

Romans 3:29-4:3

Last week saw that God set forth Jesus Christ as a *propitiation* through faith in His blood to declare His righteousness for sins that were *past*, and we saw how sins in time past were not eternally forgiven but were *remitted* in God's forbearance, and how God was able to delay judgment based upon their faith.

God now declares *at this time* His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. This belief is belief in Christ's faithfulness—as verse 22 says, the righteousness of God is by the faith of Christ unto all and upon all that believe. He wrought what was necessary to attain salvation for humanity and can now offer it independent of any work on our part.

Paul then excludes boasting in verse 27, meaning any personal merit is excluded from this process, as all have sinned (v23). It is excluded by *the law of faith*.

These laws are not simply “rules,” but are laws in the sense of absolutes. They are how God has chosen to operate, similar to how He has in place physical laws to govern the visible creation.

Finally the Scriptures reach the conclusion in verse 28 that a man is justified by faith *without* the deeds of the Law. By implication, any man-made system of righteousness also is excluded here, seeing as God's Law was perfect. Paul will write in Galatians that if there had been a law that could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the Law. And so no man made system is going to be better than God's.

We begin then in verses 29 and 30:

²⁹ *Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:*

³⁰ *Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.*

God is the God of all creation, and of all humanity, whether they acknowledge it or not. Though the gentiles did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God still had a plan of redemption for them. And while the Jews specifically possessed the revelation of the True God, the Name of

God was blasphemed among the gentiles through them, as is it written (Rom. 2:24, Is. 52:5, Ez. 36:20). Even so, God has a plan of redemption for them as well.

1 John 2:1-2 says that Jesus Christ is the propitiation for the sins of not only the nation of Israel but for the whole world.

There is a plan of redemption through the cross for the earth, in which both Jews and gentiles in God's prophetic program will be the beneficiaries.

And there is a plan of redemption through the cross for the heavens, and again, both Jews and gentiles at present time are able to be beneficiaries of this. So whether Jew or gentile, God has desired to redeem them and use them for His glory.

And so both Jews and gentiles, though God made a distinction by promise, are no different by nature, and God is disposed to save all who call upon Him out of a pure heart.

Consider what Peter says in Acts 15, when recounting his experience years earlier with Cornelius:

⁷ And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

⁸ And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

⁹ And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

(Acts 15:7-9)

Now why does Paul say *it is One God*?

This calls to mind Deuteronomy 6, where modern Judaism get their *shema prayer* from, which begins with,

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord... (**Deut. 6:4**)

This same is alluded to in **James 2:19**,

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

Paul speaks to this also in 1 Corinthians 12:

⁴ *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

⁵ *And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.*

⁶ *And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

(1 Cor. 12:4-6)

In addressing spiritual gifts here, Paul stresses the *singular* nature of the Godhead: whether there be diversities of gifts, it is the same Spirit; and whether there are differences in administrations, it is the same Lord. In the previous verses he addresses the Corinthians as having been previously led away unto dumb idols, plural. And so perhaps within the Corinthian church there were some who, having lived as pagans for so long, were confusing the varying functions of the Holy Ghost with a multiplicity of Gods or multiplicity of spirits.

But there is only One Holy Ghost and One Lord, even if the One God chooses to operate in different ways.

This is one of the things detractors of the Bible have pointed to in criticism, and one of the things also that the theological elite have struggled with, is how the quote-unquote God of the Old Testament seemed so severe, while the quote-unquote God of the New Testament is gracious and selfless and loving.

There is no “God of the Old Testament” and “God of the New Testament.” It is the same God, operating under different administrative purposes.

Of course, to frame it in that way is an oversimplification, as God is gracious throughout the entire Bible, and His judgment likewise warned and assured of throughout the entire Bible. We see strict passages of judgment in the New Testament, and we see God's longsuffering all throughout the Old.

So why does Paul feel the need to include this statement here in Romans 3:30,

...Seeing it is one God...

The answer is found in considering the differences in administrations he is about to allude to in the second part of verse 30.

He stresses it is *One God* here just as He stressed it was *One Spirit* and *One Lord* in 1 Corinthians 12 because he is about to point to a distinction in administrations:

Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

(Romans 3:30)

In that he says God shall justify the circumcision *by* faith, and the uncircumcision *through* faith, the Holy Ghost here makes a distinction.

Let's first define what justification *is*.

Justify means to be declared as righteous; or to make just.

Justification then is the process by which one is made righteous, or justified.

The English *Just* comes from the Latin word *justus*, meaning right. And so when we say that a victim deserves justice, what we're really saying is they deserve things to be made right. The root word of course for *righteous* being *right* itself. And so when we say justified we're saying made righteous.

Salvation requires a propitiation, a payment, for forgiveness; our debt then being paid off, it requires the righteousness of Christ imputed to our account; and both of these result in permanent atonement (Rom. 5:11).

And so there are components to salvation. The propitiation and justification themselves are different aspects of that process.

The propitiation being the payment by which we receive forgiveness of sins, and justification is that by which God can declare us righteous.

Remember, being forgiven of sins is not enough receive "salvation," we must also be declared righteous.

When we look at passages regarding the historical circumcisions' justification before God, with the exception of Abram and David, it is always in the context of a work of faith that they performed.

We have previously spoken of Phinehas, how that by slaying the Midianite woman and the Israelite man who was with her, God counted him as righteous unto all generations forever (Num. 25:7-8, **Ps. 106:30-31**).

We see the circumcision exhorted to endure the chastening of God that they might receive justification in the Hebrew portions of the New Testament:

Matthew 24:12-13

¹² *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

¹³ *But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

Hebrews 6:11-12

¹¹ *And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:*

¹² *That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

This is in fact the teaching for the Hebrew remnant under the chastening of God, awaiting their salvation at the return of Christ:

James 2:24 - *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

Abraham, *after* he had received the covenant of circumcision, was tested by God in Genesis 22, in being commanded to offer up his son of promise, Isaac.

James 2 says that in doing so, the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and God counted it to him for righteousness.

In this way Abraham is a type and picture of both the circumcision and uncircumcision. In circumcision, he had to demonstrate his faith, and this fulfilled God's previous declaration of his righteousness.

In uncircumcision, Abraham simply believed God, and God counted it to him for righteousness.

God did not say in Genesis 22 that this is what justified Abraham—Abraham was truly justified in Genesis 15:6, by simply believing in what God said. We will see this in Romans chapter 4.

Abraham's faith itself was justified, or shown to be authentic, when he was willing to offer up Isaac, and God said,

"Now I know that thou fearest God."

Did the Lord already know Abraham truly feared God? Yes. Did the Lord know that Abraham would actually be willing to sacrifice Isaac? Yes. Then why put him through this to begin with? It was for the purpose of *types*. And one of these types is the justification of the Hebrew remnant under God's punishment in the tribulation.

And so for the circumcision—the Hebrews of times past and the Hebrews in the last days, they received or will receive justification by the outward exercise of their faith. *By faith*. And in fact this is exactly what the book of Hebrews articulates at length in **Hebrews 11**:

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

²⁰ *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come...*

²⁴ *By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter...*

³⁰ *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.*

Now the Passover was kept, according to Hebrews 11, through faith, and that was through faith in the efficacy of the blood; and indeed some of the unnamed saints mentioned at the end of the chapter are said to have done their works through their faith, but the overarching theme of Hebrews 11 is *obtaining a good report* through faith, of patient endurance in doing the will of God. In other words, faith producing works.

This is not to say that faith today is not supposed to produce works, it is, but the operation and economy of God today is different than that in the prophetic program. The end result may even look the same, but the process itself is different.

When we turn to Paul's letters however, our salvation is always spoken of in terms of being accessed *through* faith:

Galatians 3:8

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.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

⁹ *Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

Remember, there is no circumcision at present time except the spiritual circumcision of the Body of Christ. When Israel rejected the third offer of repentance by the preaching of Stephen in Acts 7, their circumcision effectively became *uncircumcision*. And indeed this is exactly what we learned back in **Romans 2:28-29**:

²⁸ *For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:*

²⁹ *But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

Romans 3:31

Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

The law is established as perfectly Holy by the law of faith, because *the law* of faith—the fact that God is operating according to faith as a *law*—attests to our total inability to carry out the law as sinners.

Faith is the *only discourse*. But this does not void the law, only points to its perfection, similar to how Paul says our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God in Romans 3:5.

In **1 Timothy 1:8**, Paul says that the law is good if a man use it lawfully—that it was made for sinners. And so to have the objective standard of righteousness as prescribed by the law is good because it acts a mirror for sinful man to clearly see themselves as worthy of judgment.

Romans 3:31 contains the third of Paul's "God forbid" statements in Romans. This informs us God is not *voiding the law through faith* in the sense that we should disregard it altogether, but rather use its principles for the purpose for which it was given. Paul will say in **Romans 7:12** that the Law is Holy. So why was it given?

According to 2 Corinthians 3, it was given as a *ministration of death*:

⁶ *Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*

⁷ *But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:*

⁸ *How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?*

(2 Cor. 3:6-8)

And indeed Paul describes his first hand experience under this ministry of death as a believer who had put himself under the yoke of the Law in Romans 7:

⁹ *For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*

¹⁰ *And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.*

¹¹ *For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me...*

²⁴ *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

(Romans 7:9-11, 24)

The Old Testament Law's function was never to justify man, but rather to put them, as we will see later in Romans, under the dominion of sin.

Through faith in the prescription of the Old Covenant, and through faith in God, men received *remission of sin* we've previously spoken of, but the Law itself was not a true means of righteousness—if it had been, there would have been no need for a New Testament or New Covenant. If it had been, they wouldn't have received a temporary remission but true and everlasting forgiveness.

Romans 4:1-3

¹ *What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?*

² *For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.*

³ *For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*

When it says *as pertaining to the flesh*, it's not referring to the covenant of circumcision, nor the lineage that came from Abraham, who were the first in line for the inheritance it promised.

We have already seen Paul address this question in **Romans 3:1-2**:

¹*What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?*

²*Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*

The context of Romans 4:1-2 is now justification by faith as opposed to works of the flesh; to be clear, no one was ever justified by works of the flesh. Faith was always the primary element necessary to please God. Without faith it is impossible to please God (**Hebrews 11:6**).

What Romans 4:1-2 is saying is Abraham received the inheritance by *promise*, not by works of the flesh, and he received the promise of an heir and multiplied seed by faith. And it is through this faith that God justified him:

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

⁴*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.*

⁵*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.*

⁶*And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*

(Genesis 15:3-6)

And this is the passage Paul is quoting from in verse 3.

Abraham was undoubtedly justified by God by faith alone in Genesis 15 prior to the covenant of circumcision. If he were justified by works, Paul writes, he could glory in himself, but not before God. Why? Because no one can be justified in the sight of God by their works:

Galatians 3:11

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

And so James uses Abraham's test in Genesis 22 after receiving the covenant of circumcision as an example for his audience, the Hebrew remnant, *the circumcision*, also being tested by God.

By Abraham's faith he offered up Isaac and was justified *yet again*—thus James says faith wrought with his works and by works was his faith made perfect.

James 2:20-23

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

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

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

²³ *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.*

But this justification was not unto eternal life; that had already occurred while he was in uncircumcision, in Genesis 15. This justification simply resulted in a confirmation of the promises:

¹⁶ And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

¹⁷ That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

¹⁸ And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

(Genesis 22:16-18)