

**"The Doctrine of Justification"**

**Romans 3:21-5:11**

**Part 6**

**Introduction:** In the past several studies of Romans we have been looking at Paul's answer to man's greatest need. In the Doctrine of Condemnation Paul made it very clear that every person is guilty of sin and completely unable to save themselves. He then went on in the Doctrine of Justification to explain that we are saved not by our works but by the finished work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. He detailed how Jesus paid the price of redemption and how Jesus satisfied the righteousness, the justice and the wrath of Almighty God. He also explained that because Jesus satisfied the righteousness of God we can then be justified/declared to be righteous. Now because our salvation comes by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ we have nothing to boast in because we are not saved by our works.

**Notice Romans 3:28**

Paul then went on to explain that God is the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles which means salvation is by faith for everyone. The Jew is not saved by keeping the Law while the Gentile is saved by faith. Everyone that comes to God must come by faith in Jesus Christ.

**Notice Romans 3:29-31**

Now to many this is nothing more than theory. There are many who reject this teaching and they cling to a salvation that is by their works which is no salvation at all. Let me show you a very sad example of what is taught in many churches today.

*"It seems that a frog one day fell into a pail of milk, and though he tried every conceivable way to jump out, he always failed. The sides were too high, and because he was floating in the milk he could not get enough leverage for the needed leap. So, he did the only thing he could do. He paddled and paddled and paddled some more. And voila! His paddling had churned a pad of butter from which he was able to launch himself to freedom. The preacher's conclusion was "Just keep paddling, keep on working, keep on doing your best, and you will make it." You may smile at this exaggerated simplification, but this actually describes the "good news" proclaimed by many churches and by every non-Christian religion in the world. It is amazingly sad that "Amazing Grace" is one of the favorite hymns worldwide and yet most of these same people reason that if you just do your best you will somehow **make it to Heaven**. The truth is that mankind, be he Jew or Gentile, is deeply*

*hostile to the truth of justification by faith alone through God's grace. Most people are much more comfortable with the motto "We get our salvation the old-fashioned way. We earn it!" This is exactly the falsehood Paul is addressing in this section."*

Because of this false doctrine many, especially the Jews of Paul's day, then view Paul's teaching of salvation by grace through faith as nothing more than "his theory". This then is why we have Romans 4. Paul will take his teaching and he will attach it to flesh. In Romans 4 Paul will point to Abraham as the supreme example of salvation by grace through faith. Notice the words of Barclay:

*"Paul begins to speak about Abraham because he was a wise teacher who knew the human mind and the way it works. He has been talking about faith. Now faith is an abstract idea. The ordinary human mind finds abstract ideas very hard to grasp. The wise teacher knows that every idea must become a person, for the only way in which an ordinary person can grasp an abstract idea is to see it in action, embodied in a person. So, Paul, in effect, says, "I have been talking about faith. If you want to see what faith is, look at Abraham."*

Why will Paul use Abraham? There are several reasons.

**1. Abraham existed before the Law was given.**

Those who teach that salvation is by keeping the Law have a major problem when they are confronted with Abraham because Abraham lived before Moses and he lived before the Law was ever given. Therefore, Abraham's salvation declares that salvation by faith was the means of justification way back in the book of Genesis.

**2. Abraham was the supreme example of salvation by faith.**

**Galatians 3:7-9**

<sup>7</sup> *Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*

<sup>8</sup> *And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.*

<sup>9</sup> *So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.*

**3. To the Jew there was no one greater than Abraham. The Jews held him in high esteem.**

So, if Paul could use Abraham to show that salvation was by grace through faith then he could use this Truth to break through the strong hold of Judaism. Now before we get into chapter 4 I need to show you that the Rabbis had the wrong view of Abraham in Paul's day and the same is true today also.

Among the Jews, Abraham was felt to be the prime example and model of a man who was **justified by his works**, and this false understanding was amply supported by the rabbinic literature of the day as illustrated below:

For example, the Mishnah (the first major written collection of the Jewish oral traditions known as the "Oral Torah". It is also the first major work of Rabbinic literature) makes a wrong interpretation of Genesis 26:5, in which God repeats His covenant promise to Abraham's son Isaac, declaring...

**Genesis 26:4-5**

<sup>4</sup> *And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;*

<sup>5</sup> **Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.**

The Rabbis take verse 5 and teach that Abraham kept the commandments of God perfectly and that is how he was saved. They are completely wrong with this interpretation. Abraham was not saved by keeping God's commandments, but he kept God's commandments because he was saved. James tells us that Abraham's works were evidence of his salvation.

**James 2:20-24**

<sup>20</sup> *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*

<sup>21</sup> *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?*

<sup>22</sup> *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?*

<sup>23</sup> *And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

**The Mishnah wrongly concludes**

*"we find that Abraham our father had **performed the whole law before it was given**, for it is written, 'Because that Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.'*

**The earlier Book of Jubilees similarly says,**

*"For Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life."*

So perfect was Abraham thought to be that "The Prayer of Manasses" concluded that Abraham had no need of repentance, declaring...

*"Thou, therefore, O Lord, that art the God of the righteous, hast not appointed repentance unto the righteous, unto Abraham..."*

Getting back to Romans 4 again, if Paul can show that Abraham was justified by faith then that would mean everyone must be justified by faith because Abraham is the supreme example.

Let us now see what Paul has to say concerning Abraham.

## I. Abraham's Justification

### Part 1

#### Notice Romans 4:1

In verses 1 and 2 Paul is going to make a point in the negative and then he will prove his point in the positive with the verses that follow.

Here in verse 1 Paul asks a question concerning Abraham. Paul has just declared that justification is by faith and not by works and now he presents Abraham and he is asking if Abraham's life contradicts his teaching. He is asking his readers to investigate the life of Abraham to see what can be learned from him. Really the root question is, "As you look into the life of Abraham tell me how he was justified. Was he justified by works or was he justified by grace?"

#### Notice Romans 4:2

In a hypothetical way Paul tells his readers that if Abraham was justified by works he would be able to boast in his works. Paul then says, "**But not before God.**" This was Paul's way of, "Abraham has nothing to boast in because he was not saved by works." Abraham could not so much as open his mouth before God. Abraham had nothing to boast in for he was a sinner just like the rest of us. Abraham was justified by faith which proves EVERYONE who comes to God must come by faith. Paul will now go on to prove this Truth in a positive way.

#### Notice Romans 4:3a

The first words of this verse are the key, "FOR WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURE?" The Bible is the absolute Truth and it is the final Authority. It does not matter what is written

by the rabbis, it does not matter what our parents and our grandparents believed, it does not matter what the TV evangelist teaches, and it does not matter about how I feel. If none of these are in agreement with the Scriptures, then they are WRONG for the Bible is the Word of God and it is the absolute Truth. So, what does the Bible say concerning Abraham's justification?

**Notice Romans 4:3**

Paul now reaches back to Genesis and quotes out of chapter 15.

**Genesis 15:1-6**

*After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*

*<sup>2</sup> And Abram said, LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?*

*<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.*

*<sup>4</sup> And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.*

*<sup>5</sup> And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.*

*<sup>6</sup> And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*

Abraham was saved by faith as he believed the promises of God. He was not saved by works! Now let me show you what Paul records in Galatians.

**Galatians 3:6-9**

*<sup>6</sup> Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*

*<sup>7</sup> Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*

*<sup>8</sup> And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.*

*<sup>9</sup> So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.*

Abraham was saved by faith and all who are saved by faith today are the spiritual children of Abraham.

Now I want to raise a question that comes into the mind of many who look at this text, "What was Abraham's faith resting in?" Let me answer this by showing you several verses.

**Genesis 12:1-3**

*Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:*

*<sup>2</sup> And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:*

*<sup>3</sup> And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

God called him and promised that in Abraham ALL the families of the earth would be blessed. Abraham believed this.

**Hebrews 11:8-10**

*<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*

*<sup>9</sup> By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:*

*<sup>10</sup> For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

Now let me show you something else that is recorded about Abraham.

Hebrews 11:

*<sup>17</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,*

*<sup>18</sup> Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:*

*<sup>19</sup> Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

Abraham believed that through Isaac God's promises would be fulfilled and his faith was so great at this point that he was willing to sacrifice Isaac knowing that God would have to raise him from the dead if he did.

Now, if we look at the words of Jesus concern Abraham we get a few more details concerning what Abraham believed.

**John 8:56**

<sup>56</sup> *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.*

Here is the key to understanding the saving faith of Abraham. He looked forward to the coming of a Redeemer who would defeat Satan and sin. This was the promise made to Adam and Eve.

**Genesis 3:15**

<sup>15</sup> *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

This is the first promise of the coming Redeemer, the Messiah. But going back to Jesus statement, "How did Abraham see Christ's day?"

**Hebrews 11:13**

<sup>13</sup> *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

Abraham, in his mind's eye saw the day of Christ as he walked by faith. He believed that through his seed the Messiah would come. You see the saints of the Old Testament were saved by looking ahead to the cross while we are saved by looking back to the cross. But it is all by faith starting with Adam and Eve. They did not have all the Truth we have but they were only expected to believe the Truth that was given to them.

**Conclusion:**

I will leave you with the words of **Kenneth Wuest**:

*"It was the act of Abraham placing himself in such an attitude of trust in and acceptance of God's blessings that made it possible for God to bestow righteousness upon him. It is like the proffered hand of a drowning man that makes it possible for the life guard to save him. There is nothing meritorious in the act of a drowning man in stretching out his hand in order to be saved. It is the efficient medium through which he is saved. Thus, the act of faith on the sinner's part is not meritorious but only the efficient medium through which God is able save him. The "it" [in Romans 4:3] therefore refers to the outstretched hand of faith of a sinner reaching out for salvation that God grasps in His own to lift him out of the mire of sin and place him upon the Rock, Christ Jesus."*