

Faith Alone

Romans 4:13-16

Colossians 3:1-11

Colossians 3:12-25

Responsive Psalm 19:1-11

This morning we are going to pick back up where we left off last week in Roman's chapter 4. Paul has been working hard to strike home the idea that justification before God is only found in faith, and that faith, is apart from works, especially the works of the law. Before God there is no justification found in the law but rather only judgment and wrath. The importance of this message can not be overstated and is why Paul spends so much time here for in the case of salvation, it is life or death. There is really only 2 camps, you are either justified by the keeping of the law, or you are justified by faith through Jesus Christ. In the one there is only found a constant dealing with guilt and shame, in the other is hope and peace for Christ has dealt with the guilt and shame that is brought about by the law when he bore our sins upon the cross. This message is just as important today, not only relevant to the Jewish nation, but to us Christians as well for we can be caught up in the same error as they.

We mentioned this last week, that this was the driving point of Paul's letter to the Galatians. There were men from Jerusalem who had come and were convincing the Gentile Christians that they still must adhere to the Mosaic law and commandments. And Paul's argument there is much like we see here in Romans, was it by the spirit that you first believed, or by the law? That is Paul's point here as well, that Abraham, the patriarch of the nation of Israel was justified before God by faith, he believed God and it was that belief that justified him, not of works, not of law, but of faith. This is the core tenant of New Covenant Theology which is what we here ascribe to, and identify with. This is where this doctrinal belief and understand comes from, the root of it, is that justification is by faith, apart from the law. It is not that we have been enabled to keep the law through faith, but it is rather apart from it and Paul points to Abraham to make this argument showing that he was justified hundreds of years before the law came. Looking at verse 14 to the end of the chapter, Paul had just finished describing the faith of Abraham having been accounted to him before he was circumcised, showing that not only when it comes to Justification before God the law avails nothing, circumcision as well avails nothing for Abraham's faith and righteousness was accounted before and that circumcision was the sign of God's promise to Abraham, not a sign of his justification.

So therefore, the promises of the one who would come to reconcile his people to himself, through the seed of Abraham is not only for the physical descendants of Abraham, but for the spiritual. And this is even at its core the logical conclusion for God does not promise that the seed of Abraham will be the blessing to one nation, but to all. Verse 13. (read 13-25) Abraham is not the father of one nation, but the father of many. The Jews pride themselves in their lineage and heritage tracing their family line back to Abraham, which would have purpose, and meaning if the promises were only for the nation of Israel itself, but God told Abraham that he would be a father of many nations, not just one, but the father of all who believe, from every nation, every race, across the entirety of the world, throughout time. If you believe today, you are a son of Abraham and an heir to the promise that God has given, that reconciliation and justification has come through the one seed, which is Christ. Jewish belief is that their future inheritance is the consequence of having the Mosaic covenant, and in turn was the consequence of being circumcised, but this understanding reverses the reality, like I had mentioned last week it is putting the cart before the horse.

The building blocks of righteousness before God is not the law given to the circumcised, but the promise given to Abraham. “for the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” This righteousness is found in only what God has done, apart from anything that Abraham had done, it was God who came to Abraham, it was God who made the promise, and it was God who up kept and fulfilled it. This relationship is based solely upon God's grace, and his mercy. AS Paul wrote in the first half of this chapter, it is not as if Abraham had worked and therefore received a wage as an employee would with an employer, no, it was a free gift offered, and given. The Jewish understanding of this covenant is that God promised a people through Abraham, a nation and that he would provide for them their own land, in which we know he did as we see in the Old Testament. But Paul here is going beyond the idea of merely the physical aspect of inheriting the land of Canaan, to inheriting the whole earth. This understanding was slowly being revealed throughout the old Testament scriptures, we see that Abraham would be a father of many nations, David during his coronation is Psalm 2, “ask of me, I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. God is the God of the whole world, not just of the nations of Israel, his peoples promise extends beyond that of the land of Canaan. Paul is pointing out exactly how this is, that it is by faith that those of all nations can be brought into the family of God. Abraham's promised children of faith are found throughout the whole world, they are the inheritance of Jesus, the Son of David who will inherit the earth and reign with Christ.

Verse 14, “For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.” Judging by Paul's inference here, one of the errors of the Jewish understanding is that the keeping of the law supercedes the requirement of faith. Seeing a change in administration that truly isn't there, it is the same error our dispensational brothers make, creating separation that isn't there. In the Jewish mind, God worked through faith, then the law came and the law being the revelations of God is the new means of righteousness before God. They did not understand the law as a threat, as a condemnation but rather as a vehicle of redemption, it was about maintaining salvation through the works of the law understanding that their inheritance was through the fact that they were the physical descendants of Abraham. Which there is an element of truth to that understanding, but it is again missing the entire point. The law that was given to Israel, was a distinguishing mark of the nation of Israel, it set them apart from the world and by it they were given a unique relationship with God, not given to any other. But Paul is saying, the what the law set out to accomplish has been completed, the promise to Abraham has now been fulfilled, for what the law had pointed to, as arrived. The promised seed, the Messiah who would come to take away the sins of God's people, the one who is perfect and holy who is the only one who could keep God's law perfectly paid that punishment of it, so that we who are incapable may be as though we are ones who can.

That isn't to say, that we are not able to fulfill the law in this life, that again is a misunderstanding. Christ did not die so that we may now work to fulfill the law, Christ in his death fulfilled its purpose for us, so that we who are of faith, in him, are not under the law. Now the promised new covenant has been established, the one foretold which would bring in Gentiles on equal footing with the Jews. The new covenant in which God has made for himself a nation of priests, from many nations, by the blood of his son, Jesus Christ. So the ramifications of this are, that if one continues to attempt to maintain a covenant that has served its purpose, that is to reject the promise, and God's plan for the lives of his people.

Paul is challenging them here in these verses to shift their understanding of the purpose of the law. They had made the law to be something that it was never intended to be, the law which was given to set apart, to instruct the nation of Israel, was now being seen as a means of salvation, setting themselves up as the arbiter of salvation, that is, the ones who determined who would be admitted into the covenant. The law had become to them, a means by which they had control, and by insisting that gentiles must be circumcised to be a part of the covenant people of God was a form of gate-keeping and power that in their pride and arrogance were unwilling to give up. They had no problem with Gentiles converting to Judaism, but they could not separate the physicality with the spiritual. In other words they believed that circumcision was a requirement but Paul points out that if that is the case, then they have removed themselves from the grace of the covenant that was originally made with Abraham, because as Paul pointed out, they were no longer operating in the Abrahamic covenant which was given by God through his grace, they exchanged that grace, for works and in doing so put themselves outside of the covenant that God had made with Abraham, and the irony of it all, is in doing so they put themselves in the same place as the gentiles, separated from God.

The reality of the logical consequence of this legalistic understanding of the law is that it sets the law up as a replacement of the original covenant made with Abraham, if indeed law keeping is the condition of entrance into righteousness before God, then the Abrahamic covenant has no value or purpose, faith then no longer has any value or purpose. In other words, Paul is saying that the Jewish understanding of Israel as the elect nation is a misguided illusion because it makes Abraham's faith worthless. The ultimate outcome of Israel's national righteousness is God's wrath, for none are justified through the law, but only by faith. The consequence of removing one self from the principle of faith, invites judgment upon oneself by the law which as scripture tells us brings wrath. In verse 15 Paul brings forth a devastating argument against the law mindset. "Where there is no law there is no transgression." The Jewish understanding is that the law given to Moses by God sets forth a path of righteousness and all those who are not under the law have no such path concluding the salvation was for the Jew and not for the Gentile, unless, the gentile put themselves under the Jewish law and traditions. But Paul brings forth a nuance in his argument that shatters this concept. The Jews understood that breaking the law brought with it punishments and wrath, so the logical conclusion is that if one is not under the law, one is not under wrath. In other words, if the law does not apply to the Gentiles as they believed, then the Gentiles are guiltless, and therefore righteous. Paul doubles down on this idea in chapter 5:13 where he says, "For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law."

So, it isn't as if sin didn't exist, obviously it has since the fall of Adam, but the logical conclusion of the Jewish belief that sees the law as central to both righteousness and wrath, makes it as though there was no punishment or wrath before it came, again leading to the logical outcome that those who are not under the law are guiltless, and blameless. Not only has the Jewish argument against the universality of the Gospels caused the Jews to put themselves outside the grace they claimed was the essence of the covenant with Abraham, they at the same time were assigning the Gentiles whom they were seeking to control to a place where they could be heirs of the Abrahamic blessings because Abraham was declared righteous without the law. Their very own belief and argument was turned upside against them, the very thing they saw as their salvation, is their condemnation, and if the law itself is the central deciding factor for righteousness, or wrath then those who are without knowledge of it, would be free from it meaning no wrath, punishment for sins.

So again we see that there is more to this righteousness before God than a moral standing within the law given to Israel, and that is the point. Sin, and wrath for it was operating before the law, sin and its punishments is a law itself that has been operating since the fall of Adam. Outside of the law, both to the Jew and the Gentile. The law was given to point out this very fact, its purpose was not to bring righteousness but to expose the guilt and condemnation of mankind in their sins. It was a just, and righteous holy mirror being held up to the face of humanity showing her inability to be righteous before God. With a constant reminder of the vileness of sin, which could only be atoned for by blood, for the wrath of sin is death either upon the head of he who is guilty, or payed in full by another. Pointing to Christ, the promised seed of Abraham who is the blessing of the nations, making way through his blood the perfect path of righteousness through grace given as a free gift of faith so that we may believe. Verse 16, "Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring- not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham." This necessary Messiah to whom the law instructs is needed was given not just for Israel, not just for the Gentiles, but for all. God's plan and purpose never changed, all that came before Christ was given to point to him, and now that he has come the scriptures point back to him, not to the law.

This has far reaching implications to us believers today, for we are found righteous through faith by the grace of God just as Abraham and we are sealed in the promises of that covenant through the promised seed who was given so that the wrath of God upon sin may be satisfied, and by the grace of God the righteousness of God through that sacrifice is imputed to us, laid to our account, given to us. SO then, we as Christians and followers of Christ do not look to the law which was a shadow of the things to come, but we look to its fulfillment in Christ. The reality of this, is any teaching that would draw you back into the very thing that as a Gentile you have never been under, or as a Jew have been released from is false teaching that misses the point. Yes, I understand that is a controversial statement and puts us at odds with many of our brothers and sisters but that is what Paul is teaching here, and to miss this is to miss the glorious understanding of God's grace and mercy. Our salvation has not enabled us to keep the mosaic law as some would teach, rather it has freed us from the condemnation and sin that the law exposes. Those who want to put you, as a believer back under the law are believing and practicing the same error as the Jews whom Paul addresses throughout his writings. "Have you received the spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" So in practical terms, what this means, is that you who are saved, through faith, are not under the law, and many of the teachings and traditions that are taught in our churches today are still reaching back to the very thing that we are not under, as if by some ability we have been given we must fulfill something that Christ has already accomplished. Biblically there is no evidence that the purpose of the law has changed, but there are many who teach that the law is a moral guide to Christians.

This is to attribute something to the law that is outside its purpose, this is to put oneself back under the law and Paul over and over says those who do so are condemned by it. We who are in Christ have the spirit which operates within us to will and to do that which is pleasing to the Lord. 1 Corinthians 2:13, "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the holy spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The positive side of this statement is that the opposite is also true, a spiritual man discerns the things of the spirit for they are wisdom to him, he may know them because they are spiritually discerned.

Those who are in Christ have the holy spirit operating within them, discerning spiritual things with spiritual for through the spirit God has been pleased to grant us understanding of the scriptures, through the spirit God has been pleased to operate within our hearts and minds to convict of sin, and cause repentance and belief. And what does Paul say to those who are spiritual? Galatians 5 “ but the fruit of the spirit, the proof, the works of the spirit within a believer are evident through love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control...and Paul says, against such we who have this spirit are, able to discern spiritual things, and against such there is no law. Pointing back again obviously not to the law of Moses, but to faith which came before. To lean back upon the law, to rely again upon the law is to deny the spirits power in the life of the believer. It is not resting in the fact that what God has given his children is enough, and that on top of the spirit working within you, you must also have an external law to work morality in your life. We has God's children must get away from such thinking, for we have the holy spirit which is far superior to any lists of rules, for it operates in the heart itself going to the root not just the outward surface appearance, for the heart is where sin originates within us, and where it operates within us. For we can sin in thought, in intention, in being prideful in our own ability or accomplishments, while maintaining an appearance of holiness. Which is why there is no righteousness found before God in the law, for the law does not effect the heart, but directs the flesh. And without the spirit, the heart is dark and lost in sinful desire, but in Christ, we have been given a new heart, in which the spirit operates within us to will and to do, it is an inward change working outward, not an outward reform to manage the inward problem.

In all things, Christ in central, he is the blessed promise given to Abraham that through him all of the nations are blessed, In him, and in him alone we are found faultless and blameless before God for it is he who has given of himself so that we may be reconciled to God. It is not by morality, or by being a good person, or even by following the laws given to Israel, but it is only, and solely through Christ that we are made just and holy before God. In closing, I want to read verse 16 again, “Therefore it is of faith that it might be according t grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.” We who are in Christ, both Jew and Gentile are secure within this promised covenant given to Abraham, through faith we are made righteous, and by Christ the promised seed, we are made just and holy. There is no greater security then to know that our salvation rests in God, not in our abilities, but in God who has made us able. As Jesus said, “All that the father gives me, will come to me, and he one who comes to me I will be no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. This is the will of the father who sent me, that of all he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.” Repent and believe, that he who began a good work in you shall finish it, for we are secure within his hand. There is no greater rest, nor better peace then being being secure in the hands of God.