

## Paul's Illustration of Righteousness by Faith

In Romans 4, Paul asks a question:

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? (v. 1)

To the question, his reasoned answer was:

If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. 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. But to him that worketh not but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. (vs. 2-5)

The promise was plain. He was to become "a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5). God had specifically stated through whom: "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed" (Gen. 17:19). The problem was with Sarah. Her womb was dead (Rom. 4:19). It would require divine intervention for Isaac to be born. The record reads:

And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. (Gen. 21:1)

It is then stated - "Sarah conceived and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time God had spoken to him" (v. 2). The sexual relationship between Abraham and Sarah did not change, but God vitalized Sarah to a physical state she had not previously had. The change did not come to Sarah until it was impossible, from a human viewpoint, for Sarah to become pregnant (Ex. 18:11). Further, God did not intervene until Abraham and Sarah ceased from their planning as to how they could fulfil the promises of God. He did for them what they could not do for themselves.

Paul used this experience to illustrate the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Consider our condition. We are sinners. We need mercy and forgiveness. Can we provide by works acceptable offerings which God will accept to cover our sins? If man can in any way provide

such a gift, then the Roman doctrine of penance has merit. Can we live a single day without sin or fault? No one has ever done so, except the Word who came to be flesh. For this to be our experience, there will have to come a divine intervention. Our uncleanness must be taken from us. By works? No! But by faith in Him who is able to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25).

What then is to be the message of righteousness by faith for the final hours of human history? A call for an expanded works program in which to place our trust? No, never! It is to be a call to recognize the necessity for God to lay our glory in the dust, and do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. What is our response to be? Paul indicates that it is to be even as was Abraham's, who -

Staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness (Rom. 4:20-22).

Then a conclusion is drawn:

Now it was not written for [Abraham's] 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 raised for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith (not "plus works"), we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Rom. 4:23 - 5:2).

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What is justification by faith? - It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself. When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. When they begin to praise and exalt God all the day long, then by beholding they are becoming changed into the same image. What is regeneration? - It is revealing to man what is his own real nature, that in himself he is worthless.

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