

## 45. The Book of Romans 4:14-25

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*Paul's Epistle to the Romans*  
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier  
(3-6-24)

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In our study in Romans, we are currently in the second major section of the book—a section that is dealing with the doctrine of **'Justification.'**

In verses 21-31 of Chapter 3, Paul introduces them to the doctrine of justification by faith. Now, in Chapter 4 he illustrates the doctrine of justification by faith through the life of their greatest patriarch—Abraham!

### **Romans 4:13 (NKJV)**

<sup>13</sup> **For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.***

Paul wants his Jewish readers to know that Abraham was justified by *believing* God's promise, not by *keeping* God's law—for the law itself wouldn't be given through Moses for another 430 years (Galatians 3:17).

### **Romans 4:14 (NKJV)**

<sup>14</sup> **For if those who are of the law *are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect.***

Let me illustrate what Paul is saying this way—

If God said, "*I promise to give you eternal life if you 'high-jump' from the earth to the moon, or if you never sin*"—**faith is made void** (invalidated) because faith has been replaced with the works of the law as the means of salvation.

But not only that, the **promise itself is made of no effect** (made worthless because the condition would be impossible to fulfill—no one can jump to the moon or live a sinless life). However, if God said to you, "*I promise to give you eternal life—if you believe in My Son, based on what He did and not on what you do*"—then the promise of eternal life is a sure thing because *anyone* can believe.

### **Romans 4:15 (NKJV)**

<sup>15</sup> **because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is no transgression.***

The law brings about God's **wrath**—not His blessing—the Jews believed because God gave them His law they were *blessed*, but in reality they were cursed!

Why, because the law condemns those who fail to keep its commandments perfectly and continuously (James 2:10), and since no one can do that—all who are under the law are condemned to judgment (God's wrath—eternal punishment in hell).

**But where there is no law there is no transgression.**

**Transgression** means *‘the willful violation of a known law.’*

Paul isn’t saying that where there is no law, there is no sin—he will go on to say in Chapter 5 *“For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.”* (verse 13)

Let me illustrate it this way—say you’re driving down a country road going 50mph when the speed limit is actually 35 mph—but there are no speed limit signs posted.

You’re still breaking the law but you’re not breaking it willfully or intentionally—that’s what ‘sin’ is—the violation of God’s laws but not willfully or intentionally. However, if you’re driving down that country road and the speed limit *is* posted, and you know it’s 35mph, but you go 50 mph anyway—that’s a transgression—the willful breaking of known laws.

Before God gave His written law to Israel through Moses—He was still God who had His standards of right and wrong—standards that could (and were) violated by man’s actions long before Moses came on the scene.

Even though He held people accountable for breaking His righteous standards before He gave His written law (because He had written them in their hearts and set an ‘alarm system’ over them called *conscience* to warn when they violated those laws)—He didn’t punish them to full extent of the law because of their ignorance (Acts 17:29-31).

But eventually, God gave the written law so that sin might be seen clearly as sin (a clear violation of His righteous standards)—and therefore anyone who breaks God’s laws now does so intentionally and deliberately—and therefore can’t plead ignorance of the law.

So, Paul is saying that the written Law was God ‘posting’ His righteous commandments—not so we could follow the Law to be saved (He never intended it to be the way of salvation for sinful transgressors)—but as a way of showing us our sinfulness:

**Romans 3:20 (NKJV)**

<sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

**Galatians 3:23–24 (NKJV)**

<sup>23</sup> But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. <sup>24</sup> Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

**Romans 4:16 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> 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...

The promise of eternal life depends upon faith alone—so that it may be a *“matter of sheer grace.”*

At this point, it’s important that we understand that *faith*—is not a *meritorious act*.

**Romans 4:2-5 (NKJV)**

<sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”* <sup>4</sup> Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. <sup>5</sup> But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

Paul separates faith *from* works here, and doesn't make it—a classification *of* works.

Let's think about this for a moment—how can simply receiving God's gift of salvation by faith be considered a work—since when is *receiving* a gift a *meritorious* act?

Say that I am destitute and very sick—so sick that I am going to die if I don't get an operation soon—but I have no money for an operation. Then one day a wealthy man hears of my plight and hands me a check that is enough to cover everything.

In a very real sense, he is offering me salvation from death (physical) by giving me a gift of life. Now, is my reaching out and receiving that check a meritorious act? Will people applaud the one who receives the check or the one who gives it by his grace?

The same is true with God offering us the gift of salvation and our receiving it by faith.

Faith is simply our helplessness reaching out in total dependence upon God—the promise remains a gift from God—an act of sheer grace. (Ephesians 2:8-9) The law produces God's wrath and not His justification—God determined that He would save fallen men and women by grace.

In other words, that He would give eternal life as a free and undeserved gift to ungodly sinners who simply 'reach out' and receive it by faith.

In this way the promise of eternal life is 'sure to all the seed.' (verse 16)

One author draws attention to the words 'sure' and 'all.'

*"First, God wants the promise to be **sure**. If justification depended on man's law-works, he could never be sure because he could not know if he had done enough good works or the right kind. No one who seeks to earn salvation enjoys full assurance. But when salvation is presented as a gift to be received by believing, then a man can be sure that he is saved on the authority of the word of God.*

***Second**, God wants the promise to be sure to **all** the seed—not just to the Jews (to whom the law was given), but also to Gentiles who put their trust in the Lord in the same way that Abraham did. Abraham is the father of us all—that is, of all believing Jews and Gentiles."*

**Romans 4:16 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> 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...'

**Romans 4:3 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? "*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*" [Genesis 15:6]

A few weeks ago, we talked about this—what exactly did Abraham believe that caused God to declare him righteous?

Well in Romans 4, which is the exposition of Genesis 15:6, Paul tells us—

**Romans 4:16-22 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> Therefore *it is* of faith [*salvation*] 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 <sup>17</sup> (as it is written, "*I have made you a father of many nations*") in the presence of Him whom he believed--God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; <sup>18</sup> who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "*So shall your descendants be.*" <sup>19</sup> And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup> He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup> and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. <sup>22</sup> And therefore "*it was accounted to him for righteousness.*"

So, it seems that Paul is telling us that the belief that God could bring life out of death—or in other words the belief in *resurrection* is what allowed God to declare Abraham righteous—

As one author said:

*"In a sense Abraham believed in the resurrection power of God. By this time both Abraham and Sarah's bodies were "dead" to childbearing. But Abraham believed that out of 'death' God could bring life!"*

So many commentators hold to the interpretation that what saved Abraham was his belief that God could raise the dead. Okay, but just the belief that God can raise the dead in *general*—is that all that's needed for a person to be saved?

I mean the Bible records several resurrections in both the Old and New Testaments where God brought someone dead back to life—does faith that God has the power to bring dead people back to life automatically save us?

Well, it isn't the *general* belief in resurrection that saves a person—it is the belief in a *specific* resurrection that saves us—"*...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*" (Romans 10:9)

So, then **there is only one resurrection that we can put our faith in that will save us—the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ!**

As Paul went on to say in Romans 4:

**Romans 4:23–25 (NKJV)**

<sup>23</sup> Now it was not written for his sake alone that it [*salvation*] was imputed to him, <sup>24</sup> but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup> who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

At this point you might be thinking—"*Okay, but how does that work with Abraham—he didn't know about Jesus*"—or did he?

Didn't Jesus say to the Pharisees in John 8:56, "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.*"

So what did Abraham believe that allowed God to declare him righteous? He believed the same thing that saves all of us—the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

## **But how did Abraham know the gospel?**

Well, in Galatians 3:8, Paul tells us that God preached it to Abraham—

### **Galatians 3:8 (NKJV)**

**<sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed."**

- Some believe it was when God brought him outside (Genesis 15) and said in verse 5, "*Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.*"
- There are those who say that God wasn't telling Abram to try to literally count the stars—He was telling Abram to '*set them in order.*'

Or in other words God was telling him to read the *order* of the constellations for they tell the story of redemption (*the gospel in the stars*—i.e., 'the Mazzaroth').

The Psalmist said, "*the heavens declare the glory of God*" (Psalm 19:1)—and the greatest way God is glorified is through the work of redemption.

- It could be that God took Abram outside and showed him these constellations (constellations that God had named) and used them to preach the gospel to him.

Abram had the gospel preached to him, he understood the story of redemption.

- Remember in Genesis 22 Abraham knew he was acting out Bible prophecy when he offered Isaac on Mt. Moriah (Calvary)—(see part 9 of our Galatians study from [Sunday morning February 18<sup>th</sup>](#) of this year as we studied this in detail.)

Verse 17 says, "**(as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations")**

Notice the tense of this verse—God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 17:5, saying, "*I have made you a father of many nations...*"

God referred to His promise to Abraham in the past tense even though it wouldn't be fulfilled until many years in the future.

God often speaks of His future promises in the past tense, even though from our perspective it hasn't taken place because His promise is so certain—it's as though it has already happened!

(Check out Romans 8:30—"glorified")

### **Romans 4:18–21 (NKJV)**

**<sup>18</sup> who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "*So shall your descendants be.*" <sup>19</sup> And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup> He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup> and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.**

One author said,

*“Abraham did not know how God would fulfill His word, but that was incidental. He knew God and had every confidence that God was fully able to do what He had promised. In one way it was wonderful faith, but in another way, it was the most reasonable thing to do, because God’s word is the surest thing in the universe, and for Abraham there was no risk in believing it!”*

**Romans 4:22–25 (NKJV)**

**<sup>22</sup> And therefore *“it was accounted to him for righteousness.”*<sup>23</sup> Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him,<sup>24</sup> but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,<sup>25</sup> who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.**

This is why it’s called “The Gospel ( The Good News)”.

I was raised in the Roman Catholic Church and I was taught that salvation was a combination of what I believed and how I behaved—but Paul is saying that it’s not by works of righteousness that we do but by His grace (free gift) that we are saved—it can’t be both a gift we receive and something we earn!

**That’s why it is such good news!** The promise of salvation is available to everyone and is attainable by everyone no matter how badly they have lived because it is received (not earned) by faith.

Chuck Smith—

*“Now, we are always faced with, “Will I believe God’s word or not?” You see God says one thing and Satan comes along and says another. And Satan will seek to put you under condemnation. He’ll say, ‘you are a rotten sinner. You have failed so many times. You have no right to ask God for His help. You have no right to come to God. Look how many times, you’ve failed Him. You might just as well forget it. God’s not going to forgive you.’ And am I going to believe Satan? Or am I going to believe God? Who said if I’ll just confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in my heart that God raised Him from the dead, I will be saved! That God will impute righteousness to me apart from my failings. God justifies the ungodly!”*

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