

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

INTRODUCTION

A. Outline of Romans

1. Introduction (1:1-17)
2. The need for God's righteousness (1:18-3:20)
3. The provision of righteousness from God (3:21-4:25)
 - a. A description of justification (3:21-26)
 - b. Introductory comments on justification by faith in Christ alone (3:27-31)
 - c. A defense of justification by faith from the Old Testament (4:1-25)
 - 1) Abraham and David were justified by faith (1-8)
 - 2) It was not by circumcision (9-12)
 - 3) Concerning God's worldwide promise (13-17)
 - 4) Concerning Abraham's exemplary faith (18-22)

B. Review of Romans 4:1-8

1. Christians may only boast in God since justification is not by works but through faith in God.
2. Abraham and David show that righteousness is apart from works even in the Old Testament.
3. God's amazing grace is revealed in the fact that He does not credit a believer's account with his sins but with the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

ROMANS 4:9-12, OLD TESTAMENT JUSTIFICATION WAS NOT CIRCUMCISION

A. Is the righteousness of God only for the circumcised? (9a), *Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?*

1. Paul declared that since God is one, everyone, Jew or Gentile, is justified by faith.
 - a. Romans 3:30, *since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.*
 - b. Isaiah 49:6b, *I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*
 - c. John Stott, *At the foot of Christ's cross and through faith in him, we are all on exactly the same level, indeed sisters and brothers in Christ.*
2. In this section, Paul gives another reason why Abraham was declared righteous by faith, it took place before he was circumcised.
 - a. Douglas Moo, *This circumstance allows Paul to claim Abraham as the father of all believers, both circumcised and uncircumcised. Paul thereby makes clear that it is not necessary to be Jewish to become a member of the people of God.*
 - b. Access to Abraham's spiritual family is apart from works (Romans 4:3-8) and apart from circumcision (Romans 4:9-12).

B. The righteousness of God is for everyone who receives it by faith like Abraham (9b-12)

1. Faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness before he was circumcised (9b-10), *For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.*
 - a. Abraham was declared righteous by God.
 - b. Righteousness was counted to him.
 - 1) *Count* is an accounting term which means *credited*.
 - 2) It is the same word used in Romans 3:3 and 3:6.
 - 3) Robert Wilkin, *Thus, when Abraham believed God's promise, his debit account of sin was wiped clean and God credited his human account with divine righteousness.*

- c. It took place before he was circumcised.
 - 1) The literal translation in the Greek is *not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision*.
 - 2) Abraham was not circumcised for at least 13, probably 29 years after his faith was counted to him as righteousness (note Genesis 16:16 and Genesis 17:24).
 - 3) Grant Osborne, *This means that justification has priority over circumcision, and Abraham can thus be the father of the uncircumcised (the Gentiles) as well as the circumcised (the Jews). . . If it came after, its origin was the law and its works, and the Jewish system was still in effect. If before, then Abraham's faith was the initiating force, and Christianity was correct. Paul's answer is clear: "It was not after, but before."*

2. Circumcision was a token of the righteousness Abraham had already received by faith (11a), ***He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.***
 - a. Circumcision is a sign or seal of Abraham's righteousness.
 - 1) *Sign of circumcision*
 - a) *Sign* is a *distinguishing mark*.
 - b) The *sign of circumcision* is a mark of faith in God, not a mark of one's work for God.
 - 2) *seal*
 - a) *Seal* is that which *confirms or authenticates* something.
 - b) Walter Bauer, . . . *he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision as something that simply confirms the righteousness through faith that was already present.*
 - 3) William Barclay, *Circumcision was not the gateway to his right relationship with God; it was only the sign and the seal that he had already entered into it. His being accounted righteous had nothing to do with circumcision and everything to do with his act of faith.*
 - 4) Circumcision was an outward sign of the justification Abraham had already received by faith.
 - 5) Water baptism may be compared to circumcision in that it is an outward declaration of an inward event, spiritual baptism. Water baptism does not save a person but it does declare a person's commitment.
 - b. This righteousness was received by faith before his circumcision.
 - 1) Paul affirmed this in Romans 4:10.
 - 2) Douglas Moo, *His later circumcision added nothing materially to that transaction; it simply signified and confirmed it.*

3. Abraham is the father of Gentiles as well as Jews who receive righteousness by faith (11b-12), ***The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.***
 - a. God's purpose was that Abraham be the *father of all who believe*.
 - b. The purpose is two-fold.
 - 1) It is that the uncircumcised be counted righteous in the same way Abraham was counted righteous.
 - a) Righteousness is to be counted to them based on faith.
 - b) It does not require that a Gentile become a Jew.
 - c) John Stott, *For where circumcision divides, faith unites.*
 - 2) It is that the circumcised be counted righteous in the same way Abraham was counted righteous.
 - a) Righteousness is counted to those who follow Abraham in faith received before circumcision.
 - b) The circumcised must place their trust in God not in the seal of circumcision.
 - c) Romans 2:28-29, *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*
 - d) Grant Osborne, . . . *the Jewish people are no longer automatically included in God's family. . . he is "the father of the circumcised" only if they "follow in the footsteps" of Abraham's faith when he too was uncircumcised. Covenant status is no longer linked to circumcision or the law. It is attained only by emulating Abraham's faith.*
 - e) John Witmer, *Obviously, then, the rite of circumcision, which many Jews rely on for salvation, contributes in no way to one's status before God. It gives them no special standing before Him because they must be declared righteous on the basis of faith in God.*

INTRODUCTION

- A. God's promise to Abraham included all nations.
1. Many Jews believe that all of God's promises to Abraham would come to them alone.
 2. Paul reminds the readers that part of God's blessing to Abraham included that he would be the father of many nations.
 3. These promises are linked to Abraham's faith and not works as Paul declares in verses 13-17.
- B. Old Testament passages concerning God's amazing worldwide promise.
1. Genesis 17:4-6, *Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.*
 2. Genesis 22:17-18, *I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.*

ROMANS 4:13-17, CONCERNING GOD'S WORLDWIDE PROMISE

- A. The worldwide promise to Abraham did not come through the law (13-15)
1. It came through the righteousness of faith (13), ***For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.***
 - a. Paul strongly declares that God's promise to Abraham came not through the law but through faith.
 - 1) *For* gives reason why Paul did not mention law as he traced spiritual descendants of Abraham in verses 11-12.
 - a) The promise was made to Abraham long before God gave the Mosaic Law.
 - b) It came before Abraham's circumcision.
 - 2) Abraham's faith was trust placed in the faithfulness of God.
 - 3) Tom Constable, *God gave that promise to Abraham not because of his obedience but because of his faith.*
 - 4) John Stott, *What God said to Abraham was not 'Obey this law and I will bless you', but 'I will bless you; believe my promise.'*
 - b. *heir of the world*
 - 1) This term refers to God's promise that through Abraham and his descendants the world would be blessed.
 - a) Genesis 12:3, *I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you **all the families of the earth** shall be blessed.*
 - b) Genesis 18:18, *seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and **all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?***
 - c) Genesis 22:18a, *and in your offspring shall **all the nations of the earth be blessed.** . .*
 - 2) This term was only used by Paul.
 - a) It is a summation of descriptions of the promise to Abraham.
 - b) They include
 - 1] *Descendants*
 - a] Genesis 13:16, *I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.*
 - b] Genesis 15:5, *And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."*
 - 2] *Blessing to the nations* (see above)
 - 3] *Inheriting the promised land.*
 - a] Genesis 13:15, *for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.*
 - b] Genesis 15:7, *And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."*
 - 3) Grant Osborne, *"Heir of the world" sums these up from the viewpoint of the universal effects of the Messiah's coming. Abraham and his offspring would inherit the world through the victory of Christ over the world.*

- c. Abraham's offspring and heirs are those who followed him through faith not through the law.
 - 1) The heirs are those who were counted righteous by God through faith in Him.
 - 2) Galatians 3:29, *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*
 - 3) The promise of land is solely for the nation of Israel which will be fulfilled in the Millennium, Genesis 15:18-21, *On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.*

2. There is no promise if it came through the law (14), ***For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.***
 - a. William Barclay, *The Jews were still asking: 'How can anyone enter into the right relationship with God in order to inherit this great promise also?' Their answer was: 'This can be done by acquiring merit in the sight of God through doing works which the law prescribes.' That is to say, people must do it by their own efforts.*
 - b. *For* gives the reason why the promise can't be attained through the law.
 - c. Such a position destroys the promise based on faith.
 - 1) It is unilateral, all conditions that must be kept fall on God Who made the promise.
 - 2) Since no one can fully keep the law, the promise can never be fulfilled if it is based on works.
 - 3) Its impact on *faith* is that it would become *null, empty without content.*
 - 4) Its impact on *the promise* is that it would make it *void, invalid.*
 - 5) If the promise were based on works, there would be no heirs.
 - d. John Stott, Law and promise belong to different categories of thought, which are incompatible. Law-language ('you shall') demands our obedience, but promise-language ('I will') demands our faith. What God said to Abraham was not 'Obey this law and I will bless you', but 'I will bless you; believe my promise.'
 - e. William Barclay, *Paul saw things in terms of black and white. He saw two mutually exclusive ways of trying to get into a right relationship with God. On the one hand, there was dependence on human effort; on the other, dependence on divine grace. On the one hand, there was the constant losing battle to obey an impossible law; on the other, there was the faith which simply takes God at his word.*

3. The purpose of the law is to condemn (15), ***For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.***
 - a. The purpose of the law is to bring wrath not inheritance as heirs.
 - 1) *Wrath* refers to *God's future judgment.*
 - 2) Tom Constable, *Rather than bringing blessing, which God promised Abraham, the Law brings wrath because no one can keep the Law perfectly. Whenever there is failure, wrath follows.*
 - 3) Galatians 3:10, *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."*
 - 4) John Witmer, *No one can keep the Law fully; therefore God, in wrath against sin, judges those who disobey.*
 - b. The law specifies transgression.
 - 1) It gives knowledge of sin.
 - a) Romans 3:20, *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*
 - b) Romans 7:7, *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."*
 - 2) *Transgression.*
 - a) It means *violation of the law*, Hebrew 9:15, *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*
 - b) Douglas Moo, *Paul, then, is not claiming that there is no 'sin' where there is no law, but . . . there is no deliberate disobedience of positive commands where there is no positive command to disobey.*
 - c) John Witmer, *A person may still be sinning in his action, but if there is no command prohibiting it his action does not have the character of a transgression, an overstepping of a prohibition.*

- B. The promise came through faith (16-17)
1. It rests on grace to Jews as well as Gentiles (16), *That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,*
 - a. *that is why it depends on faith*
 - 1) *That is why* - Paul looks back to verses 13-15 where he shows that he is speaking of God's promise (*it*) to Abraham.
 - 2) Also, Paul gives the reason why the promise was not based on works but on faith.
 - a) *Depends* is literally *out of* in the Greek.
 - b) Robert Mounce, *Faith is helplessness reaching out in total dependence upon God.*
 - b. The promise *rests* on grace.
 - 1) The actual word for *rests* in the Greek is *kata*, *according to, by*.
 - 2) Since it is grace that maintains the promise, it is secure.
 - a) *Grace* means *unmerited favor*.
 - b) It is unconditional and unilateral.
 - c) It rests on the nature of God.
 - d) John Witmer, *Responding in faith to God's promise is not meritorious, since the promise springs from His grace, His disposition of favor toward those who deserve His wrath. The human exercise of faith is simply the prerequisite response of trust in God and His promise.*
 - e) Grant Osborne, *God gives the gift by grace, and we receive the gift by faith. Salvation cannot be attained by human effort but is entirely the act of God on the basis of his grace and mercy. The point throughout this chapter is that the gift is not a matter of merit and wages earned; rather, God freely gives it by his grace, and we accept it by our faith.*
 - c. Grace enables God's promise to be guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring.
 - 1) It is not dependent on those who adhere to the law to keep the law.
 - 2) It is for all who share the faith of Abraham, Galatians 3:29, *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*
 - 3) Abraham is the father of all who believe.
 - a) Romans 9:8, *This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.*
 - b) Galatians 3:7, *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.*
 - c) Warren Wiersbe, . . . *Abraham has a spiritual family (all true believers) as well as a physical family (the nation of Israel).*
 2. It is faith in God Who is Creator and Sustainer of life (17), *as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.*
 - a. *As it is written*
 - 1) Paul was addressing Jews as well as Gentiles and he emphasized his point from Scripture.
 - 2) Genesis 17:5, *No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.*
 - b. Abraham's faith was in God Who made the promise.
 - 1) God was able to produce nations out of Abraham and Sarah who were as good as dead concerning reproductive powers.
 - 2) Paul compared God's ability to work through Abraham to His ability to produce creation from nothing, Hebrews 11:3, *By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*
 - 3) Douglas Moo, *God can promise Abraham—and Abraham can believe—that certain things not now existing will exist because God is the God who "gives life to the dead and calls those things that are not as though they were.*

CONCLUSION

William Barclay, *Paul has laid down the great principle that the way to God is not through membership of any nation, not through any order or ruling which makes a mark upon a man's body; but by the faith which takes God at his word and makes everything dependent not on the achievement of any individual but solely upon God's grace.*

