

7. Justification by Faith Witnessed in the Prophets

Romans 4:1-8

In our previous studies we have seen how Paul has clearly demonstrated the uselessness of Law works, circumcision, ancestry and indeed all human efforts as valid means to gain acceptance with, and a right standing before God. Indeed the only valid means open to man is the 'righteousness of God without the law (3:21).'

Though Law works are no way to salvation, the Old Testament Law does in fact point to the only way and here in this passage now before us Paul proves this by two Old Testament examples. Indeed the Old Testament proves that men have always been justified on the basis of God's provision of salvation in Christ.

Please Read Romans 4:1-8

Verse 1: Having explained justification by faith, Paul now goes on to prove justification by faith from the Old Testament Scriptures, in the Law and the Prophets (3:21). This he does by first appealing to the 'Father of Israel', even Abraham himself. What was true of Abraham as regards how he entered into a right standing before God? Did it have anything to do with salvation by human means? What did Abraham discover to be the truth as regards this vital question?

As the 'Father of Israel', Abraham is a great place to begin in proving the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ. For if Abraham was justified by faith, then the current Jewish system will crumble.

Verse 2: How was Abraham justified? Was it by works? If Abraham was saved by works then it would be OK for him to boast about his achievement, but it is not so. Therefore he has no reason to boast before God.

Verse 3: The fact that Abraham has nothing to boast about is proven by the Scriptures, especially Genesis 15:6. Note that here once again Paul appeals to the Scriptures to prove his case and not human reason. That which Abraham did not have was graciously accounted to him because of the righteousness of another (Gal 3:6-9). The righteousness that Abraham did not have was placed into his account from a source that was outside of him by God. This Abraham received or appropriated by trusting God for his salvation and justification.

NOTE: EXPANSION UPON INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION: How did Abraham believe God for salvation? Explain. Perhaps you will need to refer to the Genesis 15 passage, and cross reference with Galatians 3:6-9.

God had promised Abraham an heir, even when it was humanly impossible. Yet Abraham believed God and the Lord imputed righteousness toward him on account of his faith. By faith Abraham had received the righteousness of Christ, for wrapped up in the promise of his heir was the whole gospel message (4:6,11,25; 5:6-21; Jn 8:56; 2 Cor 5:21).

Verses 4,5: So to the question raised in verse one, the answer is that Abraham had nothing to boast of, for this righteousness did not come from himself, but from another, even God Himself. Even the faith to receive this righteousness came from God (Eph 2:8,9).

When a man works and achieves his goal, he gets what he is owed. If Abraham had achieved righteousness by works, he would have received a reward of payment. But if this was a gift (and it was for it was given to him), it was grace. A person who believes receives the righteousness of God by imputation. Imputation is the placing or 'reckoning' of something to someone who in fact does not have it in himself or herself, it placed into their account as though it belonged to them.

Verses 6-8: But Abraham is not the only example, for there is also David. The passage quoted here is Psalm 32:1,2a (Ps 32:1-5), where David is rejoicing at the forgiveness of his sins and that of others on the same basis as Abraham. The thought here is of a forgiveness granted by divine grace and not on the basis of human effort. All who have received such a gracious forgiveness have truly been blessed.

In common with Abraham in this passage is the fact that this forgiveness is grounded in grace and not works. Those who are blessed have not worked their way into a position of salvation, but have had their sins not counted to themselves and this by imputation.

This passage shows clearly that it is the imputed righteousness of Christ that saves and not the faith by which it is received. The sinner's sin is transferred to the account of Christ and the sinner is also blessed for he is imputed the righteousness of Christ to his

account also. The Christian will never have his sin imputed to him, for it has been once paid for all time in Christ.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

How is Abraham the father of all believers?

To whom does the blessedness of acceptance with God apply? Explain.

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