

### THE BOOK OF ROMANS

#### Lesson 10, Chapters 3 and 4

I'm not sure that more beautiful, soaring, hope-inspiring words have been written in the Bible than what we read in Romans 3:24:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Romans 3:24 *By God's grace, without earning it, all are granted the status of being considered righteous before him, through the act redeeming us from our enslavement to sin that was accomplished by the Messiah Yeshua.***

While this is stated in about half as many words in most English Bible versions, the meaning is the same. It is that salvation and our release from the power of sin is a free gift from God that cannot be earned or merited by our own good works (nor can it be denied by our lack of good works). Rather it was accomplished on our behalf by the good works of Jesus Christ, specifically by Him being so perfectly faithful that He went to the cross as our atonement and as our Passover Lamb.

Since this indeed is the case, then why does Paul spend so much time talking about, and teaching about, the Law? It can be reduced to this admittedly over simplistic but nevertheless true principle: while the Law and the Gospel of Christ are organically connected, they serve two critically important, but entirely different purposes. The Law and the Gospel are not competitors; they are teammates. For human or animal life to exist we all must have as basic needs air, water, and food. These 3 necessities for physical life are critically important and organically connected, but they are each for entirely different purposes. No one can tell us to choose one, or even two, out of the three as most important. Any one of the three that is taken away from us for very long means physical death. It is the same with the Law and with the Gospel of Christ. For centuries the institutional Church has told us to choose one of the two (obviously with the intent that we choose the Gospel). God gave us both because we need both. So Paul is attempting to explain the difference between the Law and the Gospel, and what the purposes for each are and (just as important) are not. And that we must not confuse one for the other.

We must never forget that both the Law and the Gospel were given by God **to Israel**. It is only later that Christ told His disciples that the Gospel was to be taken to the gentile world. This is something that confused and angered most Jews of Paul's day. And much of what we have been reading is Paul explaining himself for bringing the Gospel to gentiles and in doing so establishing some of the basic principles of our Judeo-Christian faith.

So let's take up Romans chapter 3 at verse 24. We'll reread chapter 3 from verse 24 to the end.

**RE-READ ROMANS CHAPTER 3:24 – end**

Essentially in verse 25 Paul explains the nuts and bolts of just how it is that the Gospel as stated in verse 24 is **able** to do what he claims it does. In other words Paul asserts that a person is made righteous by God's free gift of grace, and not by any kind of work or deed. But especially a Jew who is steeped in Judaism is going to look skeptically at that assertion for a couple of reasons. First because it was standard Jewish doctrine of Paul's day that simply being Jewish was sufficient for God to see a Jew as righteous. And that by doing the Law one maintained their status as a Jew and therefore maintained their position of righteousness before God. I'm sorry to keep repeating myself, but it is necessary. When Jews insisted that they were doing the Law, they did not specifically mean that they were doing the Law of Moses. They meant that they were doing Jewish Law; Tradition; **Halakhah**. The religious philosophy of Judaism was (and still is) that **Halakhah** was effectively doing the Law of Moses, because **Halakhah** was the rabbinical interpretations of the Law of Moses, which included a long list of subsequent rabbinical rulings about required behaviors and rituals that were derived from those interpretations. But were the rank and file Jews consulting the Torah, the Law of Moses, on religious matters? No. They were following the **Halakhot** (the many Traditions) that the Pharisee synagogue teachers said they should be following. Thus there was no longer a clear line between Holy Scripture (the Law of Moses) versus Traditions of the rabbis.

The second reason that Jews were skeptical of Paul's assertion of salvation as a free gift of grace for all who believe in Messiah is because they didn't see a Messiah as having any direct involvement in their spiritual relationship with God. For them a Messiah was merely a real, physical descendant of King David who would militarily lead the Jews out of being oppressed by Rome and into a golden era of Israel becoming the dominant world-wide kingdom.

What we ought to be furrowing our brows about is that Paul (at least in his own mind) has decided that it is necessary to lecture these Jewish and gentile Believers of the city of Rome about these faith principles. Clearly he is skeptical that they have been taught the Gospel correctly or that they have been taught the proper doctrines to live their lives by. Paul has not decided to write an extensive general theology of Christianity and randomly send it off to Rome. He is responding to what he thinks are certain pressing issues within the Believing congregations of Rome. And as the Christ-designated Apostle to the gentiles, Paul also believes that it is not only his duty to set down the doctrines of the faith of Messiah, but that he also has the authority to do so.

So by way of explanation as to just how it is that God offers salvation as a free gift to everyone who trusts in Messiah Yeshua, he says in verse 25 that God (meaning the Father) put forth Yeshua as the sacrifice for sin. Therefore as a sacrifice (and Paul has in mind an altar sacrifice, not something theoretical or allegorical), the blood of Yeshua meets the Torah requirement of innocent blood being shed for the sake of the guilty. Let's pause for a moment. The Greek word **hilasterion** is what is being variously translated into English Bibles as propitiation, or sacrifice of atonement, or expiation. What is interesting is that in the Greek Old Testament **hilasterion** is used to translate the Hebrew word **kapparah**. And **kapparah** means Mercy Seat (the lid on the Ark of the Covenant). So the proper literal English translation is: "God put Yeshua forward as the Mercy Seat....." That is, the Mercy Seat is the place where atonement is made by the High Priest, once per year, for all Israel. Now God has put Yeshua forth as that Mercy Seat....as that place where atonement must be made. Not allegorically but

actually.

I'd like to note that in Paul's day (and since the Jews' return from Babylon) there was no Ark and no Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies. It had been taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar as a spoil of war and never returned. So when the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies in the Temple annually on Yom Kippur, he still performed the required ritual of atonement but instead of sprinkling blood on the Mercy Seat he sprinkled blood onto the floor where the Ark used to sit. Was this efficacious for remittance of sins for Israel? I can't be 100% certain, but I don't think so.

Paul continues by saying that this remittance of sin was the result of faith in Christ's blood. This passage has always created some difficulty because the usual way it is interpreted is that it is OUR faith in Christ's shed blood that counts as our righteousness. But as Joseph Shulam points out, that cannot be correct because in order to arrive at that conclusion one must alter the verb and word order of the verse. And in fact that is regularly done by Bible scholars who think it makes more sense to alter the order of the Greek words in this passage. But if we leave the word order as it stands in the original Greek, then the meaning changes from OUR faith to Christ's faith as the catalyst for atonement and forgiveness. And this meets well with the meaning of verse 22 that speaks of Yeshua's faithfulness to God. So when properly read this passage it is saying that atonement has been made through Yeshua's faithfulness by Him allowing His blood to be that sacrifice of atonement for all who believe. I only point this out because too much OUR faith is emphasized in modern Christianity, when in fact the Scriptures point to Messiah's faith and faithfulness as the primary issues. And then we are to TRUST in HIS faithfulness. And often this manifests in Christians constantly being concerned about how much faith we have, and thus a higher level of faith brings with it more favor and more rewards. Or there is a belief that if things don't turn out the way we want them to because we don't have enough faith, then if only we could muster up MORE faith more of what we want to happen would happen. Our faith will never be perfect; our faith will never be sufficient to warrant our salvation. Therefore we are to trust in Messiah's perfect faith.

The remainder of verse 25 and its flow into verse 26 is quite difficult. It speaks of how Yeshua's sacrifice highlights God's forbearance because God passed over the sins that people had committed in the past, even though He had never remitted those sins nor punished the sinners for those sins. To understand this we have to go back a few weeks when we carefully defined what is meant by God's righteousness. What is the righteousness of God? And we found that first of all how God's righteousness is defined is entirely different than how human righteousness is defined. Human righteousness is defined as being right before God, and by doing right before God. God's righteousness is summed up in His saving will. That is, God's righteousness is His determination to take people who are not right with Him and to make them right with Him. In this instance Paul is saying that at least for some, God passed over their past sins and postponed a punishment they richly deserved. He didn't wink at those sins or forget them. Rather by postponing the punishment until Yeshua came, now Yeshua's blood could atone for them once and for all. And the mere fact that God would so graciously do this magnifies His glory all the more.

So after explaining the reason why Yeshua's death on the cross is the legal justification for

God reaching down from Heaven and righteousing those who trust in this amazing protocol of grace, Paul then asks a simple question in verse 27: “**So what room is left for boasting?**” That is, clearly the sinner whose sins are atoned for 1) doesn’t deserve forgiveness, 2) has done nothing to earn forgiveness, and 3) receives the forgiveness as a free gift. Therefore he can’t hold himself up as having worked tirelessly at being Torah observant as the reason why God would choose to righteous him. His deeds don’t earn him merit; they earn him condemnation if he counts on those deeds to be his righteousness. So as usual, Paul answers his own question. He says that there is no room at all for boasting about one’s works as the reason for God righteousing him, since works was never the way one received righteousness. Rather it is trust and trust alone that gains a person righteousness. Paul says it another way in verse 28: obeying the Law is not how one attains the righteousness that saves.

Paul moves his case forward for gentile inclusion into the Biblical faith in verse 29. He asks the rhetorical question: Is God only God of the Jews or is He God of the gentiles, too? He of course answers his own question and he says, yes, God is the God of both Jews and gentiles because God is one (in Hebrew, **echad**). Or in modern English, there is only one God so there can’t possibly be separate Gods; one for Jews and one for gentiles. Really? That’s funny because this plainly contradicts another rather widespread Christian doctrine that essentially does make the claim that there are two Gods: one for the Jews and one for the gentile Christians. The one for the Jews is the God of the Old Testament, the Father. The one for gentile Christians is the God of the New Testament, the Son. And if we have two Gods, then we necessarily have two different loyalties for two different sets of people along with two separate sets of rules. Paul tackles this question head-on and says no; there is but one God for both Jews and gentile Christians.

And now in verse 30 Paul draws a conclusion. But let me remind you that throughout this dissertation he has been following the standard rabbinical Talmud method of making his case. He presents the question; next he presents the ruling that a previous rabbi made; next he refutes that ruling (usually by saying Heaven Forbid); and then finally he pronounces his own, correct, ruling. Paul’s arrival at a conclusion is announced by beginning the verse “therefore”. And the ruling is that since there is only one God, logically meaning that God then must be God of everyone (Jews and gentiles), then God will righteous those who are circumcised (meaning the Jews) based on their trust, just as He will righteous those who are uncircumcised (meaning gentiles) also based on their trust.

But now in verse 31 comes the question of the ages. Because of all the previous arguments about Jews and gentiles, and that the Law (the Torah) does NOT save, only trust in God saves, does that mean that the Torah is abolished because of this trusting? In other words, since because of Yeshua’s blood sacrifice on the cross in which we can place our trust, does this render the Law (the Torah) obsolete, replaced, and therefore abolished? How might Paul answer that question? And regardless of his answer, what might he base his theology on? I think I know, and I think most of you know. As much as I enjoy using the CJB, on this passage I want to use the KJV just to demonstrate that it doesn’t matter which version we use, the outcome is the same.

**Matthew 5:17-19 KJV**

***<sup>17</sup> Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.***

***<sup>18</sup> For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.***

***<sup>19</sup> Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.***

Paul's answer is directly connected to Yeshua's statement. And his answer to the question of if all that he said regarding equality of the Gospel for Jew and gentile, and that the Law does not save, means that the Law is therefore abolished.....HEAVEN FORBID! Let's face it; had he said otherwise, he would have refuting His Savior.

Let's move on to Romans chapter 4.

### **READ ROMANS CHAPTER 4 all**

In Jewish terms, Romans chapter 4 is essentially a Midrash (an interpretive discussion) of Genesis 15:6. There we read: ***Genesis 15:6 CJB <sup>6</sup> He (Avraham) believed in ADONAI, and he (God) credited it to him as righteousness.***

So Paul is going to justify his assertion that trusting faithfulness is what actually confirms the Law of Moses (and doesn't abolish it) by citing Abraham. And he begins by addressing a standard premise of Judaism that clearly existed then, and exists to this day that is called in Hebrew ***z'kut avot***: the merits of the Fathers. This was a belief that was part and parcel with the concept that Jewishness itself guaranteed righteousness before God. However it peeled the onion back another layer by claiming Jewish righteousness on the basis of the righteousness of their ancestors. The key words of verse 1 are "by his own efforts". In other words, the Jews believed that Abraham was righteous on account of his deeds and that Abraham's righteousness had a great deal to do with their own righteousness.

First let me comment that it is sadly fascinating that Abraham is all but disconnected from modern Christianity, even though Paul has appealed to Abraham on more than one occasion to prove not only the efficacy of the Gospel, but also of the Law. Abraham is seen by the Church as more connected to Judaism and to Islam. And yet here in the New Testament Paul shows us that the plan of redemption that we all count on is directly connected to Abraham. But even more if Paul can prove to his readers that if Abraham had no claim to glory (because he did not receive his righteousness through his deeds), then neither can anyone else claim glory from their own deeds.

Next Paul says that if Abraham was righteoused by God because of his works, then he certainly would have something to brag about. But that is not what happened; rather Abraham put his trust in God and God credited this trust as Abraham's righteousness. The point Paul is making is that the Law didn't yet exist in Abraham's day (it wouldn't for another 6 centuries).

So it can't be by doing works of the Law that God saw Abraham as righteous. Rather if any work was involved, the "work" was merely that of trusting. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism it was indeed believed that Abraham was righteous before God on the ground of his deeds. In the Book of Jubilees (which was written sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.) we read that "**Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life**". So Paul was disagreeing with standard Jewish beliefs of his day. He says in verse 3, "But this is not how it is before God", meaning Abraham did NOT establish his righteousness before God through his works and deeds. Instead Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 as how Abraham came by his righteousness; and it was simply credited to him by God on account of Abraham's trust.

So to explain how it was that Abraham was credited with righteousness, Paul provides a simple analogy. He says that a person who works for a wage doesn't receive his pay because of a favor. He doesn't receive his pay as a gift or as an act of grace by his overseer. He's earned it by his own hard labors; the reward is due to him and so he rightfully can glory in it. On the other hand, if a person does not work but rather merely trusts in God to make people who are not godly into people who are righteous, then that person has earned nothing and so is owed nothing. The trust they have in God is simply imputed to them, by God, as righteousness. What that person received (righteousness) was not owed to him; it was given as a favor, a gift.

In verse 6 Paul drags King David into the picture to use what he had to say as yet another proof that works and deeds are not what makes a person righteous before God. In fact Paul is using Psalm 32 to help to properly interpret Genesis 15.6. Only the first 2 verses of Psalm 32 are quoted by Paul. But it was a rabbinic principle that only quoting part of a passage indicated that all of the Scripture passage was being referred to and thus ought to be read into the discussion. So let's hear what David had to say about the source of righteousness (including for those, like himself, who were Jews and had the Law) by reading all of the rather short Psalm 32.

**CJB Psalm 32:1 By David. A maskil: How blessed are those whose offense is forgiven, those whose sin is covered!**

**<sup>2</sup> How blessed those to whom ADONAI imputes no guilt, in whose spirit is no deceit!**

**<sup>3</sup> When I kept silent, my bones wasted away because of my groaning all day long;**

**<sup>4</sup> day and night your hand was heavy on me; the sap in me dried up as in a summer drought. (Selah)**

**<sup>5</sup> When I acknowledged my sin to you, when I stopped concealing my guilt, and said, "I will confess my offenses to ADONAI"; then you, you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Selah)**

**<sup>6</sup> This is what everyone faithful should pray at a time when you can be found. Then, when the floodwaters are raging, they will not reach to him.**

***<sup>7</sup> You are a hiding-place for me, you will keep me from distress; you will surround me with songs of deliverance. (Selah)***

***<sup>8</sup> "I will instruct and teach you in this way that you are to go; I will give you counsel; my eyes will be watching you."***

***<sup>9</sup> Don't be like a horse or mule that has no understanding, that has to be curbed with bit and bridle, or else it won't come near you.***

***<sup>10</sup> Many are the torments of the wicked, but grace surrounds those who trust in ADONAI.***

***<sup>11</sup> Be glad in ADONAI; rejoice, you righteous! Shout for joy, all you upright in heart!***

So Paul uses this Psalm of David to make a key point: God forgives and gives righteousness to those who have sinned; and yet people who have sinned do not deserve forgiveness. However in verse 2, God "imputes" or "reckons" (depending on your Bible version) no guilt to the sinner, thus righteousness could in turn be given to that sinner who God now no longer sees as a sinner.

The verse 8 instruction about "the way you are to go" is referring to the Law of Moses, the Torah. But notice this is not associated with HOW one becomes righteous. Going the way one is to go, and receiving righteousness, are two different things. "Going the way one is to go" does NOT cause righteousness. But.....receiving righteousness DOES open a person's heart to God's instruction and His wise counsel as found in the Law so that he can "go the way one is to go".

Verse 10 of Psalm 32 is something we should carefully note. It says that **grace** surrounds those who TRUST in God. Please notice that David lived 1000 years before Christ, and yet he appeals to grace. I've said it before but it bears repeating: grace is not a New Testament innovation. Christ did not open the era of grace. Grace is an Old Testament principle naturally brought forward into the New Testament era. Grace is more than a principle; it is an attribute of God. In fact the Levitical sacrificial system was grace in action because God decided that He would accept the blood of sinless animals to pay for the sins of guilty human beings who owed Him the debt of their own blood. Grace versus Law (as it is often framed in Christianity) is an oxymoron. The Law WAS grace because God gave Israel a way to atone for their trespasses, and to return to peace with Him, which didn't involve the human trespasser losing their own life nor did it involve them "earning" their way back into God's good graces. So we...all of us....need to be ambassadors to the Church in general to help them to understand the goodness of God and the history of true grace that extends back to the beginning of humankind on this earth.

Back to Romans chapter 4. In verse 9 Paul asks his straw man yet another question: "Now is this blessing (that David was speaking of in his Psalm) for the circumcised only?" Can only Jews expect such a blessing of unmerited grace? Or does this extend to the uncircumcised (gentiles)? I can't even imagine the can of worms that Paul has just opened. This would have

caused fury among many of the Believing Jews in Rome who read this letter. But Paul is undaunted and continues with his line of reasoning by pointing out the unthinkable: Abraham was righteous by God BEFORE he was circumcised. In other words, before He was officially a Hebrew, while he was still a gentile, He was given righteousness because he trusted God. His righteousness did not come because of his circumcision.

In fact the Biblical timeline (and Hebrew tradition) is that he wasn't circumcised until 29 years had passed after the event of Genesis 15.6. So Paul has just annihilated the standard Jewish argument that fleshly circumcision was the requirement for Jews to have a decided advantage over gentiles, and to obtain righteousness, because as Paul said near the end of Romans chapter 2: ***“True circumcision is of the heart; it is spiritual and not literal so that his praise comes not from other people but from God”***. But it also proves something he has been arguing since Romans chapter 1: since Abraham received righteousness from God long before the Law ever existed, then it cannot be that it is the Law that is the vehicle to receive righteousness. Even more it is that circumcision was NOT given as a sign of Jewishness; it was given as a sign and seal that one has a trusting faithfulness in God.

Let me add something that people who have been following Torah Class for many years already know. It is that not only did the way for receiving righteousness get revealed through Abraham, but it is that deliverance (salvation, if you would) came upon Israel (they were delivered and redeemed from Egypt), BEFORE they received the Law on Mt. Sinai. And this redemption happened with utterly no deeds or merit on their part. It happened purely by God's grace. He and He alone fought Egypt through supernatural plagues forcing Egypt to release God's people. So here we have further proof that doing the Law is only something for people who've already been redeemed; it is not a means of redemption. And yet to Paul the Law is not at all dead and gone, nailed to the cross. It continues in full force. And that is because its purpose is especially important to Believers; it is needed to show us what pleases God and what sin is.

**1John 3:4 KJV <sup>4</sup> Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.**

For the Apostles Paul and John, long after Christ was crucified and arose, the Law remained the standard. The Law remains the manual for living the redeemed life that God gave to us all as a free gift of grace. Or as Paul says; there is only one Law, because there is only one God. And is He not the God of both Jews and gentiles?

Thus in Romans 4:11 Paul says that God righteoused Abraham BEFORE he was circumcised so that Abraham could be counted as the father of the uncircumcised as well as the circumcised. Fighting words to be sure to the Jews of Rome; but Paul's use of Holy Scripture and logic is impeccable.

You probably have enough to think about for one day so we will conclude Romans 4 next week.