

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

Abraham's Righteousness – Part I

Romans 3:4:1-12

2000

Introduction

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible teaches that salvation is by faith alone!

But this offends our natural thinking, because we assume that justification (or a right standing with God) should be the reward of those who do good -- and withheld from those who do evil. We want to get our salvation the old fashioned way, "We want to earn it!"

This has been one of the most successful ploys of Satan in averting mankind from discovering the path of salvation. If Satan can confuse and undermine the doctrine of salvation by faith alone then he can fulfill his diabolical plan to take as many men, women and children into the pit of hell with him. So it has been his intention to convince people that they can be made right with God and guaranteed a place in heaven by performing certain rites and ceremonies.

Because of this, every false religion of the world is based on some form of salvation by works. Some are more sophisticated and attractive than others, but they all share the common false belief that man can earn his way to heaven.

I How Was Abraham Made Righteous?

The Jews who had all their lives been taught that Abraham was a prime example of a man who was justified by works:

They believed that Abraham:

1. Performed the whole Law before it was even written

The Mishnah's interpretation of Gen 26:5 wrongly concludes that "Abraham our father performed the whole law before it was even given."

2. Was perfect in all his deeds

The Book of Jubilees says that, "Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life." They believed that he was chosen because he was the most righteous man on earth during his time.

3. Had no need of repentance

In another Jewish book called the Prayer Of Manasses, it is stated that Abraham lived such a righteous life that he never had to repent! Quite a claim!

As a result, he was held up as an example of justification by works!

But, unfortunately, on every count the Jews were wrong.

In Romans 4, Paul in essence is saying, "Because you consider Abraham the supreme example of a man justified in God's sight, let's take a careful look to discover what actually made him righteous."

A. Abraham's discovery

1. The opinion of the Jews: By **works**

a. If so, he had something to boast about

Rom 3:27-28 "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."

2. The truth of the scriptures: By **faith**

a. Abraham **believed** God

Gal 3:6 "Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Believed what? Believed in the promises of God:

1. That he would have an heir (Isaac) - Gen 15:4
2. That he would have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore - Gen 15:5
3. That he would be given the Promised Land - Gen 15:7
4. That all the nations would be blessed through him - Gen 18:18
5. That he would inherit a heavenly dwelling (a city whose architect and builder is God) - Heb 11:10
6. That God would send a Messiah - the Savior of the world
John 8:56 "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

Application:

John 6:28-29 "Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

b. Abraham was **credited** with righteousness

James 2:23 "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend."

Application:

So the question is, "When is a man or woman saved?" "When does a man or woman become a friend of God?"

Well, Abraham was credited with righteousness, not after he made some great sacrifice, or after purifying himself of all sin, or when he got his act together, but at the moment he simply believed God's promise (Gen 15:6).

We come to God on the very same basis; simply by taking God at His word and believing in His promised Son, Jesus Christ. At that moment a person is made righteous in Christ Jesus and all his sins -- past, present and future -- are all forgiven and he becomes a friend of God.

Rom 3:22 "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

B. The two possible grounds for righteousness

1. If righteousness is by **works**:

a. Then it is not a gift but an **obligation**

If justification by righteous works were attainable by men, then salvation would not be a gift of God's grace, but would be a wage that is due.

Works → Obligation → Wages

If Abraham had been pronounced righteous because he had left Ur or because he had been willing to sacrifice Isaac, then he would have received a righteous standing as something he was due -- a wage. In that sense, God would have been paying off a debt incurred by Abraham's obedience.

But Rom 11:35 says, "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"

Application:

Sometimes, I have attempted to make God my debtor. When I pray a lot, read the Word consistently, memorize a lot of Scripture or share my faith regularly, I am tempted to think, "Hey, I'm doing pretty good today. I'm worthy of being blessed!"

But God will not be a debtor to any man. He owes us nothing. Never did -- never will. The reality is that everything we have and are is a result of God's grace -- unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. The natural response to such grace is worship and thanksgiving.

2. If righteousness is by **faith**:

Some people put faith in their faith -- in how strongly they believe -- which then becomes another form of works. That's not at all what Paul is talking about here. The kind of faith that Paul is speaking of results from a simple acceptance of what God says.

Faith = "Not belief without proof, but trust without reservation."

a. Then it is credited as a **gift**

Credited = Logizomai = Used 11 times in chapter 4

An economic and legal term meaning "To credit to someone's account"

Illustration:

1. Bill Gates taking personal responsibility for all your debt and its related penalties.
2. Bill Gates transferring to your account all his enormous wealth.
All you have to do is accept his offer!

At the cross, an even more remarkable transaction took place:

1. God credited to Christ's account all your sin and its related penalty
2. God credited to your account the perfect righteousness of Christ
2 Cor 5:21 "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Faith → No obligation → Gift

Eph 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast."

Rom 4:23-25 "The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness-- for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

Paul now references the second greatest hero of the Jewish nation, King David, in order to further support his claim that justification is by faith alone.

II How Was David Made Righteous?

In Palms 32:1-2 we find David describing the blessedness of the man who experiences God's undeserved favor and forgiveness despite his repeated failures to meet God's perfect standards of holiness.

We know that in addition to David's other failures, he is infamous for:

1. Lusting after Bathsheba -- another man's wife
2. Committing adultery with her
3. Premeditatively murdering her husband, Uriah

David's case was hopeless. All he could do was cast himself on the mercy of God. And God did have mercy and forgave David his many sins and even described him as a man after His own heart - Acts 13:22

- A. He was credited with righteousness apart from works
Blessed = Makarizo = "To declare fortunate or happy"
1. Blessed are they whose transgressions are **forgiven**

Ps 130:3-4 "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared."

2. Blessed are they whose sins are **covered**

Ps 85:2 "You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins."

3. Blessed is he whose sin will never **count** against him

2 Cor 5:18-19 "All this is from God, who ... was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them."

Application:

You may have made some really sinful choices in your life. You may still be suffering the consequences from some of those choices. But the good news is that if you have taken the simple step of believing in Jesus and living a life of confident trust in Him, you will be blessed. You will begin to experience the joy God has intended for you when you finally realize that your standing before God is not based on works, but simply by believing on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

So Abraham was justified or made righteous by faith. King David was made righteous by faith. But what about the rest of us?

III Who Is Qualified To Be Made Righteous?

Paul anticipated the Jews next question; "If Abraham was justified by his faith alone, why did God demand circumcision of Abraham and all his descendents?"

Many Jews believed that salvation was based on their obedience to God in being circumcised, and that, their eternal security rested in that rite. In his commentary on the Book of Moses, Rabbi Menachem wrote, "Our Rabbis have said that no circumcised man will never see hell" (fol. 43, col.3)

Acts 15:1 "Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

A. Only the circumcised? Or also the uncircumcised?

Gal 5:6 "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

B. The answer lies in examining Abraham's life:

1. How was he made righteous? By **faith**!

Rom 1:16-17 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Spurgeon said that "Faith is the aqueduct along which the flood of mercy flows down to refresh the thirsty sons of men." (<https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/faith>)

So although faith is required for salvation, it is never the basis or reason for justification, but only the channel through which God works His redeeming grace.

2. Under what circumstances was he made righteous?

a. It was not after circumcision, but **before**

Paul makes the point that Abraham was justified by faith long before he was ever circumcised. If you look at the timeline of Abraham's life, God credited Abraham with righteousness 14 years before he received the sign of circumcision.

1. Gen 15:4-6 records the promise to Abraham that he would have an heir. It was at this point that God credited Abraham's belief in God as righteousness.

2. Gen 16:16 records Abraham's fleshly effort to fulfill that promise through the birth of Ishmael by means of an adulterous relationship with Hagar – his wife's personal servant.

3. Gen 17:24 indicates that Ishmael was 13 when Abraham and his whole household were circumcised.

4. Conclusion:

a. Abraham was credited with righteousness while he was still an uncircumcised Gentile -- 14 years before God even introduced the covenant of circumcision!

3. What, then, was the purpose of circumcision?

a. It is an outward **sign** of an inward work

Sign = Semeion = "A visible mark that confers assurance"

Circumcision was a physical reminder of God's covenant promises.

"Circumcision did not confer righteousness -- it confirmed righteousness."

b. It is a **seal** of righteousness by faith

Seal = Sphragizo = "To set a seal upon, mark with a seal, to seal"

Among other things, the purpose of a seal was to mark ownership

Song 8:6 "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame."

Application:

There are many outward seals that people cling to today that they believe actually confers salvation including:

1. Water baptism

Baptism symbolizes a believer's death and resurrection with Christ. It is an outward sign of an existing inward work.

2. Communion

Communion symbolizes Christ redemptive act on our behalf which we are to partake of in memory of Him until He returns.

Neither symbol has merit or value apart faith in the finished work of Christ.

They do not, and can not, produce a righteous standing before God apart from faith in God. They are outward demonstrations and reminders of the inner reality of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Interesting point:

For the Jew, Passover is a collective symbol of deliverance and circumcision is an individual symbol of justification. For the Christian, communion is the collective, corporate symbol of our relationship to Christ; baptism is the individual symbol of it.

C. Abraham is the father of all who **believe**:

1. He is the father of the uncircumcised:

Gal 3:7-9 "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

- a. So that righteousness might be **credited** to them

Rom 3:22 "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

2. He is the father of the circumcised:

- a. Who also walk in Abraham's footsteps of **faith**

Rom 3:29-30 "Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith."

Rom 10:12-13 "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Abraham is the true father of all who, like him, take God at his word and believe Him. He is the father of uncircumcised believers since he himself was credited with righteousness while still uncircumcised. He is also the father of circumcised believers, not because of their circumcision, but because of their shared faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

If you are attempting to win a righteous standing before God by good works or through some religious symbol or rite, you have fallen prey to Satan's age-old lie and you will face certain misery. Sure, you will have good days when you foolishly think, "Hey, doin' good today!" But then you will have to face the other 99.9% of your life admitting that you have failed to rise to God's standard of holiness.

However, if you quit trying to make God your debtor and simply believe, you will experience what you so deeply need -- God's acceptance and approval as you simply believe God and trust in the atoning work of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is a gift! It can be credited to your account today!

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