

8. ROMANS SERIES: Justification Illustrated

Romans 4:9-25

Paul has shown that the way to a right standing before God is not by works of the Law or by circumcision. Rather justification comes by the imputed righteousness of Christ, appropriated by faith in Christ, to all who believe without exception. Faith is not a work, it is simply believing what God has said and done for us in Christ. Paul now continues his argument on justification by faith by returning to the historical illustration of Abraham and proving that there is no other method of acceptance with God.

Please Read Romans 4:9-25

Verse 9: Paul continues his explanation of justification by faith alone and is now concerned to show who may actually receive this great blessing as described in Romans 3:21-4:8. Is this blessing reserved for the circumcised only or are the uncircumcised also able to receive this blessing? He has actually already proven his case regarding this, but here he further expands upon that proof.

Paul's answer is simple, God accepted Abraham upon the basis of an imputed righteousness appropriated by faith. He will now go on to show that justification by faith is not determined in any way by circumcision.

Verse 10: In what state (circumcised/uncircumcised) was Abraham when declared righteous? He was justified while still uncircumcised, not after circumcision (see Gen 17:24,25; 15:1-16:4), therefore circumcision has nothing to do with justification. Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised, in fact some 14 years before, therefore the declaration of righteousness and acceptance with God had nothing to do with the rite of circumcision.

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: How is Abraham the father of all believers?

Verses 11,12: Abraham was already declared righteous before God, then received (some 14 years later) the sign and seal of circumcision (Gen 15:18; 17:11). The sign of circumcision was the outward sign of his righteous standing before God, indicating the removal of the guilt of sin and his separation unto God. It was an external seal in that it was a guarantee of the trustworthiness of God's promise of acceptance, marking him out as one upon whom God's promised blessing rested.

Abraham's justification by faith prior to circumcision proves circumcision as irrelevant as far as gaining a right standing before God (1 Cor 7:9; Gal 5:6; 6:15; Col 3:11). It also shows Abraham to be the father of both uncircumcised believers (being in that state when justified) and circumcised believers (because they too have faith), for this is what the Scriptures teach. The true descendents of Abraham then are spiritual, those who are justified by faith (4:16) and not those professing any works of the flesh.

Being merely circumcised meant nothing before God, for it was the exercise of faith coupled with the sign of circumcision that meant anything. It was only those Jews who exercised faith that inherit the promises made to Abraham, for the rest these promises were of no value (Philip 3:3).

Verse 13: The promise given to Abraham came through imputed righteousness received by faith. It did not come from circumcision and neither did it come from Law keeping (Gal 3:16-18), which did not come for another 430 years.

Abraham had been promised a land (Gen 12:7; 13:14,15; 15:7,18-21; 17:8), a great nation through him (Gen 13:16; 15:5; 18:18) and that all people would be blessed through him (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:16,29). He has become the heir of the world by being the father of many nations (4:17,18; Gen 17:7).

Verse 14: If then by Law keeping one enjoys the blessings of God's promise, then faith is of no value, but merit is. Also the promise is of no value, for none can keep the Law and therefore it ceases to be a certain promise (Gal 3:17,18). If salvation is to be attained by any form of merit, then faith and grace are void.

Verse 15: Rather than save, the Law brings wrath, for none can keep its perfect demands (Deut 28:58-68; Rom 3:20; 8:3). Without written Law conscious transgression of it is impossible and acceptance to a right standing with God through Law keeping is also impossible. The Law is to point out our need of another option for salvation and indeed to drive the sinner to the God given remedy for sin.

Verses 16,17a: The blessing of justification is received by faith that it might be freely given to sinners and the promise be fulfilled perfectly for all of Abraham's spiritual seed (Gal 3:9,29). This is so whether it be for Jewish people (with the Law) or for the Gentiles (without the Law).

Abraham is the spiritual father then of all who believe (4:11,17; Gen 17:5; 12:3; Gal

3:29), for together (Jewish and Gentile believers) believers from the world over make one nation.

The quote comes from Genesis 17:5, where the context deals with physical descendants (Gen 17:20; 21:1-3; 25:1,21-25); but this promise also goes back to Genesis 12:3 (including spiritual descendants).

QUESTION: How should we regard believers of other nations?

Verse 17b: This part of verse 17 is connected with the previous part of verse 16, *'the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all... before him whom he believed, even God.'* This speaks of the close, personal experience of Abraham with God and of the nature of the faith he possessed. His faith was one that rested in God, who is able to raise to life the dead and to bring into being that which is not (4:18-22).

Verse 18: Abraham believed God and expected God's promise (Gen 15:5) to be fulfilled, even though everything around him screamed otherwise (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 11:1).

Verses 19-21: Though many years had passed since the promise was made to Abraham and it had not been fulfilled, he didn't waver through unbelief. He was very much aware of the seemingly impossible situation, but his confidence still rested in God. Rather he was strengthened in his faith, glorifying God (Gen 17:1-26). Abraham knew the facts, considered what God had said and was still convinced that God was able to do what He had said. He trusted in God, believing the promise.

Verse 22: Because of his faith God imputed righteousness to him.

Verse 23: This righteousness by imputation was not recorded for Abraham alone (Ps 78:1-7; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 9:10; 10:11; 2 Tim 3:16), but as a testimony to those who would come after Abraham so that they too would know the way of approach to God.

Verses 24,25: It is written for all believers, for all that exercise faith have the righteousness from God imputed to them. Our faith rests in the one whom God raised from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose resurrection testified that God was satisfied with Christ's atoning sacrifice.

For the Lord Jesus Christ was delivered up to cover the punishment required for our sin (Is 53:4-12) and was raised again in order to testify to us the acceptance of His sacrifice, and the forgiveness of our sins.

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: To whom does the blessedness of acceptance with God apply? Explain.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

What is peace with God?

Why should we be happy to accept trials?

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