

Parson to Person

Romans 4 Part 3

"...to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.' Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

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... 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..., so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.' 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. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness.'

Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:1–25 Excerpt NKJV).

The following was modified, updated, and added to from the bulletin on 1-5-2020.

Of interest to me in the text above is that Paul broadly declares that the one who *"does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness."* This verse flies in the face of modern methods of viewing/evaluating reliable evidences for "saving faith" and justification. For example, Pastor John MacArthur says that the evidences of saving faith include "love for God," "repentance from sin and hatred of it," "genuine humility," "devotion to God's glory," "prayer," "selfless love," "separation from the world," "spiritual growth," and "obedient living." (MacArthur, commentary of the book of Romans 1-8, pp. 323-326). However, Paul explains saving faith and justification quite differently.

No one would contend that Christians aren't a people of prayer, have no love for God, are unrepentant of sin, etc. However, the list above is incredibly subjective and scarcely measurable. Moreover, the fact that God *"justifies the ungodly"* certainly suggests that men who have not demonstrated any of the attributes listed above are justified while still *"ungodly"* and thus no human *"work"* is required. Salvation/justification is by faith alone.

When we talk about justification by faith, and give focus to the word "justification" through the definition, "just-if-I'd" never sinned, we tend to think that God forgives our sins but remembers them nonetheless. In doing this, we get the Gospel wrong! God did say, *"Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more"* (Hebrews 10:17 NKJV). This blessing and promise is part of the New Covenant promised to Israel and enjoyed by all people of *the* faith.

Paul, when reciting David, gave special attention to this when he wrote, *"blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin"* (vs. 8). Of interest is also the hidden gem here recorded in chapter 4.

Several weeks ago I mentioned that Abraham was called by God at the age of 75 (Genesis 12:1–4). At that time, God began to communicate His promise to him. Closely thereafter, Abraham and Sarah journeyed to Canaan for a brief period. Then, as the result of famine in the land of Canaan, they sojourned to Egypt for the space of about 10 years. Following their return, God once again confirmed His promise to Abraham (Genesis 13:14–16 and 15:1–7) by an unconditional, one-sided covenant. Shortly thereafter, Sarah encouraged Abraham to take her handmaiden (Hagar) in order to help fulfill the promises of God. This was a big mistake. The result was the birth of a son (by Hagar) named Ishmael. However, God had promised Abraham *and Sarah* a son—a son of promise. Nonetheless, Abraham (through the flesh) attempted to assist God in the fulfillment of that promise. This, among other things, was what Abraham learned *‘according to the flesh’*—that God did not need his help and that the promises and blessings of God would come through faith—not by works. However, here in chapter 4 Paul makes no mention of Abraham’s shortcomings. He simply recalls the history by saying, he, *“not being weak in faith...did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God...and therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness’”* (vss. 19–22).

Paul provided no mention of Abraham’s lapses—and there were many. Abraham lied about his wife, required his wife to lie, demonstrated a lapse in faith when allowing his wife to lead him toward trust in the flesh and when following through with her advice. Abraham clearly was not a man who lived in “unwavering faith.” However, the way the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to report the history makes no mention of his errors. It reads, *“He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith”* (vs. 20). Praise the Lord!

My friends, the same is true for you and me. History can faithfully tell the story of our lives and of all our shortcomings. However, God remembers our sin no more. *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin”* (vss. 7–8).

Additionally, Paul mentioned that Abraham’s “seed” (used here in contradiction to his use in Galatians 3 where the “Seed” refers to Jesus) are all the people of the faith. This is glorious news, for simply stated, Abraham was justified before being circumcised and thus the justification God provided was not contingent on being Jewish and/or receiving the sign of the Covenant—it was by faith alone. Therefore, Paul concludes that the Gentiles have been given the same salvific promise that Abraham and his descendants were promised—if we believe as did Abraham.

This fact does not suggest that Christians have replaced Israel intercepting the covenant blessings God promised them. However, it does clearly show that the Gentiles have access to the salvation promised.

I love you all, Pastor Paul