

“Justification and Abraham” cont.

Romans - the Gospel of God

Romans 4:1-12

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Jeff: Our gracious Father in heaven, we give You thanks. We pause before You to delight in You, to remember Your goodness toward us, and to thank You for yet another day, to thank You for an evening of rest. Father, thank You for a time together with one another in Your word. Father, we ask now that You'll open our eyes to the truth of Your word. We pray, Father, that as we study it together that You will bless us, certainly bless us that we might be edified. We pray, Father, that You will cause us to grow in grace and in the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, we also pray that You would make us lights. We pray that what we learn will be helpful not only to us but to others. Father, we ask for Your kingdom to come. And as it comes more and more in our lives we pray that our influence would help it to come in the lives of others. Father, we ask that Your name would be hallowed in our country. We pray, Father, for the repentance of our nation. We ask, Lord, that You will be our God, for the nation that has you as its God is a blessed nation indeed. And so, Father, bless us with repentance and faith; bless us with a turning toward You.

Father, we also ask that You will hear the concerns of our hearts. We pray for those we are close to, those we love. We pray for Don. We ask that the oral surgery that he's facing on Monday would be easy, that it wouldn't be difficult, that it would be a success, and that his recovery would be swift.

Father, we also pray for our brother Ted. And we're thankful for the surgery that he was able to get for his knee. But we also pray, Father, for a quick turnaround. And we pray, Father, that as the pain diminishes that he would be able to get more sleep. We're thankful that he's off the pain medication. We pray, Father, that You'll bring him about more and more day by day.

Father, we also pray along with our brother about Butch. We ask, Lord, that the biopsy would prove to be good, at least favorable in terms of news. We pray, Father, that You will strengthen and bless this man. And Father, we also pray that You will bless us as we gather together with one another. We pray that You'll strengthen us. And Lord, we ask that as we are here without Bob, we pray for him as well, asking that You will bless him with all the complications that come from his condition. Father, we certainly pray that they'll be able to do the procedures that they need to do without complication from the blood thinner. And Lord, we pray, if it's Your will, we certainly pray with certainty that You are able to do more than we are asking at this moment. We certainly pray that You'll take that tumor away and that You'll give him health and strength and vitality.

Father, we pray all of these things, committing them to You, asking that You'll be with Sig while he is away from us. Bring him back to us and use this time away to strengthen him as well. Father, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: Okay. I want us to turn to Romans chapter 4 today. If I remember correctly we didn't quite finish Romans chapter 4. So we're going to finish Romans chapter 4, and then we're going to press into the next set of verses which are 9-12. So today let's just

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refresh our memories. Let’s go back to verse 1 and let’s read down through verse 12.

Don, do you have it?

Don Maurer: Yes.

Jeff: Okay. Romans 4:1-12.

Don: Let me get it here.

Jeff: All right.

Don: *“What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’*

“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ‘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.’

“Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, 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? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be 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 who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.” This is the word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Transcriber’s Note: NKJV.

Jeff: Okay. So what I want us to do is that I want us to start thinking about the question we left off with. How was Abraham justified? And what I want us to do is, I want us to remember this question in its context. But I also realize that when you think about a question like this, the language is sometimes boring; it’s sometimes not familiar. And so I want us to think about why it is that we’re dealing with Abraham at this point. And I also just want us to pause for a minute and ask the question: why does it matter that we’re looking at justification? Why does justification matter to us?

So first of all let’s just quickly think about why it is that we are dealing with Abraham at this point in the argument. And you’ll remember that Paul took three chapters to remind us that we are dead in our sins and transgressions, that all have fallen short of the glory of God, and that but for the righteousness that He gives to us by faith in Jesus Christ we would be lost. And so there’s a sense in which that whole argument of chapters 1, 2 and 3 is unfolding for us, culminating in that conclusion. We’re dead in our sins. And the only way we’re going to be made alive is in Christ, and that’s by faith alone.

Now that’s the argument. But you remember that when you get into chapter 4 Paul says to them “Now I know what you’re thinking, because it’s the same thing you were thinking toward the end of my argument in chapter 3.” And that is but what about

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Abraham? Abraham is the trump card that’s always up the sleeve of the Jews that they throw down. And they say, “Yes. But father Abraham.”

And Paul is saying, “Yes, father Abraham; let’s think about him. Is he the exception to all that I’ve been saying?” And that’s why we’re dealing with Abraham and the justification of Abraham at this point in the argument.

But the question that we have to ask ourselves is what is justification? We’re going to take some time and look at justification in this chapter. We’ve been looking at some of the aspects of it already. But when we look at justification we need to realize for instance that Scripture tells us what justification is in Romans chapter 3 and in Romans chapter 4. You go to Philippians chapter 3. You go to Ephesians chapter 2. You go to various places in the Scripture and you begin to pull in what justification is. James chapter 2; we talked about it last time.

What is justification? And when you pull all these Scripture texts together, (and the bishop knows this because he wrote a book on it), systematic theology is the result. In other words, systematic theology answers the question: what does the Bible teach about x? What does it teach about any given subject? And systematic theology answers that question. It answers the question of what does the Bible teach about justification?

And one systematic orientation of this is the Westminster Confession and the Shorter Catechism which provides a handy answer to the question of what justification is. And we’ve had this on the board before when we looked at chapter 3. But here I want us to see it again.

It’s this. *“Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardoneth all of our sins and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”*

There’s a lot there. There are some constituent elements that I want to point out. And then what I want us to do is to go into the rest of Romans chapter 4 so that you can see some of those things that come out of that definition. And you won’t see everything coming out of this passage that’s in that definition, because that definition is collating more texts than just Romans 4 in communicating what justification actually is. But you will see in Romans chapter 4 a number of these elements.

For instance, there is the pardoning of sins. And you see that in this text. He will not count our sins against us. Or you’ll see that He accepts us as righteous in His sight. We’re going to see that righteousness was imputed to the one who has faith. We’ll see that in this text. We won’t see specifically that this was the righteousness of Christ. But we already saw that in chapter 3. The righteousness that was imputed to me was Christ’s righteousness. And then that righteousness is received by faith alone.

Now there’s a question in this text that we’ve got to answer. And I’ll just set it up for you right now. The question is: what was the righteousness that was imputed? In other words, was it something different than what Abraham possessed? Or was it something that Abraham possessed?

And on the first reading of this text it looks like the righteousness that was imputed to Abraham was in fact his faith. And there are some who teach this.

Bishop Rodgers: Oh dear!

Jeff: What’s that?

Bishop: Oh dear! I’m complaining.

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Jeff: Yes, there are some who teach this. And this is what they say. They say, well, in the Old Testament God gave them the law. And the people weren't able to keep the law. And so in the New Testament God reduced the obligation and said, "I'll accept faith in place of the works that I commanded in the Old Testament."

And what does that amount to? Either way it amounts to works. And so the question that we have to ask ourselves is, is justification by works? And I think we're going to clearly see as we move into the rest of Romans chapter 4 that it is not by works. And if it's not by works, then how do we understand this statement about faith and righteousness in this text? That says a lot? But any questions that you have before we get started looking at this today, really looking at the second half of the lesson? I knew Sig wasn't going to be here today. I know you're listening, Sig. *(Laughter)* I knew Sig was listening, so I knew I was going to get started a little early. So I've got more of the lesson built out if we do get through this. Any questions before we get started? No? Okay. Yes?

Caleb Falbo: So the argument that you've just expounded on, do they assume that faith is a gift from God or a work, that faith is something you do?

Jeff: Typically that is understood as faith is something they do.

Caleb: Okay.

Jeff: Typically it's not coming from a Reformed or Calvinistic tradition. Good question.

Caleb: Was that coming from the Roman Catholic Church only, or was that coming more into the Protestant side too?

Bishop: Liberal theology.

Jeff: Yes, that's liberal theology. So for instance it's latest manifestation would be N. T. Wright and the New Perspective where you would see something like that.

Don: Dispensationalism would have taught that too, right?

Jeff: Yes, evangelical Arminians would have taught that. The interesting thing is that if you look at them, this is the interesting thing. Let me read it because Don strikes a memory. It's on my phone, but I'm still not like those kids that really pull this up. What did you say, Gary?

Gary Dunbar: Especially when they get their hands on one of those cell phones. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: That's right. So let me read to you; this comes out of the Westminster Confession chapter 11. And it's on the chapter on justification. Let me just read it to you.

“Those whom God effectually calleth He also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them.” There's the refutation of Roman Catholicism. *“But by pardoning their sins and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous, not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone.”*

Now listen to this. *“Nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them as their righteousness.”* So they recognize what we just said. If faith is really the reduction of a requirement it is still a work. It's still obedience that needs to be offered. The Westminster Confession is saying that it is not to be a work. And we want to dismiss that because that is not the apostle's teaching.

“But by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of

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themselves; it is the gift of God.” It’s a great little section there. Okay, anything else? Yes?

Bryan Whittington: Just this as an aside. Is the Westminster Confession considered systematic theology, or not?

Jeff: Well, it isn’t really technically considered to be in the camp of systematic theology. But it is a systematic expression of the faith. Systematic theology would be much fuller and more robust and have a different loci put in, sort of in the order of the different topics of theology, putting them in a different order, and so on.

Bryan: So in layman’s terms systematic theology would be the doctrine of Jesus, the doctrine of God, the doctrine of justification.

Jeff: The Westminster Confession would get closer to the topical approach.

Bishop: The Westminster Confession is really Biblical theology expressed in an orderly, systematic way. Systematic theology also thinks of man, but it wants to relate it to the contemporary situation and the particular challenges to the faith that we face.

Jeff: Okay.

Bishop: So it always has a contemporary application that covenant theology might not have.

Jeff: Nice, nice.

Bishop: But it’s all based on Biblical theology, as is the Confession.

Jeff: Nice. Does that help?

Bryan: Yes. Thank you.

Jeff: Anybody else? Okay. All right; let’s walk through this for a minute. How was Abraham justified? Well, in general we can say by faith and not works. That’s the thrust of what we’re being told here. And I think it’s on the face of the text. But the question that we have to ask ourselves is really not how Abraham was justified, although we will talk about that. But you know the answer to that question. He’s going to pick that up in verses 9-12. He’s going to ask the question. Was Abraham justified before he was circumcised or after he was circumcised? In other words what he’s asking is, was he justified before he worked or after he worked? And the clear answer to that question is that he was justified before he did anything. He was justified before he worked.

But the question that comes to us at this point is the question of what was imputed to Abraham in his justification. And it’s the question of what we’ve just been talking about. What was imputed?

Now before we get to that discussion, let’s just ask the question. What does *impute* mean? We talk about that word often, but sometimes we don’t really understand it.

You’ll notice in the reading that I just read in the Westminster Confession chapter 11 Sec. 1, where the Westminster theologians put over against infusion the idea of imputation. And I want to just counter-balance those and say, what’s the difference there? Let’s use infusion as a foil.

And when you think about infusion, you think about this, and I’m going to put it crassly. But think about taking a large injection syringe, filling it up and then it being infused with grace, okay? And so there is infusion, a sort of injecting into the person of this grace.

But what about imputation? Imputation is more judicial in orientation, and it’s a reckoning. Think about a person in a law court. Think about a person who is on trial. And

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what happens? The judge at the end of the trial on the basis of the jury’s findings declares him to be either guilty or not guilty, right? It’s a declaration.

But we all know, for instance, that we can think of times in our history where someone has been on trial, and we all think he was guilty. He was guilty as the day is long. And yet there wasn’t enough evidence to bring a conviction. And so the judge declares him to be not guilty.

Now I think that in some way helps us to understand what’s happening here, because it doesn’t fully get our arms around the topic, but it helps us to get our arms around it a little bit. For instance, think about that person who has been declared not guilty by the judge. Well, in our court system he can never be tried for the same crime again, because he has been declared not guilty by a judge. And there’s a sense in which that’s true of us. We’ve been declared not guilty.

But think about the person who knows he did the crime. His conscience afflicts him, and he knows that he’s guilty.

That’s sometimes the way it is with us, despite the fact that God in Jesus Christ has declared us to be not guilty. We say, “But I am guilty,” right? “I know I’m guilty.” And we struggle with the conscience issues.

And the wonderful thing about the Bible is that God not only says, “You are justified in Christ.” But He also speaks to us about the cleansing of the conscience that does happen in Christ and that is ongoing in Christ. In other words, the more I come into the grip of grace the more I understand what Jesus has done for me, the more I understand that I am forgiven my sins. There’s a cleansing of the conscience involved in this that happens to me. I’m really passive in it. It happens to me as the gospel takes me in its grip more and more. Does that make sense? Okay.

So what is imputation? Well, at this point imputation is that declaration of not guilty, okay? Now there’s more to it in this passage than that. But we’re going to open it up and look at it.

Here’s the primary issue. When you read this text it looks as if what we just said in the Westminster Confession refutes what’s in this text, because look at what this text says. It says, *“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”*

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: In other words, it looks as if the righteousness that was his was in fact his faith. So it looks like the righteousness that he received was something that he offered to God.

Now when you look at this text, in fact when you look at the text in more detail, you begin to realize, wait a minute; I’m picking up on something here. The righteousness that he received is something he didn’t possess in the first place. And if he didn’t possess it in the first place, then how can it be something that he possessed in the first place, i.e., his faith? And so all of a sudden we begin to get this idea. Okay, wait a second; what’s going on here? Why is it stated the way it’s stated?

Let me jump ahead and give you a little bit more of this. Go to verse 9 and following for just a minute. *“For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it counted to him before he was circumcised or after he was circumcised?”*

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

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Jeff: Now jump to verse 11. *“He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith.”*

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: Now wait a minute. Now we’re moving into a new expression: a righteousness that is not faith, but a righteousness that he had by faith. All of a sudden, even in this text, he’s now separating righteousness from faith. In other words, righteousness is not the faith that he exercised; it’s something that he received by the faith he exercised.

And that’s true in other places. Think about Philippians 3:9 for a minute; look at it. It says in Philippians 3:9 that Paul is looking at his own poverty and his riches in Christ. Look at verse 8 and then we’ll look at verse 9. *“Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him.”* Now listen to this. *“Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”*

You see the different expressions that he uses to talk about the connection between faith and righteousness. Faith is the instrument by which we receive righteousness. Righteousness depends on faith. Righteousness is through faith. And so all of these expressions are meant to teach us the dependence upon faith and justification. Someone must exercise faith in order to be justified.

Let me put it this way. There’s a lot here right now, but let me put it this way. Let me put it in sort of a logical progressive way.

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff draws on the board.

Jeff: Here we are. We’ll make that Sig. (*Laughter*) I really don’t know whether that’s Sig or whether that’s Don there. But here is this man. And he’s dead in his sins and transgressions. And the Holy Spirit does what first of all? Put it over here.

Bishop: Regeneration.

Jeff: The Holy Spirit regenerates this man. Now what is regeneration? Regeneration is the new birth. God calls; He effectually calls. The Spirit responds to the effectual call of God and regenerates that man and brings him to life. He brings him to spiritual life.

Now upon regeneration there is fruit that results. The fruit that results is what we call conversion. And conversion is made up of two things: faith and repentance. If I could put it this way, these things are the blood that begins to flow through the dead man’s veins.

So these things by being effectually called and regenerated by the Spirit, all of a sudden life begins to flow into this person. And that life looks like faith and repentance. In other words, he responds to what he hears in the outward call of the gospel. And he’s sorry for having not responded previously. So it’s faith and repentance.

Now we say that this faith receives something else. And that something else is justification. Faith receives the blessing or the gift of justification. In other words this (justification) comes through this (faith.)

But here’s the beautiful thing about this. Go back to Ephesians 2:8. Ephesians 2:8 puts it in another way; it puts this relationship in another way. It says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”*

Now let me tell you something. When you look at that passage and it says, *“And this is not of your own doing,”* it means faith. But people object to this and they say, “Wait a

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minute. The *this* in that passage isn't just referring back to faith,” because they don't want it to refer to faith because if it refers to faith then the Arminian has a real problem, because he does believe in the evangelical obedience of faith. So what he says is this. He says, “no, no, no; you misunderstand it. The *this* in that passage refers back to the grace of God in general. It refers back to the whole process.”

And what we want to say is yes and amen. We're happy with that too. We're happy with the idea that it refers back to faith, or we're happy with the idea that the whole process refers back to God. Either way we'll take it because it is of God, right? It's of God that this thing happens.

So when we talk about faith imputed as righteousness, one of the things that we need to remember is this. We need to remember that sometimes the Scriptures speak what is called tropically. In other words, when it speaks tropically it speaks of the whole under its part. And that can be expressed in a variety of different ways. James Buchanan who writes a book on justification talks about the tropic use of faith as it expresses justification.

And what he means is that here is a part that is used for the whole. And let me give you an example of this. You see this elsewhere. For instance Christ is our hope. That's used in 1 Timothy 1:1 and Colossians 1:7.

Transcriber's Note: 1 Timothy 1:1, NKJV. “*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope.*”

Colossians 1:7. “*As you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf.*”

Jeff: Well, Christ is more than our hope. And in fact think about it this way. When you think of hope, here again we have another Christian response. The hope isn't God's hope; the hope is my hope. And yet what we're being told is that Christ is my hope. And we don't have any problem with that, right? It's a portion of what we possess in Christ as an expression of the whole. And so here what we find is that the imputation of faith as righteousness at this point serves as the whole under the expression of just our faith, the faith that is used to receive the righteousness of justification. That's the idea. Is that clear or unclear? Do you have questions about what we're going through? Yes? I'm going to go right through. Don, you're last.

Don: Okay.

Paul Bisser: I'm interested in the term *believe*.

Jeff: Yeah.

Brave Man: I find it frequently. Is it faith, or what is it?

Jeff: Yeah. What's that?

Bishop: Trust.

Jeff: Yes.

Bishop: Trusting God's word, trusting God's acts and trusting God's character, trusting God's gospel.

Jeff: So it's trust, it's faith. It's like the bishop said; it's belief. And it's either the verb *pisteuo* or *pistis*, or other forms of the verb or the noun. But it's the same word. And it's the same word translated in different ways.

It's sort of like our idea of holiness and sanctification, whether it's definitive or progressive. It's all the same word—*haggios*. It's just translated in different ways because

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it's like we talked about last time. Context really is king in terms of how you understand it. So it's like faithfulness or trust or belief or those kinds of things, any of those concepts. Would you agree with that, Bishop?

Bishop: The whole thing is that we're receiving this incredible gift that Christ laid down His life for us.

Jeff: Yes.

Bishop: How could anybody say that to receive a gift is a work? We don't say that about Christmas gifts. Why would we try to think that this is a work?

Jeff: Yes, absolutely.

Bishop: And besides that, if it were a work it would be imperfect and Christ would have to pay the price for that. So the whole thing becomes that. It's such a crazy thing to consider it a work.

Jeff: Yeah. And I think that part of the reason why Paul is not giving us a full explication of faith and justification is that what he's doing is that he's saying that justification is not by works, because he's using that simple illustration. Look. If a guy works for his wages, does he have something to boast about?

Bishop: Right.

Jeff: Well sure he does, because he worked for it. But if he gets something without working for it does he have anything to boast about? No, and that's the idea; that's his point.

Bryan: I'm curious about this. Relating to the conversation we've had here today, I go into a court. I know I'm guilty. But I'm counting on “if my glove doesn't fit, you must acquit.” (*Laughter*) I can do one of two things about that guilt. One is that I can just remain in that guilt and celebrate it. The other one is that I have to earn this gift to work off that guilt. And I think that's what we're prone to do, because we feel God's justice; we're under that weight. So we feel like we have to do works to get rid of it. Or we can choose to trust in the work of a sovereign God. And that is what amounts to having a peace that passes all understanding. And that's what causes us to do them.

Jeff: Yeah; that's great. Don?

Don: Yes. What about Abraham prior to Genesis 15? Was Abraham justified in Genesis 12-14 when God calls him and he obeys? Or is he not justified until Genesis 15 verse 6?

Jeff: Was he circumcised in Genesis 12?

Don: No.

Jeff: Did he believe in Genesis chapter 12?

Don: Yes.

Jeff: Was he righteous in Genesis chapter 12?

Don: Well, Scripture doesn't say it until Genesis 15, but I assume that he was.

Jeff: Yeah. The Scriptures say in Genesis 15 what is true of believing Abraham, right? But for instance, Don, you and I would say that just because the Scriptures don't say certain things about the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, we would still say that somebody has to be regenerated in the Old Testament in order to be saved, right?

Don: Yes.

Jeff: So we would say the same thing about Abraham in Genesis chapter 12, even though it doesn't say so, because what it does say are other things that God says to

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Abraham: the cutting of the covenant. “Abraham, this is the covenant I am making with you.” And Abraham obviously believes because he leaves Ur of the Chaldees and he goes. So before anything is done he is obviously believing, and so righteous.

Don: Yes, indeed.

Jeff: Okay.

Don: But also you were talking about God considering us righteous though we still feel guilty.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: And that’s what Rome has choked on for centuries, because they say: how can God say you are righteous when you are still a sinner?

Jeff: Yes, absolutely.

Bishop: Because of Christ.

Don: Because of Christ; exactly.

Bishop: Isn’t the main point that you’re trying to make here, though, that in one sense he’s trying to say that the same gospel involved Gentiles because before Abraham was circumcised, which was a sign of being of the chosen people, he was justified.

Jeff: Absolutely.

Bishop: That’s the main argument.

Jeff: Yes, it’s the main argument. Yes?

Roger Myers: You’re really bringing out all this because of the Jews coming to a Christian church. They needed to be circumcised and to follow the dietary laws. And that was their reaction when they find out that they no longer needed to do any of them. Was Timothy circumcised?

Jeff: Timothy was circumcised. Titus wasn’t because Titus was a Gentile.

Roger: He had one person circumcised and not another.

Jeff: Timothy was circumcised because the point was that—

Roger: He was a Jew.

Jeff: If you’re going to go and evangelize the Jews, and you’re not adhering as a Jew to the Old Covenant, then how are they going to believe in the fulfillment in the New? That was his point.

Paul: Here’s my problem throughout this discussion. How do I become more like Christ?

Jeff: So that’s a great question.

Paul: I don’t understand how I would apply this practically in my life.

Jeff: So one of the things I would say to you is this, and it’s a great question. I’ll answer it like this. The gospel has two things. The gospel has indicatives and imperatives. Indicatives tell us the state of things. And the state of things is what it is because of what God has done. This is what God has done. So this is what God does for me. And then this is what I do. The imperatives are what I do as a result, okay?

And the Bible oscillates back and forth between telling us what God has done for us and what we are to do as a result. In the book of Ephesians the first three chapters are all indicatives, and the last three chapters are all imperatives.

The point I make to you is this. One of the things that we have to be very careful to do is to make sure that the indicatives are always the foundation for the imperatives. For instance I’ll tell you how I handle this. When I come to a passage that has indicatives in it

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and imperatives I rejoice, because then I can say that this is what God has done, so this is what you do as a result.

When I go into a passage that just has imperatives in it, like I’m preaching through a book and it’s slow-going,--there’s a little passage in here and you have a series of imperatives,--I never preach just the imperatives, because I never want the new person thinking that the gospel is about what I do. So I always include in that passage the indicatives. This is what God has done, and He will equip us to do what He requires, because that’s the gospel. You will never understand the gospel if you put imperatives out here and indicatives here.

So one of the things that we have to remember is that when we come to a passage like this, and we ask the question “how does this help me to grow in Christ,” the answer is what God has done helps me to grow in Christ.

And there are imperatives that are connected to that. For instance, the explicit imperatives that are connected to this are in chapter 6. As a result of all this teaching about what God has done, “do not offer your bodies as instruments of unrighteousness.” How do you not do that? Well, here’s how you don’t do that.

And then chapter 7 is well, wait a minute. I still struggle with this condition in my life, so what does that mean for me? And there’s this whole unraveling of the imperatives. But it’s always based on the indicatives. And you can’t understand the imperatives without first understanding the indicatives, because if you go to the imperatives, if you go to the practical right away without first dealing with the indicatives, what happens? Then you have a works righteousness.

And even if you say, “Well, I know that I’m not saved by what I do; I’m saved by what God has done for me,” if you have a steady diet of imperatives—because imperatives are practical, and that’s what really matters,--what you have is that you have people who really begin to think that they are pleasing God by what they’ve done. And that’s because we’re Adam’s relatives.

So I guess, you know, in answer to your question—and that’s a long way around the line,--but what I’m saying is that here we are with an indicative passage that’s telling us what God has done. And this is why we can grow in Christ because of what God has done. And so for me, when I come to a passage like this, I take that in.

And there are practical things there, right? For instance, the practical thing is that I preach the gospel to myself in this passage: that God no longer reckons my sin to me. Why? Because He has reckoned it to Christ.

Now that’s not necessarily something that I do, but it’s something that I think. And I don’t know about you men, but I need to think that. I need to think and remind myself continually that my sins have been reckoned to Christ, and now are not reckoned to me. That’s important; does that make sense?

Paul: I’ll try to figure it out.

Jeff: Okay. Bryan?

Bryan: There was a gentleman who used to teach us; his name is Bruce. And he said that you have to think right and act right to feel right. So it’s the same application. You have to think right about the Scriptures—who you are in Christ. And that will cause you to act right. And because you act right on what you properly think, you start to feel gratitude from the faith given to you. So the curious thing is that he used to yell at me.

“Justification and Abraham” cont.

“Bryan, you can’t ask how.” So think right; think about who you are in Christ. That causes you to act right, and therefore you’ll feel right. And that’s really the application.

Jeff: That’s a great image.

Bishop: And if you don’t have peace with God, then you’re in trouble. If you do take this seriously you’re at peace with God. And He is now your Father and the Holy Spirit indwells you, and Jesus is Your Savior. So then you’re trying to grow in Them. And by the power of the Holy Spirit working in you with the Word and the means of grace, those things happen.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: I don’t see what the problem is.

Jeff: Yeah. Okay, anything else? Okay, well let me finish up with Romans here, then. And then I was going to launch off into the next portion. But let me just finish up really quick with this portion.

He brings in Psalm 32. And he brings in Psalm 32 to remind us that *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven.”*

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: Remember, we’ve all fallen short of the glory of God, and we’re all lawless. So he’s talking to Jew and Gentile now. *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.”*

Let me say a quick thing about this. *Blessed* is something we’ve destroyed as a word. When somebody sneezes we say, “Oh, bless you!” And it’s a well wish. And what we’re wishing well is that you have good health.

But God doesn’t wish you well and hope it happens. The blessing of God is a blessing that He causes to happen. It’s a blessing that He ensures. And so when he says, *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,”* they are blessed because their lawless deeds are forgiven in Christ.

And then the next verse: *“Blessed is the man against whom the LORD will not count his sin.”* The same thing.

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: It’s forgiveness, and He will not count his sin against him. Why? Because that sin was counted against Christ.

Well, we have no time left. But I want to start with this just really quick. It’s really important because, as the bishop was saying, even though there’s a sense in which all of this is for the Jew and the Gentile, he’s trying to help the Jew to see that Abraham was circumcised. But before he was circumcised he was counted as righteous. And that means that he was more in the position of a Gentile at that point. So all of that is true.

But think about this. And we know this. I was out evangelizing one night. And in another town I used to belong to a small ministerium. It was an evangelical ministerium; it was conservative. It wasn’t one of those where it was evangelicals and liberals.

And we were evangelizing, and we were with this one family. And I just asked the family. I said, “What’s going on?”, and it led to the gospel. And I said to them, “Tell me: on what do you base your hope?” And the father looked at his son and said, “Tell him, son.”

And the son said, “I got baptized on Sunday.”

“Justification and Abraham” cont.

And I said, “Help me to understand what you mean by that.” And here they were Protestants who believed in a form of baptismal regeneration.

And finally, the saddest thing was that their pastor went to our ministerium. And the point I’m making to you is that this idea of works has a way of slipping into Protestantism in all sorts of ways. It even slips in in some of the subtlest ways in some of the most orthodox Protestant churches.

And oftentimes that happens when somebody says this. “Well, I’m going to miss this. I’m not going to be able to attend this. But I do this.” It’s sort of like putting the weights on the scale in their minds and saying, “Oh, this is okay for me to miss because I’ve done this.” And how many of us—No, don’t raise your hands, because we’ve all done it. *(Laughter)* Anyway that leads us into the next segment of the argument that Paul is going to make. So we’ll leave that for next time.

Why don’t we pray? Father, thank You for this day, for the blessing of it. Thank You for the Lord Jesus, for all that He’s done on our behalf. Thank You, Father, that a passage like this reminds us that there is a cleansing of the conscience that’s to be had and enjoyed in this life, that it doesn’t wait till the next life but it is for us now. So Father, when we proclaim the gospel to ourselves, or when we hear it proclaimed faithfully, remind us that our sins were reckoned to Christ upon the cross at Calvary, and that He died that we might not have to die and experience the punishment of our sins, but that we might exercise faith which itself is a gift, and find life eternal in Him. So we pray these things and give You thanks for them in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. *(Applause)*