

## Romans

November 22, 2009

Romans Four

Romans 4:16-22

This is lesson number 16 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

### Title: “The Faith of Abraham”

The Book of Romans is about the Gospel. In Galatians Paul warns about, and condemns to hell anyone, himself or an angel, who preaches another Gospel. Romans is a clear message that salvation is by the grace of God.

The doctrine of **justification by grace through faith alone** is at the heart of a correct understanding of the Gospel. Paul has set forth the wrath of God. Paul then destroys any hope of a person being justified before God by any form of works [human response], which includes following any system of law or observing religious rites including circumcision.

Last Sunday we made the following main points from 4:9-15, as Paul calls on the example of Abraham:

- In 4:9-12, Abraham is the primary example in Scripture that justification is by faith and not by works. The argument Paul uses is simple but yet irrefutable. Using circumcision as the first example of the futility of trusting in works, Paul asks the question: ***“How then was the righteousness of God imputed to Abraham; after he was circumcised, or before he was circumcised?”***

Any fair reading of the historical record in Genesis will show that Abraham believed God and that the “righteousness of God” was imputed to him **before** he was circumcised. Not less than 14 years had passed between the time of Abraham’s being justified and when God commanded circumcision as a seal or authentication of Abraham’s justification. You must see that the example of Abraham being justified by faith alone extends to all who are justified?

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Any attempt to require conditions “in order to be saved,” amounts to salvation by works [human response], “deeds of the law,” and not by faith, and is “another gospel.”

- In the second argument for not trusting in works, or “deeds of the law,” Vs. 13-15, Paul destroys any hope in the law for justification. The law was given to Moses 430 years after the time of Abraham. If those who trust in the law are the heirs {beneficiaries} of the promise, then faith is void {empty}, and the promise is worthless. The reason he gives for not trusting in obedience to law is “*because the law brings about wrath; ...*”

The original and continued purpose of the Law, natural or Mosaic, is to give the knowledge of sin and to condemn the guilty sinner.

Today we will continue with Paul’s argument that Abraham’s justification was by faith alone. We will look at the **promise** {singular} which includes aspects of: 1) Land; 2) his seed; 3) and his being a blessing to all nations.

Brother Gables preached a series on the Lordship of Christ twenty years ago and develops that the promise of resurrection is the “hope of Israel” and the hope of the Christian.

We will take a three-pronged approach to the exposition of this passage.

Explanation or exegesis; eschatological implications; and the promise itself. These three lines of thought will not always be distinct and I will try to not confuse anyone.

Another thing that I want you to carefully consider: If what I teach is different from what you have understood in the past, all I ask is for you to listen and then test what I teach by the Scripture. If you disagree and can support your doctrine by sound exegesis, then we have some basis for further discussion. It is a matter of sinful pride to think that what you first learned must be true when you are faced with the clear word of God that teaches you differently but correctly.

One main characteristic of a believer is to be teachable.

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Many Christian people have been taken in by the popularity of the “Left Behind” series of books. The reason that I bring this up is that the system of eschatology {doctrine of last things} {known as Dispensationalism} presented in those books is absolutely contrary to what Paul is presenting in the Book of Romans. I am not trying to be confrontational or mean-spirited, but I am committed to teaching the truth as I understand it.

Romans 4:16-22

vs 16 The “**promise**” means salvation to **all the seed**. So the word promise is singular, as to salvation, and not plural, but with aspects as to land, seed, and blessing.

*“Therefore it is of faith that it might be of grace, ....”*

“Nothing is sure for sinners that is not gratuitous. A promise suspended on obedience, they could never render sure. If salvation be in any form or to any degree dependent on merit, the goodness or the stability of man, it never can be sure, nay, it must be utterly unattainable. Unless we are saved by grace, we cannot be saved at all. To reject, therefore, a gratuitous salvation is to reject the only method of salvation available for sinners.” Dr. Charles Hodge

If, in fact, we are saved, we have nothing to boast about. If you in any way boast that you have believed while someone else has not, it is no more grace!

**Can we in some way grasp the magnitude of the faith of Abraham?**

Picture in your mind a man standing out on the open plain on a dark night looking up into a clear sky that is brilliant with countless stars.

Genesis 15:1-6

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceeding great reward.”

But, “LORD GOD, I don’t have any children, and now I am too old.”

“Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’

And He said to him, ‘so shall your descendants be.’

And he **believed** in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”

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The faith of Abraham, well before Isaac was born, saw with God a progeny as countless as the stars of heaven. But more than that; Abraham saw the Seed, that is Christ. When Abraham's faith was tested in the offering of Isaac, his promised son, Abraham believed that God could raise the dead. The promise includes resurrection. He believed God!

***“Alleluia, For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”*** Revelation 19:6

***“... so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”***

vs 17 God who would give life from the dead would fulfill the promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations.

“Take note of Genesis 17:5 where God **now calls him a father**, though as yet he was not actually the father of many nations. But before God, or in God's counsel, he is such a father.” Haldane

- a) From a human point of view it was indeed as impossible for Abraham to have a son as raising the dead.
- b) Abraham believed God who “called the things that are not, as though they were.”

What seems afar off and impossible to man is certain to God.

As the example of justification by faith: That God gives life to the dead, every believer is, in a sense, raised from the dead.

***“And you He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins.”*** Eph 2:1

vs 18 ***“contrary to hope, in hope believed.”***

An oxymoron {contradictory terms}, e.g., jumbo shrimp, honest politician, military intelligence. {Some of my army reserve time was in M. I. }

An oxymoron is used to enhance a statement:

***“contrary to hope, in hope believed.”***

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“Abraham’s expectations rested solely on the divine promise.” Haldane

Abraham considered the difficulties. He even laughed at the prospect that he and Sarah would have a child. But “contrary to hope, in hope believed.” This kind of faith is not a “leap in the dark,” but it considers the impossibility of a thing and then considers **who** is making the promise.

And then, “*contrary to hope, in hope believed.*”

vs 19 Abraham’s faith in God was contrary to nature.

Abraham and Sarah are well beyond the age of procreation.  
{life spans were dramatically reduced after the flood}

From the deadness of Sarah’s womb would spring life; promised life!

Abraham was kept childless until an age when he was “as good as dead,” that the divine omnipotence might be seen as the source of Isaac’s birth.

vs 20-21 In faith, Abraham did not waiver, strengthened in faith, giving glory to God.

Moule observes that this passage suggests why God prescribes faith as the condition of justification. Faith is an act of the soul which looks away from self {as regards both merit and demerit} and honors the Almighty and All-gracious in a way not the least meritorious. Thus faith brings the creature to the Creator in the right attitude - complete submission and confidence.

The greatest insult to God is to not believe His word! Cf. John 8:24.

vs 22 Therefore {for this reason} it {his faith} was accounted to him for righteousness.

\* \* \* \* \*

We are now dealing with the question: Who are the children of Abraham?  
To whom was the promise intended? Who are the heirs of the promise?  
We have looked briefly at the explanation {exegesis} of the text.

**What are the eschatological implications?**

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Eschatology, or the doctrine of last things, is very important. Your eschatology is your view of the events that occur before, during, and following the bodily return of Jesus Christ.

We all agree that Christ will return.

Your eschatology will necessarily interpret Scripture for you.

Take, for example, one of the professors at Beeson who is an authority on the Mosaic law and the letters of Paul: Philippians, Romans, Galatians, et al. I have great personal respect for him. In his book on the continuity of the law into the NT, he makes the well-known prophecy of Jeremiah apply to a future restoration of national Israel.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

It is my understanding, as interpreted by my eschatology, that Jeremiah, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is saying that the "New Covenant" is not new in respect to time or application, but is new in the understanding of God's grace. What the prophets understood? 1 Peter 1:3-12

1 Peter 1:3-12

<sup>3</sup> Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

<sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> whom having not seen

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you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup> receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of *your* souls.

**10** Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, **11** searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. **12** To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things which angels desire to look into. NKJV

In John 13:34, Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” But doesn’t the OT say, “Love your neighbor as yourself”?

What is new about the commandment Jesus gave is its application from a new heart born of the Spirit.

The Old Covenant, or the law, as Paul has demonstrated, was never intended as a way of being justified, but rather it is the means used by God to convict of sin.

Cf. Romans 5:20

When the law is written in the minds and on the heart, the object of God’s grace is regenerated. The application of the “New Covenant” Jeremiah presents extends from Adam to the end of the age. So my eschatology interprets the same text from Jeremiah in a very different manner.

**As I said, Your eschatology will necessarily interpret Scripture for you.**

Another example, is the “Left Behind” series of books about which I have already commented. They are hugely popular. Yet I strongly disagree with the eschatology upon which these books are based. If you have adopted the theology of these books, then your eschatology “Dispensational.”

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The term “dispensational,” comes from the view that God has programmed history into seven dispensations, or periods of time. And that God tested men in different ways in those different dispensations. Sometimes in law and sometimes in grace. I know that there is much more to Dispensationalism, but I am dealing with basic principles.

Dispensational eschatology teaches that the **primary focus** of the Bible is on a race of people called the Jews. God, they teach, will restore the Jews to the land of Israel and the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile is established forever. The Church is only a “parenthesis” in God’s plan and purpose.

Brother Gables has pointed out that it is the Jews who are a “parenthesis.” They came into being as a nation and they have disappeared. The nation in the Middle East that calls itself Israel is not the fulfillment of prophecy!

Nowhere in Scripture do you find, “First to the Jews and then to the Greeks and then back to the Jews.” Charles Alexander

You may be as committed to Dispensational eschatology as I am opposed to it. It is not required that you agree with me on eschatology. But I do ask that you listen to my exposition and then test your eschatology by Scripture and not by what is popular with the majority.

My eschatology says that the focus of the Bible is on the **Church**:  
The faith of Abraham produces the church, all believers of all time.  
*“... Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.”* Ephesians 5:25

Now the primary focus of the Bible cannot be both on the Jews and also on the Church.

It is my belief that Romans 4:9-12 destroys any idea that God now, or has ever made a distinction between Jew and Gentile, or Jew and any other person as far as **justification** is concerned.

As I have often pointed out, the confusion arises from making God’s raising up a nation of people to preserve His word, the oracles of God with justification. God justifies individuals and not nations of people!

*“For there is no partiality with God.”* Romans 2:11



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This view is supported in Ephesians 2:11-18

11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands-- 12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

And Ephesians 3:8-12

<sup>8</sup>To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; <sup>10</sup> to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, <sup>11</sup> according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup> in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

Dispensationalism says the “mystery” of the ages is that there would be the church. Paul says the mystery is the make-up of the church: Jews and Gentiles together in the same body.

So far we have looked at the explanation {exegesis} and the eschatological implications. We will look in more detail at the **promise** itself.

In the three aspects of the promise: land; seed; and blessing.

Romans 4:16 “ ***Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.***”

Another professor at Beeson, {and he is not the professor to whom I earlier referred} said that the call of Abram is the antidote {remedy} to Babel. This professor is a Hebrew scholar and has written a two-volume commentary on Genesis.

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He said that Genesis presents three programmatic statements;  
or three divine directives:

1. Creation and Blessing: Genesis 1:28
2. Crime and Punishment: Genesis 3:15  
Judgement: serpent, woman, man.
3. Blessing for all nations: Genesis 12:1-3

Genealogy is an important distinction in Scripture:

Genesis 5:1-32 is the record of the pre-flood patriarchs to Noah;

Genesis 11:10-26 is the record of the post-flood focus on Abram.

Abram is introduced in Genesis 11:26 as one of the sons of Terah

Abram is to be a blessing to all nations: Genesis 12:1-3.

A land; a seed {nation}; a blessing to all nations.

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the LORD had said to Abram:

"Get out of your country,  
From your family  
And from your father's house,  
To a land that I will show you.

<sup>2</sup> I will make you a great nation;  
I will bless you  
And make your name great;  
And you shall be a blessing.

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,  
And I will curse him who curses you;  
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Abram is first called a Hebrew {descendant of Eber Genesis 11:16}:  
Genesis 14:13.

Abram meets Melchizedek: Genesis 14:18.

Abram's promise to have children is affirmed: Genesis 15:1-6.

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Sarah tries to “help” by giving Hagar, her slave, to Abram so as to produce the promised heir. Galatians 4:21-31 teaches that the story of Hagar and Sarah is an allegory of the two covenants, and that Hagar represents the “Jerusalem that now is,” i.e., Jewry, and that Sarah represents the church, “Jerusalem above.”

### Galatians 4:21-31

<sup>21</sup> Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondswoman, the other by a freewoman. <sup>23</sup> But he *who was* of the bondswoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, <sup>24</sup> which things are symbolic. For these are the\* two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — <sup>25</sup> for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — <sup>26</sup> but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. <sup>27</sup> For it is written:

*"Rejoice, O barren,  
You who do not bear!  
Break forth and shout,  
You who are not in labor!  
For the desolate has many more children  
Than she who has a husband."*

<sup>28</sup> Now we, brethren, as Isaac *was*, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, even so *it is* now. <sup>30</sup> Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "*Cast out the bondswoman and her son, for the son of the bondswoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.*" <sup>31</sup> So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondswoman but of the free.

Circumcision was given as the seal {authentication} of the covenant that God made with Abram; God changed his name to Abraham {father of many nations}; Sarah, who at 90, will have a son by a man who is 100 years old.

They both laughed. Genesis 17.

Abram's faith is tested in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the deliverance of Lot. Genesis 18-19.

Finally, Isaac, the promised son is born only to become the supreme test of faith for Abraham when he is commanded to sacrifice Isaac, Genesis 21-22.

Romans 4:17-22 is the summary of the faith of Abraham and Sarah.

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With that as a backdrop we will look at three aspects the promise:  
A land; a seed {nation}; a blessing to all nations.

Our time is up for today but if the Lord so wills next time we will continue with a  
land; a seed {nation}; a blessing to all nations.

**In each aspect of the promise we will answer two questions?**

In what respect has the promise already been fulfilled and in what respect is the  
promise yet to be fulfilled?