

Romans 3:21-4:5

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Lesson: Saving Faith

The quarterly indicates that...

"Today's passage examines saving faith and how God provided for us when we had nothing to offer beyond pain and confusion."

Romans 3:21-26 (KJV)

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Q: What does it mean to stand before God without Jesus' atonement for our sins?

<Wait for responses>

Psalms 130:3: If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

Isaiah 6:5: Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

Isaiah 33:14: The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

In this verse, the people living in Jerusalem are the hypocrites with that Hebrew word meaning "the godless" or "the profane". They had the name, Jews, they lived in Jerusalem and the outward appearance of those that were God's, and though they felt safe in the safe crowd, they were ungodly. Think of how many people fit this description in our world today? They feel safe in the crowd, without realizing every person in that crowd that goes without Jesus' atonement is under God's fiery judgement.

Romans 1:18: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

John 3:36: He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Revelation 6:15–17: And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Revelation 20:11–15: And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. ... And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

God's righteousness is completely unattainable by man. Those who are proud of their works hold them up like Styrofoam shields, painted in rich colors focused on impressing other people. God's fiery righteousness instantly burns through our Styrofoam works; they curl out of existence leaving our black sins exposed before Him.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15: Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

The works that are judged are valued as saved or lost based on God's judgement of their true value, but this does not refer to a person's salvation – that is determined by whether their name is in the book of life, and the only way that happens is through Jesus' atonement.

Revelation 13:8: And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

For our weak human judgement, we are unable to discern the works that have value from the works that false, or lies. We can be impressed by people whose works only appear good, but God's judgement is clear.

Romans 3:26: To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Romans 3:27–31 (KJV)

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

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

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.

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

We cannot boast of either our background or our actions. Our salvation is solely in from God, and our faith in Jesus. The works that we do will be fairly valued one day, but not by any person – only by God. The value of our works is in the way they glorify God.

Matthew 5:16: Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

1 Peter 2:12: Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

The world around us cannot see who is in the book of life, but the world can see the works of a life whose focus is on God and Jesus.

Our works are the form that our faith takes. They do not purchase God or salvation, but they please Him. They also help others, help restrain evil and provide visual aids for others to evaluate and decide if they should follow them.

Hebrews 6:10: For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Romans 3:31: Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Paul's focus is on the clarification Jews and Gentiles in the early church. Jesus arrival on Earth did not run counter to anything that came before. God understood His creation. We still today do not understand how our minds work except in the most rudimentary ways. We cannot make thoughts, or restore memories, or transmit one person's thoughts to another. People's bodies die, and their consciousness and memories come right back into the physical structures they left. We understand almost nothing.

God understand all. He surely knew that man would want rules and guidelines no differently than we know children need discipline, rules and instructions – so He gave them to us. He knew beforehand though that having the rules would not solve the biggest challenge that we face, which is making our way to Him.

So, He sent Jesus to atone for our sins. Jesus did not wipe away the laws that God provided, but as Paul says, Jesus made the laws clearer by showing us how impossible it would truly be to win our way back to God by following the laws.

Paul spends a lot of time smoothing things over, helping the Jews and Gentiles become good siblings under God's household, and loving each other rather than creating the strife of a joined family.

Romans 4:1–5 (KJV)

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.

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

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

The Jews had the Book of Jubilees. It was written about 150 B.C. It retells Genesis 1 through Exodus 12 and is divided into jubilees of 49 years (seven "weeks" of years). Jubilees largely agrees with Genesis, but readers can come away believing that Abraham's decisions were the reason God called on him rather than God choosing him first.

Here are some examples from Jubilees that illustrate this...

- As a boy he "began to understand the errors of the earth," that all went after idols. At fourteen he separates from his father's worship and prays to be kept from that error (Jubilees 11:16–17).
- He drives off ravens sent by Mastema and invents a way to protect the seed — already opposing the prince of spirits (11:18–24).
- He reasons Terah out of idols, then at sixty burns the idol-house by night; Haran dies trying to save the gods (12:1–14).
- He rejects star-lore as a way to control rain, prays, and chooses the Lord: "Thee and Thy dominion have I chosen" (12:16–21).
- Then the angel brings him the Genesis 12 call (12:22–24).

So in Jubilees the call does not create Abraham's monotheism. It answers a man who has already chosen God, smashed idols, and beaten Mastema's birds. Later the book

lists trial after trial — famine, kings' wealth, Sarah taken, circumcision, Hagar and Ishmael — and says he was found faithful in all of them before Mastema proposes the offering of Isaac (17:15–18).

Jubilees names Mastema as an angelic prince who leads evil spirits. Those spirits are the leftover offspring of the Watchers (the angels who took wives in the Flood story, as in Genesis 6 and 1 Enoch). After the Flood, Noah prays that the demons be bound. Mastema asks God to leave him a tenth of them, and God does. He is not presented as God's equal. He asks permission. God sets the limit. His work is to mislead, accuse, test, and destroy — especially the nations, and Israel when they leave the covenant.

Jubilees is doing what a lot of Second Temple writing does: it cannot bear a gap. If Abraham is the father of the holy people, he must have been holy before Sinai, and the nations must see why God picked him.

Genesis is willing to leave the gap. God calls; Abram goes; only later does the text stop and say that believing the promise was counted as righteousness.

The point of pulling this information forward is to explain why it was necessary for Paul to spend so much time coaxing the Jews forward. At every step of their history, they'd been taught the law, learned to depend on the cause and effect that caused Job's friends to become his tormentors by constantly accusing him of the sin that they felt led to his suffering. They didn't yet understand that it is God's choosing of Abraham that led to him taking the right steps, not the other way around.

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In verse 2, Paul wants us to understand that it is God's glory that matters, not Abraham's and not ours. If works were our justification – meaning that our works were our atonement, then the glory would be ours, not God's. That is far from the truth.

In verse 4, Paul wants us to understand that we are not making a business transaction with God. We are receiving grace as a gift that we cannot possibly afford. We are not exchanging or bartering our works with God. Our good works can please God, but they are far below the value that would be required to wipe away all our sin. We can see this by how great God's side of the transaction was, it was the painful and universal sorrow of Jesus' death on the cross. How many of a man's works would it require for such a trade?

Our faith in Jesus puts our name in the book of life.

Our good works will one day be judged by God, and they will please Him.

Paul explains that it is our simple belief in Jesus that makes us righteous, and not our works.