

LESSON 4

RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH

Romans 3:21-4:25

Introduction

In presenting the sinfulness of all mankind, Paul argued that the Jewish possession of the Law had not resulted in righteousness. He conceded that the possession of the oracles of God gave some advantage to the Jew. The full purpose of the Law is discussed in Galatians 3 and 4 and will be studied in the next lesson.

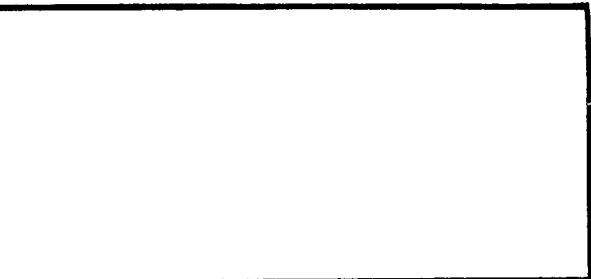
The Rabbis taught that keeping the Law perfectly would result in the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. God's presence had departed from His people because of their sinfulness. Righteousness would be established when the Israelites kept the Law, and God's presence and power would return in the restored Kingdom. The Pharisees zealously observed the Law in every detail (cf. Matt. 23). Many rules and regulations concerning how to keep it under particular circumstances had accumulated. Jesus detected that some of these rules actually evaded or transgressed the Law rather than established it.

When the question of the salvation of Gentiles arose, the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem concluded that salvation is by faith for both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15:8-11). Not all Jews were convinced that faith is the key to salvation. Paul's purpose in the Book of Romans was to show how new life comes through faith. He first presented reasons why Jews as well as Gentiles needed a righteousness provided by God rather than accomplished by religious ceremonies and laws. In his discussion of the doctrine of sin, Paul pointed out that the failure of the Jews to keep the Law made it inadequate for accomplishing righteousness. Sinful man's only hope is in a righteousness provided by God.

God's Provision of Righteousness

Romans 3:21-31

Since man cannot accomplish righteousness through legalistic works, he must look to some other source. Paul assured his readers that a divine

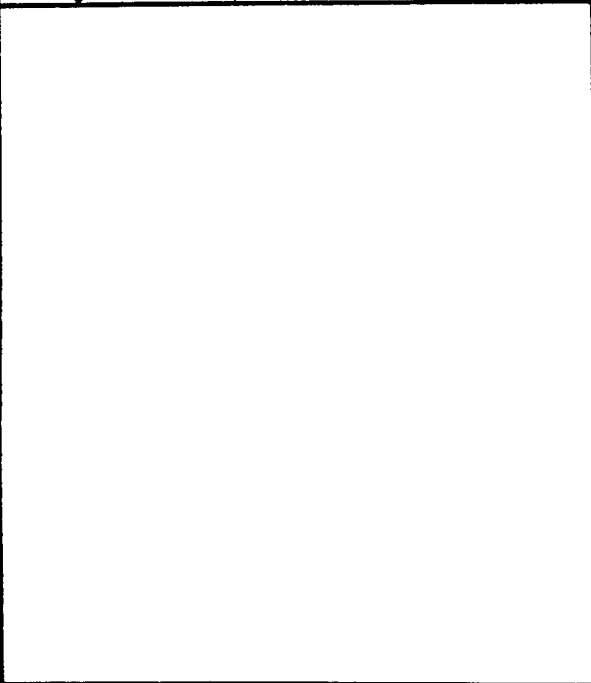


The two-fold result of keeping the Law perfectly, as taught by the Rabbis, was:

1. _____ *would be established;*
2. _____ *of the Kingdom to Israel would occur.*

The Kingdom could not be restored by the Jews keeping the Law because some of their rules actually _____ or _____ the Law.

(Righteousness, Restoration, evaded, transgressed)



righteousness which is not accomplished through legalistic works is manifested (v.21). This righteousness is not accomplished nor appropriated by keeping the Law, but "the law and the prophets" (the Old Testament) speak of it. Paul claimed support from the Old Testament for his doctrine that God provides righteousness through Jesus Christ. Man receives or appropriates that righteousness by faith rather than earning it through works (v.22). The righteousness is available to everyone including Gentiles who would be excluded if it were earned by keeping the Law.

The Jews needed the divinely provided righteousness just as much as the Gentiles, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (v.23). The Jews were just as incapable of achieving righteousness as the Gentiles; therefore, both must depend on God's free gift of grace for righteousness (v.24).

Dale Moody states that the old debate whether justification means "to declare righteous" or "to make righteous" has torn asunder what God joined together.¹ He suggests that God's righteousness is that which the believer "becomes" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). Through two works of Christ, the believer becomes righteous:

1. Through the death of Christ, he is redeemed (forgiven, cleansed) from his sins (v.24);
2. Through the control of the indwelling Christ in the person of the Holy Spirit (sanctification), he is guided to righteous acts and attitudes.

Redemption is Christ's act of grace through which the enslaved sinner is set free from the bondage of sin. The word 'redemption' was used in the Septuagint to describe God's deliverance of His people from Egyptian bondage and Babylonian captivity. Deliverance from sin is in Christ Jesus (v.24).

The word 'propitiation' in verse 25 has caused much discussion. Three related but slightly different interpretations have been proposed:

1. God sets forth for Himself a propitiation—a means of appeasement;

¹Dale Moody, Romans, Vol. X of The Broadman Bible Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), p. 183.

Verse 21 in Chapter 3 means that God manifests righteousness which is not accomplished through _____.

(legalistic works)

To "become righteous" means to be _____ from sin and _____ by Christ in the person of the _____.

(redeemed, controlled, Holy Spirit)

2. In Christ's death an act is performed whereby guilt or defilement is removed;
3. *Hilasterion* should be translated "mercy seat" instead of "propitiation", meaning the place where God meets man is in the crucified Christ.

Christ in His death replaces the Mercy Seat as the place where man meets God.

In the Old Testament, the blood of animals was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat on the Day of Atonement. Through this ritual, the High Priest represented all Israel in approaching God. The Covenant, represented by the Ten Commandments, was enclosed in the Ark under the Mercy Seat. Since man had transgressed the Commandments and broken the Covenant, his only hope for acceptance with God was God's mercy. The ceremony depicted man's admission that he had sinned and must pay a penalty or offer a sacrifice. The sacrifice itself was insufficient, however, to remove man's sin. It was necessary to depend on God's mercy. The ceremony combined the substitutionary death of the animal and God's mercy in order for man to be restored to a relationship with the righteous God.

God publicly displayed (set forth) Jesus Christ whose blood was shed as a "means of forgiveness" (propitiation—v. 25). The redemptive act of God's grace is appropriated through faith and not by works. In the sacrificial system, the Israelite was required to select an animal without blemish from his flock and offer it as a sacrifice to God. Christ is not the property of a sinner, but through faith the sinner appropriates Christ as his sacrifice.

Blood represents life; therefore, the shedding of blood is the sacrificing of life (Lev. 17:11). The penalty of sin is death. Christ's shed blood is the experiencing of death for sin. In His mercy, God accepts the death of Christ as the substitute for man who should die for his sins. Through the Cross, God maintains His righteousness without compromising with sin; yet, He is able to make the sinner right with Himself (justify—v. 26). Since sin has received the judgement of death, God would not be just if He failed to uphold the penalty which He did through His Son. At the same time, He is able to restore the sinner to righteousness. For sinful man, the debt of sin is remitted (passed over without his being punished) because Christ has made amends for (expiated) his sins (v. 25).

God has been patient and forbearing with sins which were committed previously (v. 25). The fact that God does not punish each person immediately for his sins is not the result of carelessness, laxity,

God meets man in the crucified Christ, in which act Christ is the _____ for sin.

(propitiation)

God accepts the death of _____ as the substitute for _____ who should die for his _____.

Is this statement true or false?

Since sin has received the judgement of death, God would not be just if he failed to uphold the penalty. _____

In God's mercy, the penalty was paid by _____ on the _____.

(Christ, man, sins, true, Christ, Cross)

or injustice on God's part. Through the ages, the Cross has been God's plan for putting sinful man right without compromising with sin. God's gift for making amends for sin (propitiation) was made public in the shedding of the blood of Christ on the cross.

Righteousness through the death of Christ leaves no grounds for man's boasting. Actually human boasting among Jews and Gentiles was ruled out by the demonstration of the universality of sin (Rom. 1:18-3:20). The establishing of righteousness through works, if this were possible, might lead to boasting (v.27). Since a sinner cannot establish his own righteousness, he has no personal accomplishment for which to boast. Because he becomes right by God's act of grace, he must humbly accept God's gift by faith (v.27). The proper Christian attitude is humility, an element of faith.

Paul's argument is decisive. Neither Jew nor Gentile becomes acceptable to a holy God through his own efforts or accomplishments (v.28). Their legalistic religious ceremonies do not make them right with God.

Gentiles would be excluded from salvation if acceptance by God depended on keeping the Jewish Law. Through righteousness by faith, they have an equal opportunity with Jews to be saved (vv.29-30). Both the circumcised Jew who transgresses the Law and the uncircumcised Gentile are justified by faith (v.30).

Paul did not show in his argument the relation of Law and faith. This relation will be presented in a later Scripture. He demonstrated that the Law is not established through sinful man's legalistic efforts because he transgresses it. Paul claimed that faith establishes the Law instead of destroying it (v.31). An explanation of how this happens will be given in a later Scripture.

Scriptural Support for Paul's Doctrine

Romans 4:1-25

Abraham was made righteous by faith (4:1-8)

In the Galatian Epistle, Paul argued that he did not receive his Gospel from the Apostles in Jerusalem. Possibly he did not mean to deny that he received the basic facts of Christ's life and teachings from them. He did not, however, receive the interpretation of justification by faith from them. This doctrine was revealed by God as Paul studied the Old Testament. Apart from salvation by faith in Christ, there is no salvation for the Gentiles; therefore, Paul's mission

Underline the correct phrase:

Man's righteousness is (his personal accomplishment, God's gift).

(God's gift)

In verse 28 does Paul state that a Jew or Gentile becomes acceptable to a holy God through his own efforts or accomplishments?

(No, neither one)

to them would have been in vain.

Paul's use of Abraham as an example was important for two reasons:

1. Scriptural support would have made the doctrine acceptable to the Jews;
2. Reference to Old Testament Scriptures revealed one of the sources of Paul's doctrine.

It is obvious that scriptural support was not limited to the example of Abraham since Paul had already interpreted Christ's death on the cross in the light of the Day of Atonement.

Abraham was the ancestor according to the flesh or forefather of the Jewish people. Judaism taught that Abraham was justified by works which gave him grounds for boasting (v. 2). Paul refuted this teaching by referring to Old Testament Scripture: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (v. 3; cf. Gen. 15:6). Paul used the same example as his opponents, but he came to the opposite conclusion. Abraham's righteousness and acceptance by God were reckoned (credited to his account) on the basis of faith and not as earned wages for his work (vv. 4-5). If Abraham had established his righteousness through performance, it would have been credited to his account as wages instead of as a gift. Since righteousness is reckoned as God's gift of grace through faith, it is available to those who do not earn it but trust Him who justifies the ungodly (v. 5).

Paul further strengthened his argument by referring to the experience of David whose works of sin made him unrighteous. However, God did not credit (imputeth) unrighteousness to his account, but credited him with righteousness without works (v. 6). Although David was guilty of lust, adultery, deceit, and murder, his iniquities were forgiven and his sins were covered (v. 7). David is a prime example of the unrighteous who are justified by faith.

Abraham and David, along with Moses, were key figures in Jewish history. Abraham was the father of the nation and David was the king who had made the nation a reality. Since they had been chosen by God for major roles in the history of God's chosen people, there was no question that they were accepted of God. Paul pointed out that their righteousness and divine acceptance could not have been based on perfect living since their sins were well-known through Scripture.

Using Abraham as an example, Paul made the doctrine of justification by faith acceptable to the _____.

One of the sources of Paul's doctrine was _____.

(Jews, Old Testament Scriptures)

David's works of sin made him _____.
He is a prime example of justification by _____.

(unrighteous, faith)

Abraham's justification preceded circumcision (4:9-12)

The Jews had emphasized that circumcision was essential for salvation. It was important since it symbolized the entering into a covenant relationship with God; however, God's blessings and promise which were incorporated into the Covenant were not dependent upon circumcision. Abraham was accepted of God and received His promise before the ritual had been established. The apparent conclusion is that God's blessings and promise are not dependent on the ritual nor is righteousness established by it. Abraham was made righteous by faith before he received circumcision as a sign or seal (v. 11; cf. Gen. 15:6; Gen. 17:11). A sign is an outward symbol of an inward experience. Circumcision is described as a sign of the Covenant between God and Abraham in Genesis 17:11.

Baptism is described as Christian circumcision in Col. 2:11-13; it is a sign of the relationship between man and God established by faith and not the means for making man right with God. Faith has always been the means by which man comes into a right relationship with God.

Paul stated also that circumcision was "a seal of the righteousness of the faith" (v. 11). Seal points to an inward experience while sign points to its external expression. Those who entered a covenant relationship with God through faith confirmed or sealed that inward decision by an external sign or expression of it. Since God's promise incorporated in the Covenant preceded the sign of circumcision and was based on faith, Abraham is the father of all who believe, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Judaism taught that Abraham was the father of the Jews only. Paul pointed out that uncircumcised believers were among the children of Abraham (v. 12). Children of Abraham are those who walk "in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised" (v. 12).

The promise was secured by faith (4:13-15)

Abraham's initial relation to Yahweh is stated in terms of promise rather than covenant. Yahweh promised to make of Abraham a great nation, to make his name great, and to bless him (Gen. 12:2). Implied in the promise is the condition that Abraham would worship and serve Yahweh instead of the gods and idols worshipped by his countrymen. The promise eventually developed into a covenant with Abraham's responsibilities to worship and to serve God spelled out in more detail in the commandments. Commandments or laws were given hundreds of years later to Moses at Mount Sinai. Obviously, Abraham's relationship to God was not established

Circumcision was the external sign of an inward experience of entering into a _____ with God.

(covenant)

In Colossians 2:11-13 what is described as Christian circumcision? _____

(baptism)

Abraham's initial relation to God was in terms of _____ by God. (See Gen. 12:2)

Keeping the Law was not in Abraham's first relations with God because the Law was given through _____ hundreds of years after _____.

(promise, Moses, Abraham)

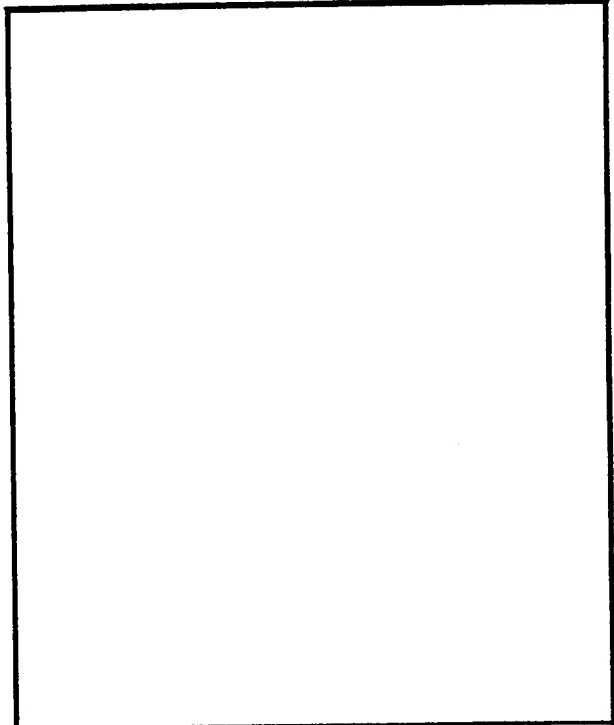
through the Law but through the righteousness of faith (v.13). The promise was renewed to the descendants of Abraham many times before the Law was given through Moses. If the promises of God and the covenant relationship between God and Abraham depended on the Law, faith would have been excluded and the promise based on faith would have been worthless (v.14).

Laws are used to condemn those who break them. Legislation passed by a state establishes legal and illegal actions. Other than knowing what is legal, a person is little affected by the law until he breaks it. When he transgresses it, the law is used to condemn him: "Because the law worketh wrath" (v.15). If a law does not exist regarding a particular manner of action, a person does not know if he is transgressing or doing right (v.15). Without knowing which actions are wrong, a person is not held responsible for violations.

Abraham's faith is an example to all who are justified (4:16-25)

If man were able to establish righteousness by works, he would deserve God's benefits and they would not be bestowed by grace (v.16). Since those who have the Law transgress it because of their sinful natures, they are unable to accomplish righteousness by works, and they are undeserving of God's benefits. God's promises could not be given by grace (undeserved favour) if man earned God's blessings. Man's sinful nature prevents him from earning God's promise as a wage, but it is offered to each one who relates to Him by faith. Faith secures God's promise not only for those who have the Law but also for those who do not have it (v.16). Faith enables Abraham to be father not only of Jews but also of believing Gentiles: "I have made thee a father of many nations" (v.17).

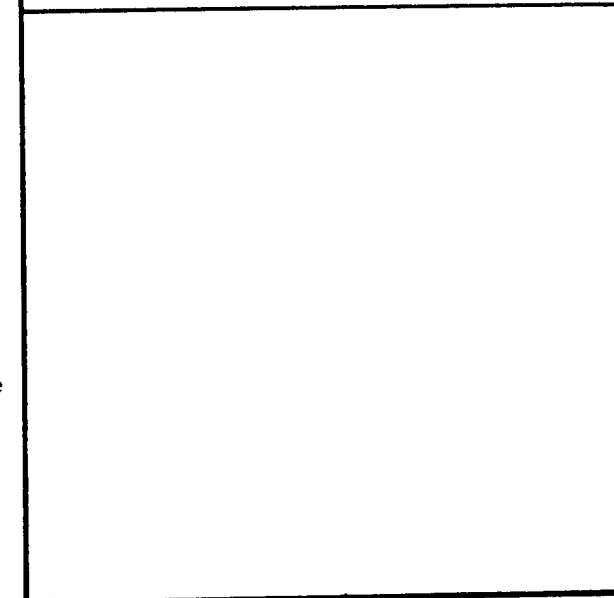
God's promise was important to Paul because of the Giver of the promise. Man is weak and inconsistent, and his promises and performance are undependable. God can be trusted to accomplish what He promises. He promised an heir to Abraham in his old age. It seemed impossible to Abraham and Sarah who had passed the age of child-bearing that they could have a son. But Abraham's God "gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist" (v.17-NASB). He held to the promise of God that he would become the father of many nations (v.18). When Abraham was 100 years old, the Lord appeared to him and promised that a son would be born to Sarah who was 90 years old. He believed God's promise even though "he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb" (v.19-NASB).



What prevents man from earning righteousness by works or obeying the Law? _____

What secures God's promise not only for those who have the Law but also for those who do not have it? _____

(his sinful nature, faith)



Although the possibility of the birth of a child to Abraham and Sarah was very unlikely, God had made the promise and Abraham did not doubt God (v.20). His confidence in God became strong, and he recognized that if a child was born it would be by the power of God. By faith, Abraham had the confidence that whatever God promised He was able to perform (v.21). His relationship to God was not established by a sinless and perfect life but by his confidence and trust or faith in God who called him and made him a promise. Yahweh reckoned Abraham righteous because of his faith (v.22). His faith qualified him for acceptance by a holy and righteous God.

Paul used Isaac as a type of Christ whom God raised from the dead. Conscious of his own utter impotence, Abraham relied completely on the all-sufficient power of God who gave life to Isaac in spite of "the deadness of Sarah's womb" (cf. v.19). Abraham's faith becomes an example to us who must believe in God's power to raise Jesus our Lord from the dead (v.24). Just as the birth of Isaac appeared impossible from the human point of view to Abraham, so the resurrection of Christ appears impossible to us. The impossible with man is not so with God; therefore, the man who by faith accepts God's promises is reckoned righteous and is accepted by Him. Although faith is an expression of confidence in God to raise Christ from the dead, His death was caused by our unrighteousness: "Who was delivered for our offences" (v.25). Christ died and rose again in order that we might be delivered from the guilt of our sins through Him (v.25). The resurrection is proof of Christ's qualifications to die for our sins, and the living and indwelling resurrected Lord guides man in right living.

The statement that Christ "was raised again for our justification" (v.25) refers to the renewing of our moral natures by the resurrected and living Lord. Justification by faith is more than the undeserving sinner "being declared righteous" by a merciful and loving God. It is the righteousness of God becoming alive and operative in the heart of the person who puts God's righteousness into effect by controlling and empowering the believer. Man "becomes" righteous through faith and he is not just "declared" righteous.

Match the following to show Paul's use of Isaac as a type of Christ:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| ___ Isaac | 1. Raised from death |
| ___ Christ | 2. Received life in spite of "the deadness of Sarah's womb". |

Abraham's faith becomes an example of faith necessary to believe in the _____ of Christ.

(2, 1, resurrection)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. According to the Rabbis, what would cause the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel? _____

2. Why were the Rabbis in error concerning the restoration of the Kingdom? _____

3. What is the meaning of 3:21? _____

4. What does it mean to "become righteous"? _____

5. What is the meaning of propitiation? _____

6. How does God maintain His righteousness through the Cross? _____

7. Why can the Christian not boast of his righteousness? _____

8. Why did Paul choose Abraham as an example? _____

9. Why was David a good example of this doctrine? _____

10. How did circumcision relate to the Covenant? _____

11. How did Paul show that the promise and covenant with Abraham were not established through keeping the Law? _____

12. What is the meaning of, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed" (4:16)? _____

13. What experience showed that Abraham received the promise through faith? _____

14. How was Isaac a type of Christ? _____

Supplementary activity (Level 2):

1. Read pages 44-54 in The Epistle to the Romans by Hunter.
2. Outline Hunter's discussion of "The Righteousness of God".
3. What two inferences does Paul draw from God's gift of righteousness through faith?
4. What is the meaning of 'reckoned'?
5. List Paul's arguments based on the example of Abraham's receiving the promise through faith.

Advanced activity (Level 3):

1. Read pages 99-119 in The Epistle of Paul to the Romans by Bruce.
2. How has God vindicated His righteousness according to Bruce?
3. Why can one justified by faith be sure of God's acceptance from the beginning?
4. What is the meaning of propitiation?
5. On what basis did God forgive sins in Old Testament days?

Seminar Discussion

1. What is the meaning of "being reckoned righteous"?
2. How might God "be just and the justifier"?
3. Who are Abraham's children or the true Israel?
4. What teachings did Paul draw from the example of Abraham's faith?