

# Lesson 7 --- March 15, 2018

1. Review Romans by writing: 1) a general outline for ch.1-4; 2) its thesis found in 1:16,17.
  
2. Three questions on righteous living from “Sacraments Do Not Save” (Ro. 4:8-12; 12/17/17)
  - a. Why is it important that we know when Abraham was commanded to walk in righteousness and to be circumcised?
  
  - b. We know righteousness is to characterize the way we think, act, and live toward others and toward God. How can we live righteously? (not in notes; think biblically, then respond)
  
  - c. How many times does God tell Abraham “I will” in Genesis 17:2-8?  
What do God's unconditional promises to Abraham teach us concerning the role of faith in our salvation?
  
3. Questions concerning legalism from “Righteousness Apart from the Law” (Ro. 4:13-17; 1/7/18)
  - a. Define legalism.
  
  - b. How does legalism attack salvation?
  
  - c. How does legalism attack sanctification?
  
  - d. What is at the heart of legalism? (not in notes; think biblically, then respond)
  
4. Read Ro.4:17-22 and excerpts from “The Nature of Abrahamic Faith” (Ro. 4:17–22; 1/21/18)
  - a. Describe hopelessness. (refer to notes and use your own thoughts :)

b. Can a person overcome hopelessness? If so, how?

c. Discuss two things: first, *...in hope against hope, he believed...*; and second, how our faith is to be similar to Abraham's faith.

d. How does having assurance glorify God?

e. How does faith achieve full assurance?

## Notes for Lesson 7

### Question 2

**Three questions on righteous living from “Sacraments Do Not Save” (Ro. 4:8-12; 12/17/17)**

**a. Why is it important that we know when Abraham was commanded to walk in righteousness and to be circumcised?**

Read Genesis 17:1-14. There are two observations that I want you to see in this passage: 1) God's call to Abraham to walk in righteousness came after Abraham was pronounced righteous; 2) Circumcision as a sign of the covenant came after Abraham was pronounced righteous.

The reason these two truths are important is that they establish the fact that, like believers in the New Testament, Abraham was called by God to live righteously after he was saved, or justified, not before. Works flow out of salvation by faith. Likewise, the fact that circumcision was given after Abraham was declared righteous, not before, clearly teaches that circumcision is, as Paul states in our Roman's passage, not part of salvation.

Genesis 17:1-14 is the first occurrence in the Scriptures where God instructs someone to live a righteous life. It is clear that this command to be blameless is not a condition that Abraham had to meet before God would pronounce him righteous. God had already reckoned him as righteous because of his faith. Abraham is already righteous before God by grace through faith a few chapters earlier in Genesis 15:6. *Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.* Abraham was made righteous by faith, by trusting in God.

God had already established the covenant with Abraham (making promises about the land of Canaan, about making him a great nation, and about blessing all nations through his descendants. God fulfilled these promises unconditionally in no way based upon Abraham's performance). Abraham & the Jewish nation were not always faithful people; yet, God kept His promises to them.

This command for a blameless walk closely parallels God's instruction to Christians to live

righteously, not in order to be saved but because they have already been blessed with salvation.

In light of God's grace shown to Abraham, reckoning him righteous by faith, He directed Abraham to do two things: 1) Be characterized by righteousness; 2) Be circumcised. They go hand-in-hand. Living according to God's standard is the outward characteristic of those who belong to God. God has always called those who belong to Him to walk in righteousness. Circumcision was a sign that the Jewish nation was marked as belonging to the one true God.

Righteousness and obedience have always been the authentication of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments. Here God calls Abraham to walk blamelessly before Him because God is Almighty God. He is Holy God. In 1 Peter 1, God calls Christians to be holy because God Himself is holy, not in order to gain salvation. God's people are called to be set apart from the world. We are not better than the world, but we are distinct from the world.

Righteousness is to characterize the way we think, act, and live toward others and toward God. Along with Abraham whom God set apart as His child, God has also directed His people to live categorically different than the world.

**b. (not in notes; think biblically then respond)**

**c. How many times does God tell Abraham "I will" in Genesis 17:2-8? (refer to your Bible) What do God's unconditional promises to Abraham teach us concerning the role of faith in our salvation?**

God's unilateral or unconditional blessings & promises appear in Genesis 17:2-8. God isn't calling Abraham to earn favor from Him. This is obvious considering how often God says, "I will" in the text.

All of these are unilateral promises. God does not make deals with a person whereby if he keeps God's rules, then God will bless him. God had already promised to bless Abraham. God had reckoned him as righteous by faith. Then God called Abraham to live out that righteousness.

### **Question 3**

**Questions concerning legalism from "Righteousness Apart from the Law" (Ro. 4:13-17; 1/7/18)**

**a. Define legalism.**

Read Romans 4:13-17. In this passage, Paul confronts legalism at its most basic level. Legalism is the religion of human achievement. It holds that salvation is based on Christ plus keeping the Law or man-made standards of righteousness. Some Jews in the early church held that in order to be saved, one must believe in Christ and keep the Law.

**b. How does legalism attack salvation?**

Legalism can have devastating effects on many aspects of the Christian life. A legalistic mindset that adds works to faith for salvation takes away from the finished work of Christ. Legalism is a basic part of man's nature in which he will attempt to approach God on his own terms instead of God's terms.

Legalism is useless because it cannot restrain the sinful nature of man. It is deceptive because a person can conform to a set of external performance standards without a heart change. So people can look good on the outside, like whitewashed tombs on the outside, but, on the inside, be "*filled with dead men's bones*" to borrow Jesus' words.

One of the problems with legalism is that you think that you are basically a good person because, on the outside, you live a certain “righteous” lifestyle. But you never take a look inside to discover dark and selfish motives, evil attitudes and thoughts. You think that you are basically a rung above everyone else. A legalistic mindset puffs up the one who lives by his own system. Judgmentalism goes hand-in-hand with legalism. “I keep God's standard. You don't.”

That is exactly the mindset in Jesus' account of a Pharisee and a tax collector who were praying at the temple in Luke 18:11-14, *“The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other.”*

### **c. How does legalism attack sanctification?**

Legalism also attacks sanctification as it erects extra-biblical standards that a believer must do in order to stay right with God. We see them in Protestant churches. For instance, you must use the King James Only Version, men cannot wear their hair too long, you have to be a part of a certain denomination, you must be a four-pointer, you must be a five-pointer, you must be dispensational, you must be covenantal, you have to wear a suit on Sundays, you have to have a rock band, you cannot have a rock band.

For some of you older ones, you cannot go to movies, you cannot play cards, you cannot wear red dresses, and the list goes on. We might add that only if you follow certain Christian authors and writers, then can you really match up to the standard. Legalism says, “If you do not live by these external duties, then surely you are not growing as a believer; or worse, you may not be saved.”

### **d. What is at the heart of legalism? (not in notes; think biblically then respond)**

#### **Question 4**

**Read Ro. 4:17-22 and excerpts from “The Nature of Abrahamic Faith” (Ro. 4:17–22; 1/21/18)**

#### **a. Describe hopelessness. (refer to notes and use your own thoughts :)**

Hope against hope. . .hope is life giving. Hopelessness takes away life. I am always amazed at the stories of men and women who were in concentration camps in WW2 or in POW camps who clung onto life because of the strong desire they had to see loved ones again. But when news came to them that their family had died and all hope was gone, they would go in a corner and die.

Hopelessness is a devastating mindset that results in depression, anxiety and despair. Having no hope impacts a person's physical well-being, and many times, hopelessness is the root cause for a person taking his or her own life. In such cases, a person determines that there is no hope in overcoming a difficulty or changing life's circumstances and, instead of continuing in a spiral down, the person decides to end the overwhelming sense of despair.

#### **b. Can a person overcome hopelessness? If so, how?**

Hopelessness can impact even some in the church. How can a person overcome a sense of hopelessness? The Bible teaches that faith and hope go hand-in-hand. Trust in the person of God and what He says in His Word is the remedy for hopelessness. Trust in the person of God is

the foundation of hope. Hebrews 11:1 *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* Hope springs out of trust in God.

We come to a critical statement in our study of Romans 4. Paul writes in v.18, "*In hope against hope, Abraham believed...*" There was absolutely no hope that Abraham would have a child by Sarah in their old age. Humanly speaking, there was no hope that Abraham and Sarah could bear a son who would be the beginning of a great nation, and yet, Abraham trusted that God would accomplish what He promised. This statement brings to the forefront an important topic concerning the nature and kind of faith that brings hope.

**c. Discuss two things: first, *...in hope against hope, he believed...*; and second, how our faith is similar to Abraham's faith.**

God promised Abraham many descendants at a time when he had no children at all. The situation would become beyond hope as time went on. But at the time of the promise, when he was 85, Abraham was still able to produce a child, which he did with Sarah's handmaid, Hagar.

Fourteen years later, when Isaac was conceived, Abraham was not even physically able to father a child. Today, doctors would take two minutes in the examination room and then declare emphatically that Abraham and Sarah would die childless. Yet, here was God promising, not only that they would have an heir, but also that they would eventually have descendants beyond any human possibility of counting.

No one, not even the most optimistic person, would be much encouragement to Abraham and Sarah at this point. From the human point of view, the situation was not promising, to say the least. There were no examples which they might refer to that would encourage him, like, "Remember old Bill? He was 110 years old when Johnny was born." So if Abraham believed God, as he did, it was only because it was God who calls things into existence that do not exist who had made the promise.

It is the same when we trust God in the matter of salvation today. God tells us that He has given His Son to die as a substitute for us, so that "...whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life." Why would you believe such a promise except that it is God Himself that says it through His Word?

Apart from God revealing this truth in the Bible, we do not even know anything about eternal life, let alone how to obtain it. The invisible world is hidden from us. No human being can tell us anything about it. So if we find salvation, it is by believing God's Word, plain and simple.

The Word of God is the ultimate revealer of truth, not man's empirical reason nor man's standard for proof. We do not need for man to support the Word of God. In fact, it would be an insult to this eternal God to say that we believe God only because of the word or experience of some human being. How can a man grasp the truths that God speaks through His Word?

Paul understood this when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 "*And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*"

Martyn Lloyd-Jones made this profound statement concerning faith: "There is always this naked element in faith. It does not ask for human proofs, it does not seek them; in a sense, it does not need them. Faith is content with the bare Word of God, because He is God."

There is an interesting thought to consider when you read v.19 -20 from different translations. Romans 4:19–20 (NKJV) *And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God.* The sense in this version is that Abraham was so strong in faith that he did not consider that his body was as good as dead. There is a negative consideration or lack of consideration.

In another version (NASB95), Romans 4:19–20 reads, *"Without becoming weak in faith, he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God."* Here the sense is that Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead and believed God anyway.

The difference in wording arises as a result of using different manuscripts. In either case, it means that Abraham understood the utter hopelessness of the situation. Yet, he believed God in spite of all circumstances. Abraham's trust was not determined from a human perspective. The energy and vitality of Abraham's faith, and all true saving faith, is seen in that the cards were stacked against him, yet he trusted God. All external evidences were sharply against faith. But in light of everything to the contrary, he had hope in God and trusted God.

This does not mean that faith is irrational. There is nothing more rational than to believe God even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Faith always stands with God and His Word, even when it appears foolish from a human perspective. "...in hope against hope, he believed..." means that from a human perspective the situation was hopeless. But since it was God who said it, Abraham was willing to trust God despite the adverse physical evidence.

#### **d. How does having assurance glorify God?**

If the chief end of man is to glorify God, then one of the primary ways that we glorify God is to trust Him no matter what our circumstances are. Abraham did not waver in unbelief. He grew strong in faith during the midst of a hopeless situation. As Abraham trusted God in the midst of this dire situation, God was glorified.

As a footnote, I appreciate much of what John Piper has taught, however, there is one thing he has said of which I do not agree. The Westminster Confession states that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Piper changed that to say, "The chief end of man is to glory God by enjoying Him forever." Piper preached what he called, "Christian Hedonism" which holds that we glorify God by enjoying Him.

I do agree that we glorify God by enjoying Him, but that is only one avenue by which we glorify God, not the whole of it. We glorify God also when we are in hopeless situations, even dire circumstances, and we still trust God. There may not be much enjoyment going on, but we are steadfast in hope.

For example, when a loved one is ripped away from you in death and there are no apparent reasons for it, instead of questioning and accusing God, there is still trust and hope in God. That glorifies God... *"yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew*

*strong in faith, giving glory to God...*

*“...wavering in unbelief...”* brings us back to “Doubting Thomas.” Thomas had the promise of Christ Himself that Jesus would rise from the dead. Thomas had the testimony of eye witnesses that Christ had indeed risen from the dead. But Thomas wavered in unbelief. Abraham did not waver in unbelief. Some other translations have: “fully convinced,” “firm conviction,” “absolutely convinced.” The NASB translates this phrase “being fully assured.”

Verse 21 *and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform* is related to power of God. *He was able also to perform* involves the Greek word “δυναμις” from which we get “dynamite.” Paul refers to the supernatural power of God. He was fully convinced that God who has supernatural ability is able to keep His promise. How much we need to hear and understand and apply this truth to our lives!

#### **e. How does faith achieve full assurance?**

The question arises, “How does faith achieve this full assurance in a world where flesh is weak and circumstances are overwhelming?” The answer is found in this phrase, “*God is able also to perform it.*” The answer is that faith focuses on the Person and power of God. We do not focus