’s circumcision **sealed**, or authenticated his justification, his circumcision did not justify him, it was faith that justified Abraham!

Physical circumcision never implied the guarantee of a circumcised heart {2:25-29}. That is what most of the the Jews believed: They thought, “God owes me!”

Our Paedobaptist brothers make the same error today when they teach that baptism is the NT continuation of OT circumcision and that in baptism there is an implied covenant relationship with the child.

Some Paedobaptists argue that they do not imply anything in baptizing infants: then why baptize unbelievers?

To stay with our exposition, it is doubtful that Paul has baptism in view in vs 9-12. So we will examine baptism later at the appropriate text.

The point to be made here is that **faith** enables both Jew and Gentile to become spiritual descendants of Abraham.

Race or ethnicity is no barrier to the universal offer of the Gospel.

Let me also make a finer point here: Abraham was not the first person to be justified by faith. Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, et al, were justified exactly the same as Abraham. But Abraham is the example in Scripture where God makes it absolutely clear that justification is a purely legal matter at God’s initiative.

As “father of the faithful,” Abraham is the archetype; the paradigm, the model, or the standard for the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

4:12 Abraham is also the father of circumcision to **those who believe**. A man could be circumcised and still be lost. All Jews were not children of Abraham.

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Abraham is the father of all uncircumcised who believe and all the circumcised who believe. He is the father of all who **believe**.

In 4:9-15, Paul once and for all removed the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile. And that wall will is never to be raised again!

4:13-15 “For the promise”

I am making an arbitrary break here at vs 15.
The context continues on to vs 22.

For the first time in Romans, Paul mentions “promise.”

“Promise” is used as a noun in vs 13, 14, 16, and 20; and as a verb in 21.

Paul then makes three points about the promise to Abraham:

- 1) The promise is based on faith and not law {13-15}.
- 2) The promise, because it is based on faith, unites Jew and Gentile together into one people of God {16-17}.
- 3) The faith with which Abraham responded to God was firm and unwavering {18-22}.

And so we won't forget he carries us back in vs 22 to Genesis 15:6.

Notice how Paul defines the promise made to Abraham. Here Paul is not quoting the Scripture, but is interpreting it. Here he makes the promise broader than natural descendants and real estate and includes all who believe the Gospel.

“For the promise that he would be the heir of the world”

Genesis often makes the point that Abraham will be a blessing to all the world, but the emphasis is on the vast number of descendants and the land promised to them.

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Law:

Paul also makes the point that the promise could have nothing to do with the law given to Moses. Abraham was justified 430 years before the law was given in its written form {Cf. Galatians 3:15-18}.

Back to the necessity of the OT again. What would this claim mean to anyone without an understanding of the account of the law given to Moses?

4:14-15 Abraham and those who came after him, “those who live by law,” could never inherit God’s promised blessing through law. If that were true, then faith has no value and the promise is worthless. Why?

Because the law can only condemn. How does the law produce wrath?

“... for where there is no law there is no transgression.”

What is the opposite of that statement? Where there **is** law there **is** sin!

Much has been said about faith.

Faith is a most important word for the Christian.

To some, faith is believing a set of doctrinal statements, a confession of faith.

Believing correct doctrine: election, predestination, reprobation.

But I have known several men, even preachers, who were correct in their doctrine and yet denied saving faith by their hypocritical lives.

Others make faith equivalent to agreeing to baptism and regular participation in the Lord’s Supper and church attendance.

Some others view faith as an emotion that can be used to get what they want from God. Are you sick? Then you don’t have enough faith they say.

Are you in debt? Then you don’t have enough faith they say.

Saving Faith:

- Saving faith is always distinct from law and works.
- Saving faith is always accompanied by obedience and good works.
- Saving faith is always based on God’s Word.

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- Saving faith does not quit God no matter how uncomfortable or how unpleasant the circumstances of our lives become.
- The Object of Saving Faith is Jesus Christ alone, as He is revealed in the Word of God alone!

Now, are you one of Abraham's children?
Have you seen your condemnation under the law?
Is your hope in the blood of Jesus Christ?

* * * * *

The next time {D.V.}, we will take up the promise made to Abraham which includes: Land; his seed; and his being a blessing to all nations.