

Romans

November 8, 2009

Romans Four

Romans 4:1-8

This is lesson number 14 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: “Imputed Righteousness”

We are now ready to take up Romans Chapter 4.

Paul makes his argument regarding the place of **works** {3:20}.

Perhaps we need to make plain what is meant by “works?”

Often we use “Bible language” and just assume that our hearers understand. I want to be as plain as possible. “Works” means **anything** you do or think.

Be sure that works are commanded.

Eph 2:8-10

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, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Hebrews 6:9 mentions the “things that accompany salvation....”

Hebrews 6:9-12

⁹ But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. ¹⁰ For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of ^{*}love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. ¹¹ And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Romans

But here is the problem: Works, while a necessary complement to faith, have no place at all in our being justified before God. But many, many preachers are telling people that in order for God to save you, **you** must first do something.

To the Jew, “works” involved obedience to the commands of God. Did not God prescribe sacrifices be made in very specific ways? Of course! But the sacrificial system was for the **worship** of God, not an evangelistic tool!

Where do men get the idea that **because** they have obeyed God’s command that that act of obedience is the **cause** of acceptance by God?

To the religious, yet lost professor of religion today, “works” may involve membership in a particular church. Any number of churches teach that unless you belong to their particular fellowship you cannot be saved. That is simply a form of works. Some also teach that you must be baptized or circumcised in order to be saved. That too, is a form of works.

There is the real danger that many who think they are Christian, especially in our Southern Baptist churches, believe that their decision, their coming forward to shake the preacher’s hand, their baptism is the thing that makes their salvation effective. Why do they believe that? Because that is what the preacher told them, and they are too lazy to study the Bible for themselves.

The devil does not care how religious you are as long as you are not completely trusting Christ. Christ alone, plus nothing and minus nothing.

One of our former elders was an accountant and he came up with: “Subtraction by addition.” If you add anything to the work of Christ you subtract from His glory.

Do you see how subtle the distinction is between faith and works? We can make even our faith a work **if** we believe that it was in our ability or power to make the transaction of being justified effective.

Notice that I am using the word “justified” instead of “saved.” Saved may be understood in three senses: You have been saved {justified}; you are being saved {sanctification}; you will be saved {glorification}.

Thousands are taught, “God will, if only you will.”
The truth is, “God must, because you can’t!”

Romans

The Word says, “... *being justified freely {without cause} by His grace through the propitiation that is in Christ Jesus*” ? {3:24}

Jim, are you going to teach Romans Chapter 4 or not? Everything I have said so far today flows from the teaching of Romans 4:1-8.

Read 4:1-8.

vs 1-2 “*What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?*”

Paul, how are you going to show that while obedience is demanded and necessary, that obedience is not the basis of justification, of being right with God?

Paul then introduces two of the most revered men in Jewish history:

Abraham and **David**.

The Jews said to Jesus, “*Abraham is our father.*” *Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham....”* {John 8:39}

“*While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, The Son of David.*” {Matthew 22:41-42}

When Matthew began to write to the Jews about their King he wrote: “*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:*” {Matthew 1:1} The Gospel of Matthew relates **Jesus** to the history of the Jews.

“If you want to understand Jesus you must go back to David and Abraham. Christ is ‘the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.’ You must know David and Abraham in order to know the Christ. In other words, if you want to understand the Lord, you must take in the whole of Jewish history. Without Him it is inexplicable. It was to Him that all the sacrifices pointed. It was of Him that all of the prophets wrote. That is why, for all of its difficulties, we can never dispense with the Old Testament. Christ is the Son of David, who is the Son of Abraham.”
Morrison} {George

So you can see why the Holy Spirit led the apostle to bring up these two men:
Abraham and **David?**

Romans

“What then shall we say that Abraham our forefather has found according to the flesh?” {4:1}

The following question of interpretation comes from Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

A question of interpretation arises as to whether “has found” attaches to “our forefather” or to “the flesh”

a) If “flesh” is understood ethically, or morally, that is, our sinful nature: What shall we say that Abraham gained by his own natural powers unaided by the grace of God, has found according to the flesh, i.e, by his works?

b) If “has found” refers to “our forefather,” Then: What are we to say about Abraham, our forefather by natural descent? How did Abraham gain his position of favor with God?

Does my filial relationship with “father Abraham” count for anything?

It seems to me that based on the boasts the Jews made as to Abraham being their “father,” that the phrase is referring to natural descent.

Abraham was not chosen because of Terah, his father.

And neither are the Jews or anyone else chosen because of natural descent.

“God never justified anyone based on his or her birth certificate.”

Charles D. Alexander

Abraham had nothing to boast about before God: cf Joshua 24:2-3, ***“And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel: “Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout the all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants {seed} and gave him Isaac.”***

And so, Abraham, the idolater, had nothing to boast about before God.

Paul quoted Jeremiah in 1 Corinthians 1:31, ***“... that as it is written, ‘He who glories {boasts}, let him glory {boast} in the LORD.’ ”***

Romans

Vs 3 “*For what does the Scripture say?*”

Paul has claimed that the Gospel is **only the manifestation** of the ancient promises {1:2; 3:21}. Now he shows the fundamental **continuity** that exists between the promises and their fulfillment also **extends** to the justification of believers in OT times. The Gospel spans all of human history.

Dr. Timothy George, Dean of Beeson Divinity School, gave an overview to his commentary on the Book of Galatians at the Pastors School and referred to the **continuity** of the OT & NT. Dr. George said, “Paul ran a pretty good N.T. church with only the OT Scriptures.”

Since there is **one God** of both Gentiles and Jews, who justifies only by faith, there is **only one way** of salvation. {3:29-30}

Cf. Acts 15:11 Please look at that verse in your Bible.

Peter, perhaps the most prejudiced of all of the disciples says:

“But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.” Did you get it? It’s not Gentiles will be saved the same as Jews, but Jews will be saved the same as Gentiles!

And here is the point: The OT saints were saved exactly like the Christians in Rome and Antioch and Jerusalem and anyone else who is truly saved by grace through faith alone.

This is a most important point. **There is only one way of salvation for all time.** There never was, nor will there ever be, but one way of salvation. That is the error of Dispensational eschatology which teaches that there is forever a separation between Israel and the church. They teach that God deals with the Jews in one way and Christians in another way. That is “another gospel”! They teach that the Jews will again be blessed because they are Jews.

In my discussions with men of the Dispensational persuasion they are highly offended when confronted with two ways of being justified; one way for Jews and another way for the Church. But there is no escaping that conclusion if you maintain that the Jews and the Church are separate and that they never come together in one body.

Romans

When we get to Chapter 11, we will see the “olive tree” is **the church**. Some of its Jewish branches were cut off because of unbelief. Some Gentile branches were grafted in, but it is one tree with a single trunk - One Church. A single olive tree, not a Jewish olive tree and a Gentile olive tree.

Genesis 12: 1-4; 15:1-6

The **Scripture** {4:3; singular} to which Paul refers is Genesis 15:6 which is the first mention of Justification or the imputation of righteousness.

Notice that there is no mention of works.

If Abraham was justified by works, then he could have something to boast about, but not before God. What did Abraham do? He **believed** God.

“Abraham **believed** God” **means more** than that Abraham believed there was God and that he went out from the Ur of the Chaldees.

That he did, but it was much more.

Abraham believed in Christ! What does that say about people today who say they believe in “god,” but deny Christ?

The **Gospel** was revealed to Abraham: “ *Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations {Gentiles} by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham, beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.*”

{Galatians 3:7-9}

John 8:30-59 There is the Gospel, Substitution!

Vs 4 You earn what you work for, the proceeds of your work are wages, therefore not a gift, not of grace.

We could say more on this verse, but I think we have covered its implications.

Vs 5 **God justifies the ungodly!**

Justification must be reckoned {charged, imputed, accounted} to be accepted by God. God is the Initiator and the Justifier.

“Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.” {Hebrews 12:2}

Romans

Amazing Grace! This is perhaps one of the most important phrases in all of Scripture: “... **Him who justifies the ungodly...**”

God does not make us godly in order to justify us; that is the Roman Catholic doctrine. They teach that in baptism original sin is removed, in the other sacraments righteousness is infused, and then God justifies you because you are clean {godly}.

That is also the implication of “decisionism.”

What does the Scripture say? “... **Him who justifies the ungodly...**”

Another distinction needs to be understood if we are to have a correct view of justification: God does not regard **us** as righteous. Think carefully.

God regards His Son as righteous;
God imputed the righteousness of God in Christ to our account;
God regards us as having the righteousness of Christ.

The genius of Paul is seen in that he gives us a positive and a negative illustration of imputation.

In verse 3 righteousness is imputed to Abraham!

In verse 7-8 sin is not imputed to the justified David!

vs 6-8 And not only Abraham; consider David {4:6-8; Psalm 32:1-2}

One principle of interpretation is to connect and compare texts which use the same word. The principle being that the word has the same meaning in both places and by analogy of Scripture you may understand the meaning.

Now this is not an absolute rule because the “world” in John 3:16 that God so loved cannot be the “world” in 1 John 2:15-16 that is not of the Father.

So in Genesis 15:6, “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted {reckoned, imputed} to him for righteousness,*” is compared to Psalm 32:1-2,

Romans

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not {not ever} impute {reckon} sin.”

Notice the close connection between justification and the forgiveness of sin. Those to whom God has graciously reckoned righteousness, the same are those to whom He does not reckon sin. You still commit sin, but that sin is not charged to you, it has been reckoned {imputed} to Christ.

Justification does not change us morally, but it changes our legal standing in God's sight. When a person is justified by God, it necessarily follows that God has given that person the new birth in regeneration, being thus regenerated, we have an awe of God, that He would be gracious to such a “worm as I,” He creates worship of the true God in Jesus Christ, and a desire to serve Him in obedience.

Do you see it?

What a savior!

Abraham saw His day and was glad!

David saw the work of Christ and was blessed!

Do you really see it?

Are you a Christian? Let me help you to know right now.

Can you say this very instant that you have the righteousness of God?

Can you despise any and all of your good works as far as they might have any merit before God for your acceptance?

Can you take your place with Abraham? With David? The ungodly?

Can you be satisfied to trust only in the blood of Jesus Christ?

If God the Holy Spirit has worked in your heart and you have never publically professed faith in Christ, and you have not yet submitted to believers' baptism, then you should talk to one of the elders of the church. We do not have the power to forgive sin, nor to guarantee that your profession is genuine. But with God's help we can hear your testimony and counsel with you. The “invitation” is not to make a “decision,” but to simply trust Christ and then make a Scriptural declaration of your faith in believers' baptism.

Romans

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God willing, next time we will see that Abraham was justified before circumcision. What is the implication of that? Not only was Abraham justified before he was circumcised, he was justified before the law was given to Moses.