

Week 5 – Embracing Grace – Grace Guarantee (Handout)

This week we will continue our reading in Romans to examine other aspects of God's grace as Paul continues to unfold his arguments to the Roman church.

Romans 1-3 (sketch)

(1:16f) Paul gives his overall thesis – “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel *the righteousness of God is revealed*, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

(1:18-3:20) Paul describes how God's ultimate judgment against sin is visible even now in the self-destructive sin of those who “exchange the glory of God for self made images.” These are the pagans who do not honor God at all. Paul then goes on to describe how both Gentiles who attempt to follow moral codes and Jews who claim to be teachers of morality still sin. His point is to prove using scripture and logic that “there is none righteous, no not one” or “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

(3:21-27) In similar fashion, God's righteousness was revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross. Paul claims that God's uprightness, his justice and grace were clearly displayed through the faithfulness of Jesus, who yielded to the will of God and submitted to death trusting in the resurrection promise. This death, Paul claims, demonstrates God's grace in action. Grace that atones for sin, redeems us from slavery to sin and, sets us right with God. The three principle words used to describe this are righteousness, redemption, and atonement.

Romans 4:1-5:11 – By Faith

At the close of chapter 3, Paul asks some rhetorical questions and then he answers them with the arguments that will continue in chapters 4-7. The key question is, “*On what basis can we boast in being righteous?*” On the basis of law or faith? Paul's thesis statement for this section is found in 3:28, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.....there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.” To prove this thesis, Paul advances three arguments that rely upon the example of Abraham.

Abraham part 1 (4:1-9) – “and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

“Justified by works” – works can be any type of work, anything that would “secure” your righteous standing by means of following the rules, keeping the law, faithfully maintaining right-practices, etc. The Jewish tradition claimed that Abraham was obedient to the law...and that is why he was considered righteous. What is the relationship between works and obedience? Can you be obedient without faith? Can you have faith without obedience?

- 1 Macc 2:51-52 “Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?”

Credited – this is accounting language. God sees faith and writes down “righteous”

Justifies the wicked – This is a radical statement for Paul to make. The general understanding was that God justified the righteous, not the wicked. Even Abraham was reported to be considered “righteous” because he kept the law, not because of faith.

- Exod 23.7 – “Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty.”
- Prov 17.15 – “The one who justifies the wicked and one who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.”

Imputed righteousness – Imputed righteousness is the idea that we receive Christ's righteousness instead of our unrighteousness. In this section, we do NOT find any support for “substitutionary” atonement

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which asserts that via the cross we receive Christ's righteousness because he took our punishment of death. Instead, we find that "faith" is the substitute for "righteousness" or "sinlessness." The popular idea that when God looks at us he sees Christ instead is not supported here. We could say that when God looks at us he sees our faith instead of our unrighteousness.

Abraham part 2 (4:10f) Blessing for both circumcised and uncircumcised

Paul enters into the narrative account of the story of Abraham to demonstrate that righteousness was "credited" before the command of circumcision.

Seal & Sign – Abraham's obedience is understood to confirm the underlying faith that existed before the "law of circumcision." Again, this is a radical thing for Paul to say because circumcision was the key sign/mark of the covenant with Israel.

"Heir of the world" – Paul characterizes the promise to Abraham in ultimate terms taking it from the simple promise of "land" and pushing it to the horizon as "heir of the world." This brings in the idea of ultimate salvation as opposed to immediate blessing. Paul is again reflecting Jewish traditional thinking depicted in Sirach 44.19f.

The Promise is worthless – The force of Paul's argument is that Abraham exhibited faith by trusting God to keep the promise that is why God credited righteousness to him, not because he kept the command. Paul has already said that the law declares that there is none righteous (3:17f), here he simply says "the law brings wrath." Faith = trusting God to keep the promise of an inheritance.

No Law, No Transgression – Paul is making a distinction between "sin" and transgression. The law spells out the clear definition of sin and makes sin "accountable" by defining it with precision. No Law does not mean there is NO SIN, but only NO transgression.

Abraham part 3 (4:16f) – Father of all because he trusted God's promise

Connecting to the idea of "inheritance," Paul now shows that the "promise" to Abraham is a promise to both Jews and Gentiles.

Against all Hope – Faith is defined in this section. We see that faith is believing that God has the power to do the impossible despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. He gives "life to the dead" and "calls things that are not as though they were"

Guaranteed – lit. valid, the opposite of nullified v. 13. God made a promise to Abraham to be a blessing to all nations. If law-keeping is an added condition, then the promise is void. The only way for the promise to be valid to ALL is that it is based on faith alone, not law-keeping.

It was credited – Paul takes the opening verse and concludes that this same formula applies to us as well.

Access to ongoing Grace (5:1-9)

Peace with God – restored relationship with God

This grace in which we now stand – the phrase "now stand" is in the perfect tense which means it has on-going effects

God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit – the phrase "poured out" is also in the perfect tense which means he poured it into our hearts and continues to pour it into our hearts. Here we see the connection of the Jer 31.31 imagery of the new covenant

Hope of Glory – What the pagans exchanged in chapter 1, and we all fall short of in chapter 3, we now have regained hope for.

God died for sinners – This violates the traditional thinking of Israel which says you should not do good to the unrighteous. Sirach 12.1-7

IF A, then how much more B – Declared righteous now....confident of future salvation. Set right → sanctified → eternal salvation