

## Justified through Faith # 13

Romans 4: 13-17

In our text tonight, Paul continues to deal with the life of Abraham. He was regarded by the Jews as the father of their faith. They related to him in faith, but failed to grasp the real measure of faith Abraham possessed. The majority of Jews believed Abraham was justified in the eyes of God because of the works he performed and his adherence to the law. Paul continues to make the biblical case that supports Abraham being justified by faith in the Lord. He desired people to respond to the Lord by faith rather than seeking salvation through works.

We are well aware of this line of thought. We have already discussed it at length and there will be more discussion to follow. However, it is a biblical message that needs to be studied and shared. The majority today are depending more on works than faith. They embrace faith, but refuse to believe faith alone is enough. Man's way to God requires works; it is based on what we do for Him. God's way of salvation requires faith; it is based on what He has done for us. If we have any hope of salvation and eternal life, we must come to God according to His plan.

I want to consider the [distinctions](#) Paul gives regarding the law and faith as we think on: [Justified through Faith](#).

**I. The Dilemma with the Law** (13-15) – Here Paul uses the life of Abraham to reveal the dilemma man has with the law. Notice:

**A. The Exhortation** (13) – [For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.](#) The Jews held Abraham in high regard. Each of them traced their lineage back to Abraham. He was the father of their nation. Each of the twelve tribes descended from Abraham. They rejoiced in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Paul doesn't seek to detract from their thankfulness for God's favor, but he wants them to have a proper perspective. The obedience of Abraham and birth of Isaac were not the result of his keeping the law, but solely by faith. God honored the faith of Abraham.

- Really there is no other rational way to consider the life of Abraham. He was called of God to follow Him at 75 years of age. He was promised at that time to become the father of a great nation through the promised son. It took 25 years for Isaac to be born. After his birth, God asked Abraham to take Isaac to Mount Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice unto the Lord. He had faith that God would raise Isaac from the dead. His life is a great example of living by faith!
- We too must live our lives by faith. We come to Christ by faith and live by faith!

**B. The Proposition** (14a) – *For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void.* Paul argues that if men are made heirs of God through keeping the law, then the faith of Abraham and countless other saints is made void, of no value whatsoever. If God justified men on the basis of works, their keeping the law, then there is no need for faith.

- This addresses the conflict we continue to deal with today. Many believe works are necessary to gain salvation and eternal life, along with faith in Christ. Paul declares we cannot have it both ways. If salvation is obtained by works, there is no need for faith; in essence faith is nonessential. If salvation is by faith, then works are insignificant in regard to salvation. (I am not advocating that believers should never do anything for the Lord, their fellow man, or live as they please with no regard for righteousness. However, it is clear that works have no bearing on salvation by faith.)
- Each of us must determine which path we will seek. What are you depending on for salvation and eternal life? The doctrine of faith plus works is clearly refuted in this passage. It has to be one or the other. There is no agreement between the two when it comes to salvation. It is either sought through faith or works. Those who seek works for salvation are relying on the law to save and those who seek faith in Christ for salvation are relying on the Lord.

**C. The Cancellation** (14b) – *and the promise made of none effect:* Paul now speaks of the promise of God being of none effect if men are justified by keeping the law apart from faith. He refers to the promise in [V.13](#). Essentially Paul declares that the unconditional promise of God, given to Abraham through faith is no good, if it is sought through works. The Jews, as well as all people, would have to keep the stringent demands of the law in order to be acceptable to God. We know this is impossible.

- I am glad that salvation is offered to all by grace through faith. It isn't dependent upon my ability to keep the law or the good deeds that I do. Salvation is offered freely through the sacrifice Christ made on the cross to atone for our sin. We just have to embrace His gracious offer by faith. [Gal.3:17-18](#) – *And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.*  
<sup>[18]</sup> *For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. If salvation is on a basis of "trying," then it is not on a basis of "trusting." But it is faith, not works; grace, not law; belief, not behavior, which is the basis and foundation of all that God gives.*<sup>i</sup>

**D. The Condemnation** (15) – *Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.* Paul reveals the dreaded consequence of breaking the law of God: suffering the wrath of God. The law doesn't offer promise, but demands punishment for sin. It was given to

reveal our depravity and point us to Christ as the Redeemer of our souls. Through the law, the more we sin, the greater our guilt; the greater our guilt, the more wrath we deserve. The Jews may have hoped to inherit eternal life through the law, but it would only result in wrath.

- We know that none are able to keep the law in its entirety. James declares if we are guilty of breaking the law in one point, we are guilty of the whole law. If one expects to gain entrance to heaven through keeping the law, he better be able to live a perfect life, fully keeping each and every demand of the law. Jesus was the only one who lived that perfect life. I am glad grace was offered so that we could receive Christ by faith instead of God demanding we keep His law in order to be justified!

**II. The Deliverance through Faith (16-17)** – Humanity faces a great dilemma with the law, but there is deliverance through faith. Consider:

**A. The Expression (16a)** – *Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace.* Paul seeks to convey and emphasize the importance of faith. God gave the law to reveal His holiness and our depravity. It was never given as a means of salvation. He could've left us in our sin to face the judgment we deserved, but He made a way for salvation and reconciliation to Him. We are offered salvation by grace through faith!

- This continues to make the case for faith instead of the works of the law. We were guilty, without doubt. We could never deserve God's redemption. His grace has been extended; His unmerited favor. That gracious offer is only available by faith.

**B. The Confirmation (16b)** – *Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed;* This reveals a great blessing to those who come to Christ by faith. Paul speaks of a sure promise. He reveals that we can have assurance in our salvation! When one comes to Christ by faith, there is no need for worry. There is no need to wonder if enough work has been accomplished to merit salvation. There is great peace resting in the finished work of Christ rather than continually wondering if enough work has been done to please God and gain entrance to heaven. Our salvation is not based on our works or the severity of our sin, but upon the completed, satisfying, sacrificial atonement of Christ!

**C. The Inclusion (16c-17a)** – *not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,* <sup>[17a]</sup> *(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations.)* This may have been doubted by many of the Jews, but it reveals a great truth. Paul declares

salvation is available to the Gentile as well. It isn't reserved for those who have lineage in the line of Abraham. It isn't obtained through works or adherence to the law. It is received by faith and available to all who respond to God's gracious offer of salvation.

- I am truly thankful that faith is all God requires for salvation. If He demanded works of the law, I would be unable to meet His demands. If He required riches to purchase it, I would never have enough. If He required specific social or racial status, I would not have been in the proper group. But praise His name, He only required faith. As He worked in my life, revealing Himself to me, I responded to His offer by faith. That was enough to secure my eternal salvation!

**D. The Provision** (17b) – before him whom he believed, *even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were*. Abraham believed God and responded by faith. He knew God had the power to quicken the dead, to offer righteousness by faith, and to make those who were unworthy acceptable by His grace. Abraham never trusted in his own ability; he fully relied on the provision of God.

- Salvation is offered through the grace and mercy of God. None were deserving. None could earn salvation through works. The law cannot save; it only condemns and cries out for justice. God's grace offers salvation. God provided everything we need to receive salvation. Faith responds to His gracious provision. Faith looks to the finished work of Christ instead of depending on works. Faith rests in the provision of God.

**Conclusion:** We all are depending on something to merit acceptance of God and eternal life. I am convinced we all depend on one of two things: works or faith. We cannot depend on both. If we are counting on works, then faith is no good. If we are depending on faith, then works have no bearing on salvation. Which are you depending on? If you are counting on works, you will never make it. It is impossible to keep the entire law. Guilt in one area translates to guilt in all. Faith in Christ is the only way of salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring Romans: An Expository Commentary.