

The Faith Of Abraham

Memory Text: ““Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31).

Setting The Stage: “In many ways Romans 4 gets to the foundation of the biblical doctrine of salvation by faith alone and to the heart of what began the Reformation. 500 years ago it all began with Luther, and faithful Protestants have never looked back.

“By using Abraham (to the Jews, the paragon of holiness and virtue) as an example of a person who needed to be saved by grace without the deeds of the law, Paul was clear. If Abraham’s works and law-keeping didn’t justify him before God, what hope do we have? If it had to be by grace with Abraham, it has to be the same with everyone else—Jews and Gentiles.

“In Romans 4 Paul reveals three major stages in the plan of salvation: (1) the promise of divine blessing (the promise of grace), (2) the human response to that promise (the response of faith), and (3) the divine pronouncement of righteousness credited to those who believe (justification). That’s how it worked with Abraham, and that’s how it works with us.” (ABSG, Teacher Edition, The Book of Romans, p. 57)

Sunday – The Law

Romans 3:31 - 4:8

Romans 3:31-4:8. Paul cleverly lays out the relationship between law, grace, and faith. He then launches into sharing the lives and testimonies of the Abraham and David. By doing this he supported his ideas by use of the OT scriptures. In light of what his Judaizing opponents believed, this approach is a brilliant move.

“How is the law not voided?” 1) *The law is actually established when Paul shows that the Old Testament points to justification by faith, not by works of the law, as the basis for human salvation from sin. In fact, if justification had been based on our human obedience, it would easily produce either despair or self-righteousness. And both results have always tended to practical antinomianism (making the law of none effect—voided).*”

2) *If justification by faith abolishes the law, then there was no need for the atoning death of Christ to release the sinner from his sins, and restore him to peace with God. Christ died because the law could not be changed. It was that law that we transgressed thus causing us to incur the death sentence. If the law could have been done away with after the cross, then it could have been done away with before the cross, thus not necessitating a substitute.*

3) *Additionally, genuine faith implies in itself an unreserved willingness to fulfill the will of God in a life of obedience to His law.* Real faith, based on wholehearted love for the Lord, can only lead to obedience. The fact that Christ endured suffering because of our transgressions against God's law is one of the strongest motives for obedience. We don't easily and readily repeat a course of conduct that would hurt our family and friends. Similarly, we can only hate those sins that inflict grief on our best Friend of all.

One of the chief glories of the plan of salvation is that while the plan of salvation makes possible our justification through faith, it also provides powerful influences to produce in us a desire to obey.

Monday - Debt or Grace?

Romans 4:4, 6-8

Romans 4:4, 6-8 (see Ps. 32:1, 2). According to scripture, any blessing we receive at the hand of God is "reckoned of grace", or offered and extended purely on the basis of God's generous purpose. If we received that blessing based upon works or any inherent goodness, then that would make God a debtor to us. That would mean God owes us something. And is that the case? Not at all! We'd be sorry if we got what we really deserved. But the blessings/promise given is not based upon what we have done, but upon God's graciousness.

The story is told that one day a beggar by the roadside asked for alms from Alexander the Great as he passed by. The man was poor and wretched and had no claim upon the ruler, no right even to lift a solicitous hand. Yet the Emperor threw him several gold coins. A courtier was astonished at his generosity and commented, "Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?" Alexander responded in royal fashion, "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit my giving."

Paul uses David's experience now to confirm and further explain his interpretation of Abraham's experience.

"Imputes." To reckon righteousness is essentially the same as to justify. How blessed is the person who is forgiven, whose sins have not been charged to him, and who is therefore treated as a righteous person. No longer is she regarded as a rebellious sinner, but as a friend of God.

"Without works." Works are of absolutely no avail in atoning for past iniquity. No amount of good deeds would have brought David into right relationship with God again.

"Not impute sin." This is the negative side of justification – the forgiving of past sin. The positive side is the imputing of righteousness. The two cannot be separated. To emphasize only the first may rob this experience of reconciling and life giving power. The positive realization that God has not only forgiven me but has also

imputed to me His righteousness should not only find me with gratitude but also with hope and aspiration for the future. God wants me to know that He's not only prepared to forgive me but is also prepared to treat me as if I have never sinned. (see SC 62). He treats me as a friend, even a son.

Tuesday – The Promise

Romans 4:9-17; Galatians 3:7-9

Romans 4:13-17. The inheritance can't be dependant on the law, because God granted it to Abraham by promise (Gen. 12:1-3). The law could never do in a persons' life what is stated in v. 17 – “Who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.”

Galatians 3:6-9. Why do you think Paul first appeals to Abraham as he looks to the scriptures to validate his gospel? It was commonly held that Abraham was declared righteous because of his obedience. After all, hadn't he left homeland and family, accepted circumcision, and was willing to offer up his son for a sacrifice? Paul's opponents certainly believed that. But Paul shows that Abraham wasn't declared righteous because of his obedience, but because of His belief. Nine times Paul refers to Abraham in Galatians as an example of faith, not law-keeping.

There is nothing you and I can do to earn Christ's righteousness. It is impossible anyway. Think about it: I need Christ's righteousness because I have sinned. The wages of sin is death. Plus the law of God demands righteousness which I cannot give. In order to be counted righteous therefore, I would need to die for my sins, be raised back to life (by myself) in order to live a righteous life to meet the demands of the law. That's akin to picking yourself up by your bootstraps. Impossible!

Romans 4:9-11. Abraham was counted righteous while uncircumcised. Therefore justification came to him apart from the works of the law. **What are the implications?** Locally, the Gentiles didn't need to become Jews before being saved (Acts 15:1, 5). Righteousness was for both Jew and Gentile – for all. So because salvation is available to all humans, as they have been invested with infinite value, how then can any Christian ever dare to engage in racial (ethnic), class, and national prejudice? In fact, the death of Christ for all humans should deal an effective deathblow to bigotry. What versions of this variety of prejudice may be lurking in our souls?

Wednesday – Law & Faith

Galatians 3:21-24

In Galatians 3:15-20, Paul has argued two things:

(1) Galatians 3:17, 18. *The giving of the law at Sinai 430 years after God made a covenant/promise with Abraham, took nothing away from nor altered or changed that covenant in any way.* In other words, God wasn't changing the terms of salvation

from faith to works/obedience. Faith has always been the means by which salvation is received, and always will be.

(2) Galatians 3:19. *The giving of the law at Sinai was for the purpose of redirecting Israel back to God and the grace He offers to all those who come to Him in faith.* In other words, the law wasn't given as a justifier of sin, but a revealer of sin directing God's people to the only One who can truly justify – the promised Messiah.

Now to ensure that his readers don't think he is undermining the law, Paul asks and then answers an important question: **Does the law contradict the promises of God?**

Galatians 3:21. Paul responds with an emphatic, no! Who gave the promise? God did. Who gave the law? God did. Is God trying to hurt His own cause? Not at all. Conclusion: both the promise and the law are valid; they are not the same, but they do fulfill different roles, complimenting each other.

Galatians 3:21-24. **What is Paul saying about the law in these verses?** The law wasn't given as an addendum to the promise, to fight with or contradict the promise, or to provide another means of salvation (works rather than faith), rather 1) *the law was given as a revealer of sin to cause us to flee to Christ the great justifier of sin,* 2) *and to keep believers "under guard," or preserve them for, "the faith which would afterward be revealed."*

Many years ago an auto commercial captured the fancy of the national audience, no doubt because of the simple yet profound message it delivered. The commercial featured a woman driving a vehicle and thinking what it would be like to cross the lines on the highway and "go for broke." She remembers her childhood days when she would "color outside the lines" of the figures in her coloring book. The fantasy comes to an abrupt end when the voice of her kindergarten teacher jolts her back to reality. What did the teacher say? "Stay between the lines. The lines are our friends.")

The law is no substitute for the promise of salvation through grace by faith. But the law does keep us safe on the road as head toward the consummation of our journey, heaven and home.

Thursday – The Law & Sin

1 John 2:3-6; 3:4; Romans 3:20

No one today can be justified by works. **Then, what purpose does the law serve?** Why did God go to all that trouble to give His law if it wasn't going to serve a significant purpose; or does it have more importance than we realize?

Romans 3:20: "...for by the law is the knowledge of sin." *The law is a revealer of sin, not a justifier of sin.* It's like a magnifying glass, not designed to increase the amount of dirty spots in a garment, but to make them stand out clearly and reveal what can't normally be seen with the naked eye.

Why do we need to know we've broken God's law? We need to know, because without knowing our true condition we won't ever look for help and assistance. When I know how evil my heart is I realize that I need a change of heart, but I know I can't change it, so I go to the only One who can – Jesus.

1 John 2:3-6: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”

1 John 3:4: “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” A few hundred years ago, Irish writer Jonathan Swift wrote: “But will any man say that if the words drinking, cheating, lying, stealing, were by Act of Parliament ejected out of the English tongue and dictionaries, we should all awake next morning temperate, honest and just, and lovers of truth? Is this a fair consequence?”—*A Modest Proposal and Other Satires* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995), p. 205.

In the same way, if God's law has been abolished, then why are lying, murder, and stealing still sinful or wrong? If God's law has been changed, then the definition of sin must be changed too. Or if God's law was done away with, then sin must be, as well, and who believes that?

Thanks God that He has provided a way for us to receive Christ's righteousness.