

Understanding Paul #2

Understanding Paul

(Number Two)

A look at Romans, Chapters 4 and 5, should clarify some of the questions that may have arisen over Paul's teaching on justification. Keep in mind that among the Jews there was a very strong belief in justification by works, that is, by works of the law, and often the patriarch Abraham was regarded as the example. Justification simply means that the guilty past has been erased and does not refer to salvation. There was a large contingency of Jews in the Church at Rome, and Paul had to address this issue in a detailed way.

Paul states: "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God" (Rom. 4:1-2). Other translations use the word "boast" instead of "to glory," meaning that if he been justified by works of the law he had something to boast about. But this meant nothing to God. Thus, if Abraham had been justified by works, he had all the glory for himself and received nothing from God. But Paul continues, "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (vv. 3-4). But this is not what took place with Abraham, as Paul states the following: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (v. 5). Clearly, Abraham was not justified or made righteous by works of the law, but by God's grace. To make oneself perfect by works, righteousness, then, is not the result of grace, but an obligation that God owes. If this is the case, grace – God's free, undeserved, unmerited pardon – is cast aside.

Recall that the Apostle Peter stated Paul's writings had been twisted. The departure from the original truth given to the so-called "primitive" Church began before the first century was over and continued for about 300 years. Second-century theologians interpreted the texts that refer to the works of the law to mean the law in general, including the Ten Commandments. These they regarded as Jewish and should be discarded. What is called Christianity today follows this same line of reasoning, and the Ten Commandments are regarded as a minor thing of the past. While the Ten Commandments may be regarded as a good model, so they say there is no obligation to keep them. The failure to realize their importance is because second-century theologians, either deliberately or ignorantly, failed to recognize that the law, to which Paul referred in addressing the Jews at Rome, was the various works of the law required by Moses — the law the Jews professed but did not keep. The works of the law included the ritual sacrifices, the various carnal washings, the many prescribed do's and don'ts, and especially circumcision. These works of the law are no longer required. Why? ". . . By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:12-14)?

Paul explained: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5:8-9). The Apostle Peter affirmed this when He wrote: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not

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redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Paul adds: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 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; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith [apart from] the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:24-28).

One who is justified has his sins forgiven. ". . . Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision" (Rom. 4:7-10). So when did Abraham receive acceptance from God? The answer: Before he was circumcised. So the entire Jewish belief that the act of circumcision (which automatically included all the works of the law), brought about justification was invalid.

To walk in the steps of Abraham, Paul tells us: "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect" (Rom. 4:11-14). Abraham's relationship with God was in effect before he was circumcised, so circumcision as far as any relationship with God was concerned, has no meaning.

The Jews based their whole faith on a codified law that was given 500 years *after* the time of Abraham. God's acceptance of Abraham did not rest on any codified law, yet the Bible clearly states: ". . . *that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*" (Gen. 26:5). The fact is: The Ten Commandments were in force long before the time of Moses.

The Jews claimed they were heirs of all the promises given to Abraham, but Paul told them in Romans 2:17-25:

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

The Jews did not really keep the law. The Bible makes it plain that transgressors are under the wrath of God. "Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15). "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude

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of Adam's transgression. . ." (Rom. 5:14). "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that *all* have sinned: For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law" (v.v.12-13). While there was no codified law [the Law of Moses], there was the Ten Commandments, as well as particular statutes that had been revealed to Abraham. Death passed upon all men because all have sinned. Sin *is* the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4).

The entire pre-Flood world was condemned and destroyed because of sin. How could God hold the pre-Flood world accountable if there was no law? The answer: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1:21-22). There indeed was a spiritual law in force long before any codified form was given to the Israelites. It was this law that Abraham obeyed, and his faith and obedience to God is what justified him.

The promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations must be understood in a dual sense. The promise was both physical and spiritual. The physical aspect is mentioned in Romans 4:17. "(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be." The spiritual nature is seen in Romans 4:11-12. "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised."

Abraham's faith in God is emphasized in Romans 4:18-22. "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness." This righteousness applies to all who manifest the faith of Abraham. "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:23-25).

Paul builds upon this concept in Chapter 5. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8). Justification is just the first step. Notice the culmination. "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:9-10). The steps are: Justified by His blood, saved from God's wrath, reconciled to God by the death of His Son, and saved by His life. Jesus said: "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" (John 3:36).

Man must recognize that he is a slave to his own nature. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. . . . But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life

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through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:16-18, 22-23).

How are we saved by His life? Saved by His life means that as He was resurrected from the dead and now is seated at the right hand of the Father, He is the great High Priest who grants us help in time of need (Heb. 4:14-16). As Paul stated: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but *Christ liveth in me*: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). *Christ in you* is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). Notice the following: “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you” (1 Cor. 3:16)? “*And if Christ be in you*, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:10). “. . . If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and *we will come unto him*, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). From these texts we can see that by the power of God’s Spirit dwelling in us we are able to overcome and suppress the nature that is in us. “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom. 6:19). With the help of prayers from the brethren and the supply of the spirit, we *can* overcome (Phil. 1:19).

Belief in Christ means believing in everything He stood for. Belief in Christ without obedience to the Law of God is futile. Paul said: “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but *ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you*. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Rom. 6:17-18). Faith requires works. The Apostle James made this clear when he wrote: “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law” (Jas. 2:10-11). This law is the Ten Commandments. “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? . . . Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect” (Jas. 2:14, 17-22)? To repeat, the works of Abraham were not based on the Law of Moses.

When interpreted by other Scriptures, the writings of Paul are understandable. It is a mistake to interpret the many clear-cut Scriptures of the Bible by Paul, or to ignore or reject those texts that clearly disprove the false doctrines that emanate from this faulty approach – an approach which has led to endless confusion at best, and false doctrines at worst. God has exalted His Word far above His name. Not one should be neglected or disregarded. “I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: *for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name*” (Ps. 138:2). “. . . Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).