

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 4, Verses 16-25
Notes from Tuesday September 14, 2010
Last Revised on September 17, 2010

Songs

Opening Prayer

Introduction

In this class, for those of you who are new, we are studying the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Notes for all previous classes have been posted on the class web page, for your review.

Last week our reading took us up to Verse 15 of Chapter 4.

Before we read on, I will review a little.

Review

The first 15 1/2 verses of Chapter 1 are **introductory** but they tell us some important things,

including the fact that we are reading a **letter**, written by **Paul**, the **Apostle**, to **Christians** living in a city that he had **never visited**, namely **Rome**.

Paul has been called and set apart by **God** to proclaim something called the **gospel**,

which is God's good news "concerning his **Son, Jesus Christ our Lord**, who was descended from **David** according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his **resurrection from the dead**, all of which was promised **beforehand** through the **prophets** in the holy **Scriptures**.

Paul longs to visit Rome in person to proclaim the gospel there but meanwhile this letter is his written exposition of the gospel the Christians in Rome, and now also to us.

Notice that, like us, the Christians in Rome had **already** been saved by the gospel but, like us, they **still** needed someone to help them better understand the gospel by which they are being saved!

It seems from what we read in these introductory verses, that the group of Christian believers in Rome is heterogeneous --- i.e. there are several different kinds of believers in Rome: Greek and Barbarian, wise and foolish, and Jew and Gentile.

And Paul will repeatedly emphasize throughout this letter that God shows no partiality, and

that Paul himself is under obligation to proclaim the Gospel to everyone without exception.

So far as salvation is concerned, nobody has a special advantage. God only cares about what is true on the **inside** of each believer.

God only cares about faith.

But Paul also has much to say throughout this letter, from the beginning until the end, about the unique role which the **Jews** have played in salvation history.

This is not something peculiar to this letter or to Paul generally. We can't really get around it. From Abraham to Jesus and all his Apostles, the Bible is essentially the story about the Jews, God's chosen people.

Abraham shows up early: in the first verse of the 12th chapter of the first book in the Bible (i.e. Genesis 12:1). From there on out the Bible is the story of his descendants according to the flesh.

Even the events recorded in the first 11 chapters of Genesis are not really pre-Jewish history, since it comes to us through the Holy Scripture of the Jews, it is at least **Jewish** pre-history.

These two themes --- i.e. that we are all the same before God who shows no partiality and that the salvation of the world has been accomplished in and through Israel, are not paradoxical.

Rather we simply come to understand that the salvation which comes equally to everyone (Jew and Gentile alike) comes to everyone **through** the history of Israel.

Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World, and Lord of the Church, is first of all King of the Jews!

So much essential theology is packed into these first 15 1/2 introductory verses of Romans!!

Then in the latter half of verse 16, Paul tells us that the gospel is "the **power** of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

and in this gospel, Paul tells us in verse 17, "...the **righteousness** of God is revealed.."

and in Verse 18, he adds that "... the **wrath** of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..."

These three verses (i.e. 16, 17, and 18 of Chapter 1) are a wonderful preview and summary of much that will be said in greater detail throughout this letter: The gospel reveals how God in Christ has chosen to deal with the unrighteousness and ungodliness of man, pouring out his wrath upon sin, while saving us from it, thereby bringing to completion, despite our sin, all that had been previously said and promised in the law and prophets of the Jews.

We could sit for a year and ponder the first 18 verses of this letter, which are pretty much about the deepest and most important secrets of the universe, and there is here easily enough of the gospel already explained to save everyone who believes what is written here.

Yet Paul adds so much more....

From **Verse 18 through the end of Chapter 1**, Paul examines the unrighteousness and ungodliness of man, from which the gospel saves us, and we are all supposed to see **ourselves** accurately described there, and also every single man and woman who has ever lived, excepting only Christ.

This is so important to understand: every single human being except for Christ is totally depraved, and can never be saved in any other way, besides the gospel of God's grace.

This means that no one (including the Jews, especially the Jews) has any right to judge others, and this is what Paul makes very, very clear in **Chapter 2**.

Then in the **first 20 verses of Chapter 3**, Paul tackles the question of whether there is any value in being a Jew or any advantage to it, in view of what has been said of the total depravity of Man, and God's complete impartiality.

As we have seen, the answer is either "yes" or "no" depending on how one understands the question.

Yes, the history of Israel is incomparably great. In it God reveals himself to Man and unfolds his eternal plan for the salvation of Man, and himself becomes a man (a circumcised Jewish man) in order to bring his salvation plan to its successful conclusion. To have been a part of this history and these people is glorious and valuable and advantageous in many ways. Christians can only honor the Jews and praise God for all that he has done among them.

But this does not mean that the Jews are any less sinful than the gentiles. Indeed because they were the ones to whom the law was given, and to whom the prophets came, they may even be in a more precarious position before God... "since through the law comes knowledge of sin," as Paul says in **Verse 20 of Chapter 3**.

So the gospel is no less necessary to the Jews, and no less glorious in their eyes, when their eyes see clearly. On the contrary, the gospel is most needed by them and comes first to them, and it is the goal and purpose and culmination of their entire history, as recorded in Holy Scripture!!

The whole Bible which is mainly about the Jews is about the Gospel of Jesus Christ!!

And now we come to the very heart of the gospel and of the Bible itself, or at least that is how some men such as Martin Luther have viewed **Verses 21 through 26 of Romans**.

Chapter 3.

 “But now,” Paul says in **Verse 21** of Chapter 3, “the righteousness of God has been manifested **apart** from the Law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it.”

This righteousness, Paul says in **Verse 22**, is “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for **all** who believe. For there is no distinction:”

 “For **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (**Verse 23**)

 “and are justified by his grace as a **gift**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (**Verse 24**)

God put Jesus forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith (**Verse 25a**)

 This demonstrates God’s righteousness, in relation to sins which God in his divine forbearance “passed over” before the coming of Christ... (**Verse 25b**)

 This is the Bible story: Adam, Noah, Babel, the Patriarchs, Moses, and all the Priests and Kings in Israel....it is the continuing story of God’s faithfulness, of man’s sin...sin which God “passed over,” and of the faithful few who continue to manifest faith in God and hope of salvation.

 And now that Christ has come, in these “last days” in which we live, it is totally clear that God is just and that He is the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (**Verse 26**)

 Faith in Jesus is faith in God’s faithfulness, in his grace....it is trust that God in Christ forgives our sins, and will sanctify us, and give us eternal life, just as he has promised to do.

 Since faith in Jesus is the only ground on which God will finally justify anyone, there can be no ground for boasting in our own righteousness, or in our own history or religious heritage, not even for the Jews (**Verses 27-30**)

 The history of Israel, including the Law which they were given, finds its whole meaning and purpose in God’s message of good news concerning his Son, Jesus Christ.

 This faith does **not** “overthrow the Law,” Paul says in verse **31 of Chapter 3** but upholds it.

 Last week in class we discussed what Paul meant by this --- i.e. how the law is upheld by our faith in Christ.

 Someone said that only Jesus has ever kept the law and through faith, and the Spirit of Christ who comes to dwell in us, we somehow participate in his perfect obedience.

 Someone else said that, if Jesus had not come to live a perfect life and then to die and pay the price for our sins, then none of us (except Jesus) could have satisfied the just requirements of the law, and found eternal life.

 Someone else said that, because Jesus has come to save us, we are reconciled with God and we are more willing and better able to behave in ways that are consistent with the law.

 I think these are all good answers and there may be other good answers you can think of....

 But in summary, I suppose that Paul's main point at the end of Chapter 3 is that there is no inconsistency between the law and the gospel. The law is a tool and servant of the gospel.

 This may be easiest for us to see by remembering that the gospel is eternal and has always been at the back of things, even though it was hidden and veiled to some extent until the time of Christ.

 The goal and purpose of the Law, which began to appear fairly late in human history, in the time of Moses, was to help to prepare the way for the coming of Christ and the gospel.

 Except for the gospel which was to come, the law would not have been beneficial to man but only an instrument of his death.

 But because of the gospel which was to come, the law has been a glorious instrument of life, by helping men to understand how much they needed to be reconciled with God through the gospel, by showing us how impossible it is for use to justify ourselves through obedience to the letter of the Law.

 Truly the law rests on the foundation of (is upheld by) the gospel! {Draw Picutre on WB}

 Which is what Paul will amplify beautifully in Chapter 4.

 So ends our review of Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 --- from beginning to end --- is predominately about **Abraham**.

 By the end of last week, we had covered the first 15 verses or so fairly well, and had touched on verse 16, as I recall.

 Today we will finish reading and discussing Chapter 4.

 Notice in Verse 1 of Chapter 4 that Paul seems to be speaking primarily to **Jewish** Christians, in that he refers to Abraham as "**our forefather according to the flesh.**"

 And when he says "**our** forefather according to the flesh" Paul is clearly identifying himself with those to whom he is speaking. "We circumcised Jews, Paul means to say."

 Just as the Jews were proud of being the keepers of the laws given through Moses, they were proud of their ancient ancestors, especially Abraham.

 Not only did some of them think that they were better than other people, for having, and knowing, and keeping the Law,

 but many of them also thought that God would be more forgiving of their sins because they were Abraham's descendants.

 So they had a sort of double advantage!

 Not only that, they believed themselves (i.e. circumcised Jews) to be destined for greatness because of the promises which God had made to Abraham concerning his descendants.

 In case of the latter --- being destined for greatness --- they were right about that, albeit not in the way that most of them probably imagined. They were great insofar as the whole world is saved through them, but this is a salvation which many of them did not expect to share with gentiles.

 Paul aims to adjust their thinking about these things...

 In **Verses 2-8 of Chapter 4**, Paul points out that, however great Abraham was, and he was very great, not even Abraham had any basis for boasting before God.

 Scripture (all of which, remember is Jewish scripture) makes it plain that Abraham was not counted as righteous because of anything that he did but, rather, because of his faith,

 and scripture makes it plain that this faith was not something that Abraham accomplished (i.e. faith is not a work that men can "do") otherwise Scripture would not have spoken of Abraham as having been "counted" as righteous.

 The bottom line is: God made Abraham righteous by giving him faith. There is surely no merit in that!

 Likewise King David speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

 This is really important for all of us to understand: neither our faith in Christ nor the salvation that it brings nor the good works that flow from it, are accomplishments of ours! God grants unto us the faith by which we are saved. Whatever good works may follow, are good only to the extent that they are done by the Spirit of Christ in us. By our self we are not capable of faith or of any good work.

 Faith, salvation, and works are free gifts of God.

By ourselves the only thing we are capable of is sin!

In **Verse 9 of Chapter 4** Paul asks if saving faith is something which God gives only to the Jews.

He then goes on in **Verse 10** to observe that when Abraham believed God and this was counted to him as righteousness, he himself had not yet been circumcised.

The “sign of circumcision” was added later “as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.” (**Verse 11a**)

This is precisely the same way we understand Christian baptism --- the “sign of baptism” is added later as a seal of the righteousness that we have by faith while we were still unbaptized.

In either case --- i.e. circumcision or baptism --- the external sign is meaningless if it is merely external.

Such signs and seals and symbols are meaningful to the extent that they point to inward reality, which is all that God ever cares about. He sees straight to our heart and soul.

The same is true, by the way, of our behavior. Feigned obedience and piety means nothing to God. He cares only about our faith.

Abraham may be thought of as the father of all who are counted as righteous by faith, regardless of whether they bear external signs of circumcision or any other sign that is merely external.

That seems to me to be Paul’s point here in **vv 11 and 12 of Chapter 4**.

Please understand that circumcision is a kind of “law” of the ceremonial variety. It became in Israel and remains to this day a kind of initiatory rite or ordinance of Judaism, the way that baptism is for Christians. Through circumcision a man enters into the nation of Israel and all of her rites and practices. Through baptism a person enters into the visible church and all of her rites and practices.

To circumcision were added, over the centuries that followed, many other laws of various kinds and yet none of these laws, not even the Ten Commandments and other laws of Israel which Christians accept as their own, were the basis of the promises made to Abraham and his offspring, which promises were, are, and always will be grounded in faith, without which no set of laws can produce anything except transgression and death.

This is the sense of verses 13 and 14 of Chapter 4 and so ends our review of what we have studied fully until last week.

Before reading on, do you have any questions?

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 4, Verses 16 - 17

Will someone please read verses 16 - 17 in Japanese

Thank you. Now will someone please read these verses in English.

16 That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring---not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"---in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Thank you.

(Verse 16)

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring---not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

Paul says “that is why it depends on faith.” To what is he referring.

I remember asking this question last week, and someone answered “**righteousness.**”

Clearly Paul is teaching that **righteousness** (a right standing before God) depends on **faith**.

Alternatively, “it” may look back to verse 13 and refer to God’s “**promise** to Abraham and his offspring, that he would be heir of the world.

Verse 13 goes on to make the point that the promise came **not** through the law but, rather, through “**the righteousness of faith.**”

So I guess in verse 16 we are supposed to understand that the promises made to Abraham belong to those who are **righteous through faith**, as opposed to being righteous merely through the law,

just as, indeed, Abraham himself was counted **righteous through faith**, and not through the law.

This is equivalent to saying that the promise rests on **grace** (rather than on keeping the law).

We discussed before how grace (faith, the gospel) is the foundation by which the law is

upheld.

Here we can see how grace precedes law in the history of Israel.

Indeed this goes all the way back to Noah,

and back to creation itself.

All of these things are gracious acts and evidence of God's gracious character which will later become fully manifest in Christ.

We come to see that God is essentially gracious. The law is graciously added to help us see our sin and to help us understand God is not indifferent to it, and to help us understand that we need to be saved from it. The cross is graciously added to rescue us from our sin. It is all grace.

Here Paul helps us see that, because the promise made to Abraham was a gracious act of God, connected not to Abraham's obedience but to his faith, which faith was itself given to Abraham as a gracious act of God,

the promise is "**guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring**"

"not only to the adherent of the law," which would be obedient Jews, if there are any,

but **"also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham"**

"who is the father of us all."

And I believe that Paul means to say that the promise is guaranteed to all, at least to all who share the faith of Abraham, and certainly to all who have faith in Jesus.

Here the point may be not so much to trace the outer edges of who all may be included in the promise, but to make it very plain indeed, that the promise cannot be confined to circumcised, observant, Jewish, Christians, of which Jesus, himself, is the only one!

God chose Abraham and gave him faith so as to save the whole world through him, and not to save merely those among his descendants (if any) who would be circumcised and somehow manage to keep the rest of the law.

This point is further expanded in Verse 17, which reads:

(Verse 17)

as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"---in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

The first part of Verse 17 is a quotation from Genesis 17:5, cited exactly in accordance with the LXX

It reads **“I have made you the father of many nations.”**

This comes from the speech of God where He is explaining the meaning of the name of Abraham, which means “father of a multitude.”

There it might have been read to include only the descendants of Isaac, Ishmael, and the sons of Keturah

but Paul is reading it here to mean and include all people of faith

this connects with the last clause of verse 16 so that, taken together, we get “Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”

However the citation from Genesis is a sort of parenthetical insertion, and if we remove it, we get: “Abraham, who is the father of us al...in the presence of the God in whom he believed.”

The God in whom Abraham believed is, of course, the only God there is, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

“who,” Verse 17 concludes, “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”

This contemplates all of the mighty works of God, including the creation of the universe, the birth of Isaac, the resurrection of Christ, and the new Heaven and Earth promised to all who believe in Him.

Our God, the God of Abraham, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of the impossible.

Abraham and all of his spiritual children, that is all people of faith, put their faith in God’s willingness and ability to do exactly what he says he will do, no matter how strange and impossible that seems to be!

To underscore this point, Paul goes on to remember the strange promise that God made to Abraham,

the one which brought to light the faith which God had given to Abraham and which faith God counted to Abraham as righteousness.

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 4, Verses 18 - 25

Will someone please read verses 18 - 25 in Japanese

Thank you. Now will someone please read that verse in English.

18 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."

19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

22 That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

23 But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,

24 but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,

25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Thank you.

(Verse 18)

In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."

What God promised to Abraham --- that his descendants would be numerous and that he would be the father of many nations --- was not possible within nature.

Not only were Abraham and (especially) his wife beyond the age when conception was possible, but they had been trying for decades without success to have a child, including the years of their youth and vigor and fertility.

For Sarah to conceive a child was impossible and absurd ... even laughable ... and Sarah laughed!

This was not less impossible than the promise that God gave centuries later that Mary, a virgin, would be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and bear a child.

Neither of these things were less likely than that Jesus, dead for three days, would then be alive.

And none of these things were less impossible than that God should speak and the universe come into existence from nothing.

The faith which the children of Abraham have, is no small faith, and has almost nothing to do with apologetics!

It is a faith in God's faithfulness: a faith that God has said what he has said and that God can and will do what he has said that he will do --- no matter how impossible and absurd this may seem.

It is, as Paul says in verse 18, a hope against hope --- a confident belief in the impossible.

Verse 19 reads

(Verse 19)

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

Our faith does not overlook the Impossibility of what is promised.

This may be a really important point. We are not supposed to try to come up with scientific explanations for the frankly supernatural things we are promised.

God seemingly goes out of his way to make this impossible for us. We are asked to believe things that simply defy scientific explanation. Things that are scientifically impossible.

This does not mean that people of faith are irrational or unscientific, but that the objects of our faith are simply not matters which submit to scientific inquiry. Ours is a frankly supernatural faith that has real and unexplainable miracles.

We hope against hope. We believe what is promised in spite of what can be objectively concluded based on the facts at hand.

Verse 20 reads:

(Verse 20)

No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

When God's promises are inconsistent with the facts at hand, we trust in the promises, giving glory to God, and this causes our faith to grow.

But it is important to remember that this faith is rooted in the Word of God --- in what God has said and in what God has promised.

Christians are not supposed to be unrealistic and indulge themselves in mere wishful thinking. ("I am trusting in the Lord for this that or the other thing that I desire!")

We are supposed to trust in the Lord for what he has promised.

Maybe it is best to say that Christians are supposed to face all the facts squarely, and to understand that the promises of God are the most solid facts of all.

That is the sense of Verse 21. Abraham was

(Verse 21)

fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

And Verse 22 says...

(Verse 22)

That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

God counts Abraham as righteous because Abraham trusts God despite everything that Abraham can see and understand from the world around him, all of which weighs against God's truthfulness.

The world says that what God has said is impossible. But Abraham believes God anyway.

This is a huge step in the opposite direction from the one that Adam and Eve took.

There everything was in favor of God telling the truth, but they doubted his word anyway.

Here everything is in favor of God telling a lie, but Abraham believes God anyway.

So begins the redemption of the world and the long and difficult march toward Christ and the Cross!

God creating for himself people who would take God at his word.

Verse 23 reads:

(Verse 23)

But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,

If God is true, then Old Testament scripture was written in the shadow of the cross.

The words "it was counted to him" were written for all of God's children, even us.

as it says in verse 24, these words were written for our sake also...

Verse 24)

[but for ours also.] It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,

Abraham was counted righteous because he believed God when God promised him that he would be the father of many nations, when Abraham could look at his body and that of his wife and clearly see that, insofar as child bearing was concerned, they were already dead.

We are counted righteous because we believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.

If we do not believe this, conversely, then we are not counted as righteous and God's wrath remains on us.

We must believe that Jesus was dead and that Jesus is alive,

But of course even the demons believe that,

so we must also understand what the death and resurrection accomplished for us

as Paul reminds us once again in Verse 25

Jesus...

(Verse 25)

{who} was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

When Paul says that Jesus was "delivered up" I think he means "delivered up to death"

It was in a human sense the Jewish leaders and Roman officials of that time who delivered him hum and even a large mass of the people of Israel, representing the human race at large.

The world offered Jesus up in some sense, and in some sense Satan is the Prince of this World.

However we all know that none of this would have been possible against the opposition of God, so as Paul has earlier said, it was God who put Jesus forward as a propitiation for sin.

But finally we understand, and the Bible makes this so very clear, that Jesus offered himself up in obedience to the will of his Father.

And all of this in accordance with the law and the prophets as written in Holy Scripture, so we know that this was all part of God's eternal plan and purpose.

The death of Christ was long prepared to take away the sins of the world.

And when he rose from the dead, then in some sense all who belong to him, all whose sins have been forgiven for his sake, rise with him, now reconciled with God.

"He is raised," Paul says, "for our justification."

This is the Gospel for all who believe.

May God grant such faith unto you and me

and unto men and women everywhere.

Closing Prayer