

## THE BOOK OF ROMANS

### Romans 3:25-31

25 whom God set forth *to be* a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God;

26 for the showing, *I say*, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.

### Continuing Comments on Chapter 3 Verses 25-31

vv. 25, 26 – God publicly exhibited him. Some translations use “propitiation,” others “atonement,” some “mercy seat.” To propitiate is to appease, to render favorable. Thayer speaks of “relating to appeasing or expiating, having placating or expiating force.” The big question is whether it is of a place or propitiation or a propitiatory thing. Some seek to avoid the concept of appeasing God’s wrath, but whether Christ is the thing (person) that avoids wrath or the place where wrath is avoided, wrath is still avoided.

Was Christ’s death an “appeasing” death or merely an “expiatory” death? The expiation school removes the wrath of God and claims the appeasement view is pagan and no like the God manifested in Jesus Christ.

There can be no forgiveness without repentance of sin. There can be no repentance of sin unless some manifestation of sin’s ugliness be made known; unless sin be recognized for the abomination that it is. How bad is sin? Bad enough to attack God himself. The cross is sin’s finest hour. Sin reached a new low right at the very spot where grace was reaching a new high and love was making it highest appeal. To repent requires that we adopt a changed mind about sin. But sin could not be seen to

be sin until the cross. That is, it's only at the cross that the depth of sin's depravity is made clear. God's view of sin wasn't understood at its deeper level until the cross.

If Christ was only a man then sin's crime here at the cross was to slay a fine man, the finest man; but only a man. But Christ was God manifest in flesh and the crime committed by "ordinary" sins was a crime against God himself. Satisfaction is found only in Christ because we have in Christ's death God's word against sin and our unholy work of sin. The death of Christ enables God to set aside his judicial wrath against us without setting holiness aside or making light of his law.

The difference between expiation and propitiation is that one sees wrath in God and the other doesn't. The appeasement view speaks of both truths that the wrath of God is averted and the sins of mankind are covered by the blood of Christ.

God did this "to show his righteousness." God "passed over" sins aforesaid. Did he just ignore them? If so, why is He making such a big deal of sin now? He did not treat them casually. He passed over them in light of the coming sacrifice. God's justifying of us must itself be just. It would hardly do for God to free us from our unholiness and unrighteousness by an unrighteous procedure. Abraham said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

27 Where then is the glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of law? of works? Nay: but by a law of faith.

v. 27 – If a man were to live a perfect life he would have a ground for boasting, that no taint of sin had ever soiled his spotless life, and that he stood justified on his own record. Paul has taken away this basis. The greatest ground for humility is that an innocent person, yea, even the God-man himself, Christ Jesus, had to die for my sin. I have to depend on another, and this depending on another is what Paul calls the “law of faith.” This law of faith is the plan, or arrangement, in which is required faith in Jesus who died for us. The law of God is the expressed and binding will of God. The will of God expresses itself in various ways. It isn’t always expressed in terms of commandments to be kept, rules to be observed, or statutes to be obeyed. Sometimes it is expressed in promises given, love made known, and such like. One aspect of the will of God revealed to us in the Bible is “law.” The law of faith is the will of God in connection with justified persons who confess the need for mercy and so excludes boasting.

28 We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

v. 28 - Not contrasting faith and the obedience of faith; rather, justification by works and justification by faith. In chapter 1:5 and 16:26 Paul speaks of the “obedience of faith,” that is, obedience of which faith is the source – an obedient faith. When Paul talks of faith, he means an obedient faith. Many have stumbled through Romans without ever recognizing the fact that Paul makes that clear in the very beginning of his letter.

To make works of law refer to the obedience of faith is to enshroud ourselves in a fog of confusion from which we will not be able to emerge with any clear idea of the gospel plan of salvation. To be justified by works of law requires that works, measured by law, be perfect. A sinner can never be justified by works of law because no amount of works can change the fact that he sinned. But the death of Christ made it possible for those who believe in him to be justified.

But just here another hurtful error has been made – namely, limiting faith to an acceptance of Christ as a sacrifice for our sins. Faith is thereby made too limited in scope because it does not include also a submission to Jesus as our King.

vv. 29-30 - Available for Gentiles who had no revealed law as well as Jews who had. The Jews did not think that God would recognize a Gentile unless he became a part of the Jewish nation. To them, God was the God of the Jews only – a tribal or national God. Even some early Christians taught that Jews had to be circumcised to be saved. Acts 15:1. Paul was constantly opposed by Judaizing teachers. Paul asserts that God is the God of all nations. He is one, period. Not one for the Jews and another for the Gentiles.

And that God will justify the Gentiles by faith and the Jews out of faith – in the same manner.

29 Or is God *the God* of Jews only? is he not *the God* of Gentiles also? Yea, of Gentiles also:

30 if so be that God is one, and he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.

31 Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law.

The notion advanced by some that even today God recognizes two groups in which He takes special delight – the Jews and the church – finds no support in Scripture either here or elsewhere. What does find support is Paul’s teaching in Eph. 4:4-6.

v. 31 - We put the law on its true base by showing its office to be - not to justify - an untenable position - but to convince of sin and so lead to Christ. Gal. 3:24.

Establish the law as the medium through which it may be had.

But we are told, “This is legalism.” But legalism is not to be understood as obedience. A legalist isn’t someone who insists on keeping God’s commandments. A legalist is one who claims to satisfy God’s demands of holiness by his own holiness. A legalist is one who offers less than what law demands (perfection) and he feels justified on the ground of his moral goodness. Such a one doesn’t need the Christ (he says at least in deed). If justification comes on that basis then Christ died for naught.

After we have done all that is commanded we are unprofitable servants. Luke 17:10. All the church-going in the world will not remove a single sin. All the money given, all the prayers said, all the doors knocked, all the sermons preached, all the sacrifices made, and all the tears shed, all the sympathy shown, and all the dreams dreamed cannot remove a single sin! These

Romans 4:1-5

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, hath found according to the flesh?

2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not toward God.

were all owed to God, anyway, and more.

So beware of the self-righteousness that can creep into the heart as we gain strength in Christ Jesus. Beware of any preaching that removes from the center of justification the once-for-all work of the Master. We obey, but acknowledge that our obedience can never fulfill the laws demands. The obedience of Another did that (Romans 5:19).

Comments on Romans 4:1-5

4:1-2 – According to the flesh – is sometimes connected with “hath found” and other times “our forefather.” The first refers to what Abraham gained by his own earthly efforts. The second refers to what Abraham our earthly father found. The Greek will support either. It really makes no difference because both are true. The point is that Abraham himself was justified by faith, and not by works, believers being his true heirs.

All of this is directed toward Judaizing teachers. When he dealt with unbelieving Jews, he sought to convince them that Jesus was the Christ of whom the prophets spoke. Useless to argue to unbelievers in Christ that law was done away at the cross, that the Jew was dead to law, and he might be married to Christ.

What then shall we say about Abraham? If the case that Paul has made in 3:21-31 is

true, it ought to be true about Abraham. Does the case of Abraham help us in determining whether what Paul said is true or false? If Abraham's case conformed to Paul's thesis, then the case was made. No Jew would have the nerve to deny justification on the basis of moral excellence to Abraham while claiming it for himself.

What did Abraham have according to the flesh? If anyone "according to the flesh" could come up with anything, surely Abraham could have managed it. Abraham came up with nothing based on his own human worthiness. He had no fleshly connections of which he could boast.

Verse 2 makes clear that Paul, in arguing his case, holds "obedience" and "works" to be distinct concepts. It isn't that Paul denies that obedience is involved in works; he doesn't. However, to Paul, in this argumentative section, "works" stands for the full quota of works demanded by LAW and flawlessly carried out. It is perfectly clear that Abraham OBEYED God, but it is also perfectly clear that Abraham had nothing about which to boast. It is also perfectly clear that obedience (with the right heart) is unto righteousness (6:16). In Paul's argument "works" are not unto righteousness. Obedience is possible for a person; "works" is not because "works" stands for sinlessness.

If a person has that kind of perfection, he can glory, but it is in himself, not toward God. Why should he glorify God when he has put

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

God in his debt and God is obligated to save him because of his perfection? God has given him nothing. There is no grace or mercy.

v. 3 – Gen. 15:6 – Is this at the point that Abraham entered into living union with God? Some suggest that this refers to Abraham's justification as a sinner, and James spoke of his justification as a righteous man. **FACTS** 1) Gen. 12:1-3 commanded to go to new land, promised to bless him, make great nation of him, bless all families through his seed. 2) Heb. 11:8. By faith, went out. 3). Gen. 12:6,7. Renewal of seed promise at Shechem; he builds an altar and worships. 4). Gen. 12:8. Builds another altar and called upon the name of Jehovah. 5). Gen. 13:3-4. After return from Egypt, he returned to altar and called upon name of Jehovah. 6). Gen. 14:18-19. Melchizadek, priest of God most High, blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God most high. 7). Gen. 15:1. Fear not Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

Clearly Abraham was justified at the latest in Gen. 12. Why did Paul not go back to Gen. 12? The Jews would not have denied that Abraham was justified at that time. They would have agreed with the Hebrew writer (Heb. 11:8) and Stephen (Acts 7:2-7). Paul went to Gen. 15 because it had the very language that Paul needed to make his case.

Now if Abraham really justified in Gen. 12, and really justified in Gen. 15, what does that tell us? It tells us that justification is a



dynamic and ongoing thing. It isn't a static, once-for-all act of God. James refers to Genesis 22 (the offering of Isaac) and says that Abraham was justified then. If justification is a once-for-all act of God and Abraham was justified in Gen. 12, how could Abraham have been justified in Gen. 15 and Gen. 22? He couldn't have and this establishes that justification is not a once-for-all act of God, but an ongoing thing.

What, then, has Paul established? He has established that Father Abraham, the Jews pride and joy on whom their uniqueness rested, was a prime example, not of justification by works of law, but of justification by faith. Abraham could not boast of justification by works because he was a sinner. Abraham could not boast of justification by faith because that conceded that he was a sinner who needed grace.

Vv. 4-5 – Paul is not discussing the conditions of salvation. He says nothing about the man who “depends” on works and the one who doesn't. Only perfect works can bring salvation as a debt. “Worketh” is the one who has no guilt. “Worketh not” = no perfect obedience. God counts his faith as his righteousness. “Counted” = not earned.

Notice four things:

1. The “worker” contrasts with the “non-worker.”
2. The “worker” eliminates grace altogether.
3. The “non-worker” is a believer.
4. The “non-worker's” faith is

4 Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt.

5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness.

	reckoned for righteousness.