

Inheriting the World
Romans 4
GES Conference 2012
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Teaching Method: Lecture and Power Point.

Purpose:

1. To show that Paul moves to issues of sanctification in Romans 4 not 6.
2. To provide the exposition of Romans 4 so that believers place their faith in Jesus just as Abraham did.

Idea: Believing in Jesus is the most important thing we believers can do for God.

Introduction:

A. The traditional division of Romans.

Most of us were taught that Paul writes about sin, justification, sanctification, eschatology, and application. The chapters roughly follow 1-3 for sin, 3-5 for justification, 6-8 for sanctification, 9-11 for eschatology, and 12-16 for application. I've come to wonder how much of this division of Paul's work is truly his intention. If this truly was his intent, surely he could have made it clearer. He doesn't seem to have a problem moving from one subject to the next in 1 Corinthians; there he simply states, "Now concerning," and moves on. Why didn't he do a better job of writing the division of Romans? Some places in Romans he uses clear inferential conjunctions, but then when we come to Romans 9:1, there is no connection at all. And if 9-11 is eschatological, why in Romans 8:17 is he talking about a glorification that is contingent upon our suffering with Christ?

Perhaps the traditional approach to Romans has been imposed upon Paul and it would do us well to go back and read his book as if we have never seen it before. We want to separate justification and sanctification, and then we shove the chapters into our outlines. Having established our sinfulness, Paul moves to the subject of imputed righteousness in 3:21 by faith apart from works, and never leaves it. God's righteousness is always given by faith apart from works. That is true of unbelievers and believers alike. He easily moves from the lost person's need, to the ungodly believer's need, to the godly believer's need of righteousness. He doesn't appear to respect our outlines of his work.

When our outlines do not reflect Paul's argument, it is time to start the interpretive process over. It seems to me that Paul does not have a justification/sanctification division in his development

of Romans. Even as early as Romans 3:31 he states that we establish the law, and by Romans 4:6 he uses David as a key illustration to argue our need for faith based righteousness.

[May I suggest some problems I have encountered with the traditional view of Romans? I have twelve nagging issues with the traditional division of the book.]

B. Problems with the traditional division of Romans 3 – 8.

1. **The use of David as an illustration, Romans 4:6-8.** In a section that is reported to deal with justification by faith apart from works, Paul introduces a believing Jew who is in need of imputed righteousness after he has committed the sin of adultery and murder. Surely David has already been declared righteous by faith long before he met Bathsheba. Does anyone argue that David wasn't justified until after his sin with Bathsheba? Not even the Calvinists can make that argument.
2. **“Walking” is used of sanctification issues, Romans 4:12.** The verse states that some “walk in the steps of the faith” of Abraham. Wouldn't we all argue that walking in the steps of faith fits very well with a Pauline view of the life of the believer? This seems different than 3:26 “that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
3. **The grammatical connection in 4:16, Romans 4:16.** The *δια τουτο* of this verse would be better translated as “because of this” rather than simply as “therefore.” Five times Paul uses the *δια τουτο* construction in Romans (1:26, here, 5:12, 13:6, and 15:9). In each place there is a close, causal connection with the immediately preceding argument. Romans 4:16-22 is tied closely to the promise of inheriting the world.
4. **Using Genesis 17, Romans 4:17.** Paul's reference to Genesis 17 rather than Genesis 15. It seems to me that Genesis 12 is a conditional promise made to Abraham while he was still in Ur. “Leave, and I'll make you a great nation.” Abraham took his time, but eventually left. He and God would make a great team. By Genesis 15, Abraham had concluded that he is not going to be able to help God with the great nation idea. He was 75 when he left Haran and he is not getting any younger. This time when God gave him the promise, he believed that God would do it; his faith was no longer in himself, but in God. Indeed, God took the covenant all by himself, and Abraham was off to the side asleep. It took Abraham until he was maybe 80-82 to finally give up on the team effort. So why does Paul, in Romans 4, go to Genesis 17, approximately 20 years of “walking by faith” later? Well, because Genesis 17 fits Paul's argument pertaining to sanctification better than Genesis 15.
5. **Abraham's mature faith does not fit evangelism, Romans 4:17-20.** The vivid description of Abraham's faith after about 20 years of knowing the Lord does not fit initial justification apart from works. If Romans 4 is about justification apart from works, are we really trying to tell the one considering believing in Jesus that they

must have a faith like Abraham? I don't have a faith like Abraham and I've been walking with the Lord since seventh grade.

6. **The grammatical connection at Romans 4:22.** There is an odd little inferential conjunction in this verse. “διο” is simply translated “therefore” in my text. The Majority Text uses this conjunction 5 times in Romans. Most miss the difference between a δια and a διο. The διο, used here requires a very close, logical connection to the immediate context. “For this reason,” or “wherefore” is required. It denotes that the inference is self-evident (BAG, Thayer). Abraham's spectacular display of faith at the age of 99 is the basis for the imputation of righteousness. Verse 22 simply cannot be dismissed as a summary statement of an argument made back in chapter 3. But it fits well with sanctification.
7. **The reckoning of righteousness for the reader is future, not past, Romans 4:24.** The imputed righteousness that is for our benefit is future from the point of view of the reader. Verse 22 carries the argument with a Present Active Indicative 3rd person singular μέλλω. That means that the righteousness Paul refers to is for believers who are about to receive imputed righteousness.
8. **The parallelism of Romans 4:25.** If Paul is talking about initial justification by faith apart from works, these verses are difficult to explain. Jesus was “delivered up because of our offenses and raised up because of our justification.” As our offenses create the need for Jesus to be delivered up to death on the cross, so our justification creates the need for Jesus to be raised up from the dead. Having already been declared righteous through faith in Jesus, we now need a resurrected Jesus to impute righteousness to those of us who walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham.
9. **The Perfect tense in Romans 5:2.** The “in which we stand” is a Perfect tense. We have stood in the past, are standing, and will continue to stand. The Perfect tense fits sanctification better than a justification by faith.

While we are here in Romans 5:2, may I talk about the purpose of 5:1-11? It seems to me that this paragraph is a hinge. The aorist participle of 5:1 “Therefore having been justified by faith” refers to everything he has said about righteousness thus far. Since it is faith based and reckoned apart from works, we are having (present tense) peace with God. His transition to the reign of righteousness is fitted around boasting. In Romans 3:27 Paul excluded boasting. In Romans 4:2 Abraham cannot boast before God, but now in 5:1-11 he provides three specific statements about what we can boast about. So having taken our stand in faith/grace righteousness (5:1) we boast in:

1. The glory of God's promise, 5:2,
2. God's unmerited (5:6-8) love through the Holy Spirit and realized during trouble (5:3-8), and
3. God Who wrapped His loving arms around us (5:11).

10. **The Present Tense of Romans 5:2, 3, and 11.** In Romans 5:2 Paul starts the theme of boasting. Boasting is a Present Active Indicative and is repeated 3 times: 5:2, 5:3, and 5:11. We cannot boast in our works (Romans 3:27), but this section of the chapter certainly contains some things we can boast about right now in our present experience.
11. **The Future Tenses of Romans 5:9 and 10.** While you are looking at Romans 5, notice the future tenses of verses 9 and 10. Verse nine states that we shall be saved from the wrath. Having been justified, why does Paul use a future tense? This fits sanctification nicely. Again in verse 10 he looks to the past (having been reconciled), and then to the future (shall be saved by His life). Future salvation by the living Jesus fits sanctification.
12. **The parallelism of Romans 5:12-21.** Notice the parallelism of Adam and Christ. Read quickly without a great deal of theological interpretation, this passage seems to say that as death reigned over all due to Adam's single act, righteousness reigns over all due to Christ's single act. Ok, Paul does not push his parallelism to the extreme; he does come back in verse 19 and state that Christ's act benefits the many. But don't miss his point. It is the reigning of righteousness that is the issue here. This hardly fits with the justification apart from works of Romans 3:21-31.

[What we have seen thus far is that there are a number of problems with the traditional division of Romans. Now let's go back and work our way through the text of Romans 4 and see if you can see Paul's intentional shift to what we call issues of sanctification.]

C. Exposition of Romans 4.

Paul considers Abraham's life-long experience with righteousness, 4:1-22.

Romans 4:1, I am taking the "according to the flesh" as a reference to his life-long experience. This fits the contents of the entire chapter.

1. As an **ungodly, non-Jewish, unbeliever** Abraham was reckoned righteous when he believed in the Lord apart from works, 4:2-5.

- His works did not provide grounds for boasting before God, 4:2

The structure of this conditional sentence assumes the first part to be untrue. "If Abraham had been justified by works (but he wasn't), then he is having boasting, but not before God."

- God's righteousness was imputed to Abraham because he believed God, 4:3
- Relying on one's works results in increased obligations, 4:4 (but)
- An ungodly person who believes on God is reckoned righteous, 4:5

Notice here in verse 5 how this verse argues against the Calvinistic argument that regeneration precedes faith. The personal pronoun “his” refers back to “ungodly.” Those who believe that an ungodly, unregenerate, reprobate can believe in the Savior do not have a problem with a verse like this. The wonderful message of justification by faith apart from works is truly good news for the ungodly, that is for all of us.

2. As an **ungodly, Jewish believer**, David was reckoned righteous apart from works, 4:6-8.
 - As a circumcised believer, David was blessed by God who forgave his lawless deeds; this was done apart from works, 4:6-8

With verse 6 Paul introduces an additional line of thinking. Since the Apostles are never wrong in their interpretation of the Scripture, Paul fully understands the context of Psalm 32. Paul’s point here seems to be that works do not play a part in the imputation of righteousness. They play no part for the unbeliever; they play no part for the believer. Righteousness comes by faith and not works. Justification comes by faith, and the one who has been justified shall live by faith.

Paul introduces David here because he is going to pursue the issue of imputed righteousness in the life of the believer.

3. As an **uncircumcised believer**, Abraham received imputed righteousness and became the model for both Gentile and Jewish believers, 4:9-12.
 - As an uncircumcised believer Abraham received God’s imputed righteousness by faith, 4:9.

This blessedness (a believer’s sins forgiven apart from works) does not come upon the circumcised believer only (David) but also on the uncircumcised believer (Abraham).

- Circumcision came some years after Abraham’s initial experience with righteousness. It distinguished Abraham from others, and was an authentication of God’s righteousness that came to him by faith, 4:10-11a.

Abraham received the sign of circumcision when he was 99 years old; a year before the child of promise was born. He left Haran at 75 and he was 86 when Ishmael was born. He was declared righteous by faith sometime between the age of 75 and 86. He had been justified for between 13 and 25 years when he received the sign of circumcision.

- Abraham is the father of all the ones believing who are uncircumcised, 4:11b.

Notice the present active participle in 11b. Abraham is the father of all the ones believing through un-circumcision. That is, these folks are believers and they are not Jewish, yet Abraham's experience in righteousness is the model for them as well.

- Abraham is also the father of all Jews who walk in his steps of faith, 4:12.

Of course the irony here is that Paul is calling upon Jews to follow the model of their uncircumcised patriarch. Though they are Jews and circumcised, they are to walk in the steps of faith of their father Abraham. In other words, circumcision is insignificant when compared to walking by faith. The work of circumcision (as witnessed by both David and Abraham) is useless when it comes to receiving righteousness as a believer.

Illustration: My father was born on a farm in northern Canada. The house was a small two room building; each boy had a peg for clothing, and on the floor below the peg were their boots. The house was for eating and sleeping. Each boy would roll up his bedroll in the morning, eat, and then head to the barn. Often the snow would mound up to the roof of the house. I'm told it provided good insulation, but I doubt it. To get to the barn my grandfather would open the door of the house, shovel the snow from the opening, and then head for the barn. The barn was nice and warm because of all the cows, and, of course, all the snow outside. In order to get there the younger boys would follow in the footsteps of their father. They literally stepped where he stepped. This is the way Paul calls upon us to follow our father Abraham.

Some may question the issue of imputed righteousness for believers. It seems to me that we are essentially Roman Catholic in our world view. While we may have moved from Rome's justification by works, we are still essentially in a Roman sanctification-by-works world. When we sin as believers, we confess it, and promise to never do it again, and also promise to do something extra special to make up for the sin we have committed. Sounds like Catholicism to me. We have swapped the 50 Rosaries for witnessing to 3 people. Here is where David (the circumcised, believing Jew) and Abraham (the uncircumcised, believing Gentile) can help us. What sort of atonement can one make for murder and adultery? How can Abraham atone for his multiple "she-is-my-sisters" and, from our perspective, the amazing mess with Hagar? Righteousness is imputed to us when we believe in Jesus; it is also imputed to us as believers. Paul will pick up this concept again in Romans 8:10.

[Review the three points thus far:

1. As an ungodly, non-Jewish, unbeliever Abraham was reckoned righteous when he believed in the Lord apart from works, 4:2-5.
2. As an ungodly, Jewish believer, David was reckoned righteous apart from works, 4:6-9.
3. As an uncircumcised believer, Abraham received imputed righteousness and became the model for both Gentile and Jewish believers, 4:9-12.]

[In the next section, verses 13-17 we find something that cuts across a central belief of American evangelicalism. We have been taught over and over that rewards are the result of our hard work, and all too often, the good works look a lot like the programs within our churches.]

Verses 13-15 seem to be a further explanation of the importance of faith in contrast to clinging to the Mosaic Law. If uncircumcised Abraham is the model to follow, his experience was completely void of law or any other kind of works.

4. Abraham's inheritance of the world is by faith without works so that all who believe might share it, 4:13-17.
 - Abraham was promised the world through righteousness by faith and not works, 4:13 (It was by faith because law brings wrath not the promise, 4:14-15).

In verse 13 Paul is considering the implications of Abraham's conversion in Genesis 15. In that chapter, Paul says, Abraham is promised that he would inherit the world, **and the Apostles are never wrong** in their interpretation of the Scripture. Genesis 15 contains the footprint of the land given to Abraham. God names the river in Egypt to the Euphrates River and all of the peoples dwelling there. What seems to make sense here is that the Lord has a global, millennial view of the world. The land designated in Genesis 15 would be the spot from which the world would be ruled. God literally gave Abraham the world. In the Kingdom, many will come from east and west and sit down and have lunch with Abraham.

This promise to Abraham and to his seed was completely apart from works of the law. Had works been involved, there would have only been failure and the promise of inheritance lost.

- The promise of inheriting the world was by faith so that the promise would be absolutely certain to both Jews and Gentiles who believe, 4:16

Whenever we read heir or inheritance, we rightly think reward. Here the reward is inheriting the world and the basis of the reward is not works, but faith. In our efforts to motivate believers to go to work for God so that they might receive a reward, let us never fail to establish the basics: the most significant thing we can do for the Lord is to believe in Jesus. In our theology of rewards, it seems reasonable that the starting point should always be “the just shall live by faith.”

The promise of inheriting the world is for all believers, both Jews and Gentiles alike.

- The promise of a world full of nations is so important that Christ personally appeared and only God could fulfill the promise, 4:17.

There is no work Abraham can do to fulfill God’s promise. Only God, who speaks life into existence from one already dead, can fulfill the promise.

5. Abraham’s mature, amazing faith (not his works) is the reason for reckoning him righteous, 4:18-22.

Notice Abraham’s faith:

- He continued to believe even when the promise of being the father of many nations defied all human logic, 4:18
- He continued to believe even though he and Sara were unable to have children, 4:19
- He steadfastly believed the promise of God, 4:20a.
- His continued faith glorified God, 4:20b
- He was convinced that God would do what He had promised, 4:21
- “For which also” he received God’s imputed righteousness by faith, 4:22

The translation “and therefore” fails to recognize the “διου.” The verse begins with “διο και.” The “διο” should not be translated as “and therefore,” but “wherefore also.” Paul is not returning to 4:3, he is providing a reason for the immediately preceding argument. Verse 22 is a statement that is directly tied to Abraham’s mature and amazing faith. He is not suggesting that an ungodly, unbeliever should have the kind of faith that Abraham had at the age of 99. Paul is arguing that Abraham’s mature, amazing faith (not his works) is the reason God reckoned righteousness to him throughout his “steps of faith.” There is an imputation of righteousness for the ungodly unbeliever, but there is also the imputation of righteousness for the godly believer. We never outgrow our need for God’s reckoned righteousness.

Conclusion: Abraham’s experience with righteousness is to become our experience with righteousness, 4: 23-25.

- His experience was for our benefit too, 4:23-24a

- Those who believe in God who raised Jesus will (future tense; subsequent to the time of initial believing) receive God's imputed righteousness, 4:24b.

As mentioned previously, the μέλλω makes this an experience for someone who has already believed in the finished work of Christ on the cross. What is in view now is the imputed righteousness we need as believers from the resurrected Savior. He is introducing the "saved by His life" of 5:10. If this were about an ungodly unbeliever's need for imputed righteousness the focus would be the "through faith in His blood" of 3:25. Hence he explains this in the next verse.

- Christ's death provided imputed righteousness for our sin; Christ's life provides imputed righteousness for our walk of faith, 4:25

Romans 4 in some sense parallels Paul's development of the Book of Romans. As the book unfolds we find him addressing our initial need of justification by faith apart from works (chapters 1-3), then he moves to the subject of sanctification (chapters 4-8). The just shall live by faith, and as we do we receive imputed righteousness from the resurrected Savior. Then he moves to the millennial arrangement of Abraham and his faith-followers inheriting the earth (chapters 9-11). And then he has some excellent applications for us (chapters 12-16). It is as if Paul places chapter 4 in his book to help us understand the direction he is traveling.

I have two concluding applications:

First: Abraham is the father of us all. So let's follow in his footprints and have a faith like his. It is time we evangelicals give up on the notion of the innate, indwelling righteousness of a believer. Paul viewed his flesh as having no good thing, yet we think the problem of abiding depravity has somehow missed us and we can make up for our sins by confession and doing better in the future. That did not work for David or Abraham. Righteousness comes from the HOLY Spirit when we believe.

Second: We would all like to hear, "well done thou good and faithful servant." We would all like to do something great for the Lord. We would all like to truly give glory to God. So let us never lose sight of an important fact: if we truly want to glorify God with our lives, then remember that nothing glorifies God more than when we believe in Jesus.