

96-04-12b

Okay, we're back from our break and as we have now established, we're, I think, or hopefully we're convinced that this is a message for us. This is a choice that we are going to make as believers as we view our Christian life. Are we going to try to either consciously or unconsciously look at the actions in our life, the things that we accomplish, the number of people we evangelize, the way that we are perceived by our fellow believers, the standing that we have in our church or in our fellowship of believers? Do we sort of look at that and say, well, I've done my bit, I've participated, I've engaged in these various things and I expect that God will declare me righteous.

This is the kind of thinking that Paul is addressing. It took a very obvious form in Judaism, but it permeates our Christian society today. And if you read books, if you look at the productions of Christian psychology, the various ministries that seek to breathe new life into old churches and so forth, it's all oriented to let's get the people fired up to look like what they should look like and do what they should do.

And it's this kind of thinking. It's a failure to recognize that we have a different purpose in this age. If we were called to works, we would be in the Old Testament age, and those works and our failure to be able to completely and perfectly observe and do them would be making a point in God's plan, which is we're unrighteous, we're under sin.

Even after faith in God, faith in Christ, we still have sin. This is why God leaves us here after salvation. Once we have been delivered from the penalty for not believing in God, we have a purpose in our life.

We've been recruited for a purpose, and that's to live a life that is well-pleasing in God's sight and to be a place where God's righteousness is demonstrated. So it's critically important for us to understand how that righteousness is obtained. Where does that fruit that is pleasing to God come from? Does it come from what we do, what others see us do, or does it come in another way? And Paul is making the point that it's what we believe that establishes the grounds for God's righteousness because God will account righteousness to us when we trust Him.

It is not works of righteousness that we do that saves us, and it's not works of righteousness that we do that makes us righteous in God's sight as believers. It's what we believe. When we put ourselves on the ground of faith, when we're accepting reality based on what God says, and we're viewing life and setting priorities and making decisions and thinking thoughts based on what we accept of what God says, God will account us righteous, and it's His righteousness.

He imputes it. We don't earn it. We don't create it.

We don't perform it. It is whether or not we're living by faith, we are declared righteous. Just like when we were saved, we didn't earn or deserve the positional righteousness of Christ.

We believed in Christ, and God accounted it to us, imputed it to us at the point of our salvation. As you receive Christ, so walk, and the same principle applies. We don't create righteousness.

We don't produce righteousness in our lives. We trust God, and God accounts righteousness to us based on that faith. In living the life of faith, our actions will work out that deliverance.

This is the balancing effect that James gives us. It almost looks like there's a contradiction when you read James, because Paul says works don't justify, and James says if you don't have works, your faith is dead. What's the reconciliation of those two viewpoints? Neither one of them makes a point for works apart from faith.

Paul says stop worrying about works and concentrate on faith. James says if you really do have faith, it's going to manifest itself in deeds. If you don't have a lifestyle and actions and priorities that reflect faith, you don't have faith.

That's James' point. Paul is arguing forward from faith, and James is arguing backward from lifestyle. There were people who claimed to have faith and say, well, I believe God, and we do this today.

There are a lot of people who say, well, I'm sure that my life is in God's hands, and I know that God has promised to provide and so forth, and yet we can worry. We sit and fret and lose sleep and agonize over whether or not something is really going to take place. We claim that we trust God and that we believe His promises, but our life doesn't reflect it.

Our life says, well, I really believe God helps those who help themselves, and I better get busy and help myself. James makes the point that you need to go back and review whether or not you really have faith if your life doesn't reflect faith. Paul is saying don't think that righteousness is going to come by what you do.

He's saying don't think that righteousness, being declared righteous in God's sight, comes through faith. So both of them are making a case for faith. They're just approaching it from different directions.

And so Paul is going to continue his argument here. He closes chapter 3, or this section of his letter, by saying, if we make the point that there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith, God is going to justify, declare righteous believers at their judgment based on faith, how much they trusted God, what kind of reality they constructed in their soul. If you think about faith, what is it really? It's deciding what's real, what's true.

Someone can rush into a theater and yell fire, and you have to make a decision about the likelihood that there really is a fire. Someone makes a statement, you have to decide how likely it really is. Someone can come in and say, eating eggs, the white and the yolk, will kill you with cholesterol.

Well, you have to make a judgment as to how much stock to place in that statement. And one of the things that happens in American society, and probably all over the world, but certainly in our country, is that when science says something, we take it as reality. Studies have shown that this particular food produces this result, or this behavior produces this result, or this habit produces this result.

When science says it, we accept it without question. Very seldom do we go back and review the credentials and the testing method and the laboratory procedures and we just say, well, it's science, science has done it, it has to be right. Science says that, you know, feed a cold and starve a fever or starve a whatever it is.

Whatever they say, we just accept it, and that becomes a reality, and we live our life in the light of that, and that's faith. So, faith in God's Word says that when God makes a promise, when God states a principle, when God puts forth a proposition, that becomes a construct in our soul that is just as solid and just as firm as concrete and rebar. We say, okay, that's the case, and we accept it, and we live our life, set our priorities, make our decisions, perform our actions, based on what God says is true.

God says all things are good for food if they are taken with thanksgiving. Okay, if that's what God says, that's real. All foods are good.

God also says, argues for a balanced lifestyle. There is some profit to bodily exercise, Paul tells Timothy. Bodily exercise has a little profit, but there's greater profit in godliness.

So, if I have a choice and can only do one of two things, either go run or study, study is more profitable. It doesn't mean running is unprofitable. And so, we look at the statements of Scripture, treat them as fact, and act accordingly, and that's faith.

And the more we do that, and the more of our view of reality is constructed out of biblical building blocks, the more God is going to account righteousness to us. And our life is going to naturally reflect, in works, the things that have happened in our soul. Our mind has been renewed.

And we don't worry about moth corrupting, and thieves breaking in and stealing and so forth, because we're not putting stock in what we have on this earth. And so, the prospect of losing material possessions doesn't create instability, it doesn't make us lose our peace, because we don't account importance as being in the treasure that's on earth. We look at whether or not we're living the life that is worthy, that pleases God.

That's what Paul is arguing for, and it's a very, very pertinent message for us, because everything in our culture, and everything in our Christian culture, tries to pull us in another direction. And so, this is very pertinent for us. And Paul is going to go back and make a very, very powerful argument for the audience that he's addressing, which are Jewish Christians who still see the law as a means of being declared righteous.

He starts in chapter 4, and he says, What then shall we say about Abraham, our father, according to the flesh? The new King James says, What then shall we say that Abraham, our father, has found according to the flesh? And the reason for these two is that the word *heurisco* here, remember Eureka? Everybody that took California history, Eureka, I have found it, it's on the state flag. Eureka is from *heurisco*, which means to find or to discover something. And it's not clear in the Greek grammar here whether we are discovering something about Abraham or what shall we say that Abraham discovered in this regard.

It doesn't make a whole lot of difference either way. Paul is introducing Abraham as an illustration. And in the light of the argument that he's just made about the importance of faith rather than works of the law, he's going to say, let's take Abraham as a case in point.

Now, this is great because all of the Jews, Abraham is our father. Remember all the discussions Jesus got into with the Pharisees? Well, Abraham is our father. And this was a favorite foundation.

And in the argument of the rabbis and the teachers, the Pharisees and so forth, they love to point to Genesis 22 where Abraham took Isaac up the mountain. And in his obedience to God's Word, he was justified. Well, Paul is going to lever them off of the mountain here by going back before that time and saying, let's go back and see what Scripture really says about Abraham being declared righteous.

You can find this in the Jewish writings that were extant in this day. They always loved to go back to Abraham and taking Isaac up the mountain. It was his obedience, it was his works that justified it.

So Paul is going to make an even greater point out of Abraham. He says, what shall we say about Abraham? What did he find or what do we find in his experience? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about. Now, in 4.2, you may be familiar with the conditional clauses in Greek.

We have different ifs. We have if and it's true, if and it's not true, if maybe yes, maybe no, or if I wish it were, but it's not. Well, this is a first-class condition.

This is the particle *Ei* plus the indicative, which is a first-class condition, if and it's assumed to be true, at least for the sake of argument. Now, there's a little bit of a fallacy because not all first-class conditions are literally true, but they're assumed to be true for the argument. So basically, Paul is saying, let's say Abraham was justified by works.

If he was justified by works, he has something to boast about, if that's true, but not before God. Even if Abraham lived a perfect life and has something to boast about because he's done it and nobody else did, he still can't boast before God, is the point here. There is no boasting before God when it comes to righteousness because we don't create any righteousness.

God is the source of it, and we have no boast when it comes to righteousness, no matter how good we are, action-wise. Then he makes his point in verse 3, what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and this is Pistuo in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament, just like it is here. Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

This is logizimae, and Paul is going to use this word in this chapter to talk about being accounted or being credited with something. This was accounted to him for righteousness. He says in verse 4, now to him who works, wages are not counted as grace or a gift but as a debt.

If you earn something, then it's not a gift, it's not grace, it's tip for tat, it's wages for labor performed. But to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted, logizimae, for righteousness. So what Paul is arguing here is there's a difference between this righteousness that might be earned, but he says earned righteousness doesn't give you a boast before God.

The righteousness that is at stake here is accounted righteousness. This is the righteousness that Abraham got. If you want to be a follower of Abraham and a true child of Abraham, then you want to get the righteousness that Abraham got.

And Abraham didn't earn righteousness, Abraham was imputed or accounted with righteousness. And that's the righteousness that God wants us to have, is this accounted righteousness. So it's not earnable.

You can't work for it and gain it. And that's Paul's point. To him who works, it's not grace, it's a debt.

But to him who does not work but trusts or believes him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. David declares this. He declares the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes or declares righteousness apart from works.

This is from Psalm 32, I believe. 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.

And this word here in verse 8 is logizimai. And so Paul is saying, look at what David says. David says it's not a matter of what you do, it's a matter of what God accounts.

And he says, blessed is the man that God does not account sin to. God is either going to account sin or account righteousness. This is all in the judgment of God.

And so he says, the issue in David's mind, back in the Psalms, is you're blessed if God does not account sin to you. So then he continues in verse 9, does this blessedness come upon the circumcised 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.

And this is the beautiful part of Paul's argument because by close observation of what Scripture says, we find out that God accounted righteousness to Abraham before the covenant of circumcision. In fact, by the reckoning of the rabbis, apparently 29 years elapsed between the time that Abraham believed God and the time that he actually underwent this circumcision. So, how then was it accounted? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.

And he received the sign of circumcision, which was a seal of the righteousness of faith, which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe. In other words, circumcision was a visible manifestation of the fact that Abraham had been declared righteous by God. And that was a reflection of something that had occurred earlier.

And that of course is the relationship in our lives. Our righteous deeds, our acts of ministry, the things that other people can see and tell that we are believers in God and that we are doing what is right, our obedience, action-wise, should be like circumcision. It should be a seal, it should be a reflection of the fact that God has accounted us righteous because of our faith.

And so, it is going to be a result, a symptom, a side effect of the fact that we trust God and God has accounted us righteous. So it isn't a means, it's a result. One of the great things to trace in Scripture is the difference between what is a means and what is a result.

In our study of Colossians, when Paul mentions faith, hope, and love, we saw that faith, if you boil it down, faith is the means, hope is the motivation, and love is the result in the Christian life. Hope is the motive. Why should we bother to be obedient? Why should we bother to trust God, except that there is an expectation? This is what Hebrews 11, 6 says.

He that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Paul says that if there is no resurrection, we have no future expectation. We are of all men most miserable.

Christ is not raised, your faith is in vain. The whole point of living the life of faith is that we have an expectation that God will fulfill His promise, that there is a purpose in living the life of faith, and in not pursuing our own passions and so forth. So, that's the idea.

Hope is the motivation. Our expectation is the reason we live the way we live, and we expect that God will fulfill His promise. Faith is the means of living the life, walking the worthy walk.

And the result of that faith, motivated by that hope, is going to be love. Love is our interaction with our fellow believers primarily, and also by extension to the rest of the world. And that's the way we live, and the way we act, and the testimony we have, both verbal and non-verbal.

So, when he says that Abraham received this circumcision, or performed this circumcision as a sign and seal, it was well after he had been declared righteous by his faith. And this is so that he

might be, in verse 11, 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 also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

So Paul basically says, Abraham is a great example, because for the Jews he manifested the righteousness that God had accounted to him in his obedience to what God had said. And to Gentiles, Abraham is a great example because he was accounted righteous before he performed any acts of obedience, just because he trusted the promise of God. And if you wanted to add a sixteenth point to the ones that we began our study with this evening, notice that the issue for Abraham is not eternal salvation.

When Abraham believes God and it is accounted to him for righteousness, Abraham's salvation is not in view. This is the promise that he will inherit the world. This is the promise that he will have a son.

These are privileges and rewards for being a great man of faith. God doesn't say, get up from Ur of the Chaldees and go to the place that I will show you and I will give you eternal life. I will forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness or whatever.

This is the opportunity to be in a place in God's plan. It's not unlike the contrast between Saul and David, where God makes an offer to Saul and says, if you will be obedient, I will be with you, I will establish your house and your dynasty forever. Saul was already a believer and this was an opportunity that he lost through disobedience.

God made essentially the same proposal to David. David, as a man of faith, seized on that. By believing God, David didn't become a believer.

By believing the promise of God, David inherited a great reward to have his name forever attached to that of the son of God. These are opportunities for believers. Abraham here has already believed God or he would have never left Ur, believed in God.

He has already saved. But his faith after salvation in God and in the promise of God, this is what's going to enable Paul, as we'll see next week, Paul is going to argue in the rest of chapter 4 that Abraham did not waver in his faith. Though his body was dead, he believed and so forth.

He talks about the endurance and the quality, the patient continuance and well-doing, if you will, that Abraham manifested. And he says, because of this, it was accounted to him for righteousness. And of course, there's no endurance component to our salvation.

So once again, we're on track with our understanding of Romans. But it's a tremendously motivating set of principles, isn't it? Because we have the opportunity to concentrate on trusting God. We don't have to concentrate on what we're doing or how we're perceived.

We can concentrate on constructing the reality in our soul out of the principles and the doctrines and the promises of the Word of God. And in accepting that as our reality and thinking accordingly, our outward life and the ministry we engage in, the deeds that we perform, will be a reflection of that righteousness that God accounts to us because of faith. And the righteousness of God is now manifested apart from the law.

It's manifested in our lives, and it is an unspoken testimony. It's an epistle written in our hearts, like Paul tells one of his churches. The truth of God in our soul and our acceptance of it is a greater testimony than anything we could ever say to the righteousness of God.

And it's a terrific tool for God to use in evangelism and in reflecting His glory both to humanity and to the angels. So we have such a great opportunity, and Paul is going to great lengths to illustrate it for us and to bring it out to our attention so that we can avoid the pitfall of being sucked into spirituality by works, righteousness by what we do, instead of God's righteousness being manifested by what we believe. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word. We thank You for the great privilege we have of living in this age where it isn't the sinfulness of man that is the point of demonstration, but Your righteousness and Your righteousness is revealed by faith in our lives. We thank You for the Holy Spirit and for the Word of Truth that we have before us and we pray that that purpose will be accomplished in our lives and that we will be able to stand on that day of judgment and our conscience will excuse us and You will count us as having been good and faithful servants.

The purpose for which Christ died, which was not only to deliver us from the lake of fire, but to deliver us from this present evil age, will have been accomplished. We pray that these things will contribute to that and to the renewing of our minds. We ask all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.