
Wednesday Night GEL Group ONLINE

Tonight, we are going to further explore a key theme of Paul's letter in what it means to be justified by faith. In Romans 3:27-31, Pauls briefly mentions two implications of the truth that we are justified by faith and not by 'observing the law'. What Paul means here is, we can't boast in our religious accomplishments. This sounds like the Pharisee from last Sunday's sermon! As we have seen in previous studies, Paul further asserts that Jews and Gentiles have equal access to being justified. Here in chapter 4, Paul further develops these points with a remarkable reference to Abraham.

Let's pray and then read Romans 4:1-25.

1. Throughout this chapter, Pauls grounds his exposition in the key verse seen in 4:6 which is derived from Genesis 15:6. How does Paul show that Abraham himself had nothing to boast about before God?

2. Let's explore some aspects of this chapter and pick out some on the key components by reflecting on discussing these sentences:

Faith is something completely different from 'works' (4:3-8)

Faith doesn't depend on any religious ceremony (4:9-12)

Faith is not related to the law (4:13-17)

Faith often rests in a promise that flies in the face of what is natural and normal (Romans 4:18-22)

3. What do you think 'crediting' Abraham's faith 'as righteousness' mean? Would you consider crediting Abraham's faith as righteousness means to 'account to him a righteousness that does not inherently belong to him?' When Abraham believed and placed his faith in God, God granted him the status of 'righteousness'.
4. It's interesting when we think about this. When we "work," an employer pays us wages not 'as a gift' but as an 'obligation. God always gives love and grace freely and without constraint. He is never or will be obligated to do so. Therefore, God cannot credit human beings anything on the basis of their 'works'.

5. In typical Jewish fashion, Paul also confirm righteousness is because of faith not works from a quote from David's Psalm 32. (Let's read this) How was this achieved?

6. Let's then reflect discuss a key point which David shared in his Psalm. This in turn shapes Paul's writing. The people who are blessed are not those who have earned something from God, they are the ones who have received something from him. Something quite serious being the forgiveness of sin! He accepts us and wants to bless us. He grants us a status we have not earned and do not deserve.

7. Before we study Romans 4:9-13, we need to place the context of this correctly. Let's first read Genesis 17:1-14. Paul's use of the Old Testament would have been thoroughly familiar to his readers in Rome. In Romans 4:10, Paul provided a chronological relationship between God's pronouncement of Abraham's righteousness (Genesis 15:6) and the institution of circumcision (Genesis 17). What is Paul asserting here in his letter? Clue: think about father of many nations.

8. When we read Romans 4:9-12 today, we need to show some appreciation for what it meant for Gentiles to be offered the opportunity to become 'full' members of God's peoples, with equal rights with those who were Jewish by birth. By faith in Jesus Christ, they, along with the Jews, can now enjoy the privileges and blessings promised to Abraham's (the father of many nations) descendants. How does Paul also infer this in Ephesians 2:11-18 and Galatians 3:23-29?

9. What is the learning lesson for us here? Whilst a lot of churches can be broadly defined to look like this, they rarely do. We tend to congregate in monocultural ways. It is natural to feel comfortable worshipping with people who are 'like' us. Is it the case here, that one of the purposes of the church is to force us out of our comfort zones so that we benefit from association with people who are like us in faith in Christ but may be different from us in other ways? Can it be unfortunate that Christians can stifle that intention by, maybe even unconsciously, shaping 'church' to suit a particular group of people that can remain comfortable?