

## THE MOST IMPORTANT PASSAGE IN THE BIBLE

### *Discover God's Grace Study Series*

#### Study #6 - Read Romans 3:27-4:8

Previously we learned that when we cease all personal effort and trust only in Jesus Christ for our salvation, God is honored and glorified (He gets all the credit). On the other hand, if we attempt to gain salvation through devotion, self-denial or obedience to God's commands, we dishonor Christ's work on the cross and glorify only ourselves.

#### J. Upholding The Real Purpose of the Law (Romans 3:29-31)

**“<sup>29</sup> Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, <sup>30</sup> since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised [the Jews] by faith and the uncircumcised [the Gentiles] through that same faith. <sup>31</sup> Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.”** (NIV)

Simply stated, what Paul is getting at in these three verses is that God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles. There is only one true God who justifies people in both groups solely on the basis of faith. Faith in Christ (apart from obeying the law of Moses) does not nullify the law of Moses. Instead, it upholds the real purpose of the law which was to make us aware of our helpless sinfulness condition and our desperate need for a savior.

The law was never intended to make us righteous, but to make us aware of how unrighteous and sinful we really are (see Romans 3:19-20). When we come to God with the faith of a child, receiving what Christ has done *for us*, we “uphold” the law's intended purpose of revealing our sin and pointing us to Christ.

#### K. How Abraham Was Declared Righteous (Romans 4:1-5)

(Romans 4:1-5) **“<sup>1</sup> Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? <sup>2</sup> If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way. <sup>3</sup> For the Scriptures tell us, ‘Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith’. <sup>4</sup> When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. <sup>5</sup> But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners.”** (NLT)

Q1. According to the verses above, how was Abraham counted righteous and made acceptable to God?

In verse 4, Paul uses a commonsense principle, “when people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned”. In other words, when you do a job you *work* for pay and you *earn* a paycheck. But this was not God's way of justifying Abraham and it is not God's way of justifying us (vs.2,3&5). God justifies us freely as a gift received by faith, with no strings attached and with no fine print requiring some form of payment.

Paul uses Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, to illustrate that no one is made right with God by doing good deeds. Paul says that Abraham discovered (what each and every one of us must also discover) that “people are counted as righteous, not because of their work [effort, devotion, etc.], but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners”. Abraham believed God's promise regarding Abraham's *future* offspring - who was Christ (see Gal. 3:16), and we must believe God's promise regarding forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Christ as well.

NLT = New Living Translation, NIV = New International Version, ESV = English Standard Version

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(Romans 4:22-25) **“And because of Abraham’s faith, God counted him as righteous. And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn’t just for Abraham’s benefit. It was recorded for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God.”** (NLT)

(Galatians 3:6-9) **“...Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith. The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God...the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would make the Gentiles right in his sight because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, ‘All nations will be blessed through you’. So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.”** (NLT)

(Galatians 3:10-14) **“But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God’s Book of the Law’. So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, ‘It is through faith that a righteous person has life’. This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, ‘It is through obeying the law that a person has life’. But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith.”** (NLT)

#### K. An Adulterer Forgiven? A Murderer Declared Righteous? (Romans 4:6-8)

Q2. Do you think that God would forgive someone who committed adultery with the wife of a loyal and trusted ally? If so, on what basis? If not, why not?

Q3. Do you think that God would forgive someone who pays someone, or orders someone, to commit a premeditated murder? If so, on what basis? If not, why not?

The answer to the two questions above is found in the following verses.

(Romans 4:6-8) **“6 David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it: 7 ‘Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. 8 Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of sin’.”** (NLT)

David spoke these words about the joy that comes from being forgiven and cleared of sin, based on his *real-life* experience. David, God’s appointed King of Israel, accomplished many great victories on behalf of God’s people (the story of his defeat of Goliath is legendary). But King David was also involved in a very serious scandal and coverup. A scandal and coverup even worse than those we heard about during the recent presidential campaign (if you can believe it!). You can read the full story of what happened in 2 Samuel chapters 11&12, but below is the short version.

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David had a loyal and devoted soldier and personal bodyguard named Uriah. Uriah had put his own life on the line many times defending Israel and protecting David. But once when Uriah was away at war, fighting for his king and country, David had Uriah's wife Bathsheba brought into his palace and had sexual relations with her. When, as a result, she became pregnant, David began to implement one of the most elaborate coverup schemes in human history. When his scheme was unsuccessful (due primarily to Uriah's personal loyalty and integrity), David ordered the murder of Uriah under the ruse of a 'casualty of war'. When, Uriah was killed *in the line of duty* (in the very act of fighting for David), David casually dismissed it as an unfortunate consequence of war and subsequently took Bathsheba as his wife! After David committed this great wickedness, an extended period of time elapsed without any admission of guilt or responsibility on David's part. In fact, it was only after God directly confronted David (through the prophet Nathan) that David finally admitted his sin.

As a result of what David did, the name of God was ridiculed and maligned, and David experienced various naturally occurring consequences (family incest and rape, a rebellious son who was killed, and even the temporary loss of his kingdom). In addition, he received discipline and correction from God which resulted in significant loss of life within the nation of Israel. However, when it was all said and done (and this is the most remarkable part of the story!), David was fully forgiven and declared perfectly righteous by God. This in itself seems to be scandalous and a major coverup! How can someone who is clearly guilty of adultery and murder *get off* without any long term punishment? Why in the world would God clear David's record and pronounce His verdict that David was 'permanently forgiven and perfectly righteous'?

The answer is that, although David was truly wicked and perhaps one of the worst sinners who has ever lived, He was completely forgiven by God, because of the fact that a *substitute* (who was pictured in the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant) bore all of the wrath and punishment that David deserved. David believed God's promise that He would send a future redeemer who would pay the full penalty for all sin (the same redeemer who took *our* place on the cross!). David was declared 'righteous' based on the righteousness of another (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Over and over in the Old Testament (including many of the Psalms written by David himself), God announced that He would send His Son as Messiah and Savior to purge away man's sins once and for all, and to reign forever over Israel and the world (ruling on "the throne of David"). Not only did the Old Testament prophecies point to Christ's coming, but the thousands of daily, weekly and annual sacrifices offered in Israel (by David and others) vividly portrayed the future and ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God who, would in Himself, bear the sin of the entire world! This is why salvation is by grace through faith alone. On the cross Jesus bore David's sins and ours. This is grace!

As a result, David could speak freely and without hesitation of the happiness of those "who are declared righteous without working for it" and he could revel in the joy of those "whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight...whose record the Lord has cleared of sin". He knew that he was guilty ("bloodguilty") of great evil, but he also knew firsthand that his sins would never ever be held against him!

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