

~Other Speakers A-F: Ron Bailey:

Abraham, My Friend
The Making of a Praying Man

from grace to grace

Just a final catch-up as regards Abraham and justification by faith and then we will move on to later steps in his pilgrimage.

The best exposition of the verse And he believed in Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness. (Gen 15:6 ASV) is, as we have already said, the letter to the Romans. Did I mention that William Tyndale regarded Romans as the best possible introduction to the Old Testament? This is an ancient wisdom which was known by Augustine; "The New is in the Old concealed. The Old is in the New revealed." This truth is sometimes reversed by modern Bible students who declare that we cannot understand the New Testament without studying the Old; it is, of course, a question of emphasis. We need to take care that in de-Greecing the Church we don't run into the opposite error of Hebra-ising the New Testament. Paul will expound Abraham for us; not the other way around.

Abraham, says Paul, is the 'father of all believers' irrespective of their ethnic histories. (Rom 4:11,12) There is one aspect of Abraham's faith which we will return to for this last visit to a 'series within a series'. Abraham believed God (Rom 4:3) Abraham's faith was not in data about God; it was 'in God'. This has very important ramifications for the evangelical family in the 21st Century. Evangelicals have specialised in 'data about God' and in a very careful exposition of 'justification by faith'. We have created doctrinal statements to ensure that wrong 'data about God' does not get into the family. In some circles we have itemised the doctrine of 'justification by faith' so that it can now be presented in "4 Spiritual Laws". The concern is that although there is nothing wrong with getting right 'data about God' or careful explanations of 'justification by faith', it is possible to get all this right and yet still to miss 'God'.

We do not receive 'justification by faith' because we believe in 'justification by faith'. Please let that statement really sink in. Abraham was not 'reckoned as righteous' because he believed in the doctrine but because Abraham believed God. I wonder how many who respond in meetings are putting their faith in God? An 18th Century evangelical once said; "It is much easier to join oneself to a sect than to God". That is frightening, and true. The purpose of evangelism is not to produce another evangelical but to bring a hearer to put their confidence in God; But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. (Act 26:16-18 KJV) It was not to change their data about God, although that is necessary. It was and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. The 'destination' on the front of the 'gospel bus' is not an improved theology, or even forgiveness of sins and an inheritance. The destination is not 'justification by faith', the destination is 'faith that is in me'; the destination is God.

Let me illustrate by tracing this truth through Romans 4. The first reference is our current starting point; Abraham believed God (Rom 4:3) There are three more pointers to the same vital truth:

2. 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. (Rom 4:4-5 KJV)
3. (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. (Rom 4:17 KJV)
4. 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; (Rom 4:23-24 KJV)

This last point states our case very clearly; 'righteousness is reckoned in we believe in Him; I am trying here to draw attention to the ground of faith; it is Him. An old hymn-writer captured the idea;

"My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device or creed;
I trust the Ever-living One,

His wounds for me shall plead.Â”

Did you ever notice the point at which the Galatians began to go wrong? I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. (Gal 1:6-7 KJV) They switched (removed/transposed) from a 'Him' to an 'it'. All 'its' are as deadly as each other. If we switch our faith from 'Him' to prayer, evangelism, revival, bible reading, quiet times, church governance, sanctification, whatever... we become '...foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? (Gal 3:1 KJV). The Bible seems to reserve the description of 'fool' for those who leave God out of their thinking; people who have something other than Jesus Christ 'before their eyes'. They are, says Paul, bewitched, and the enchantment with other things always begins when we take our eyes off Him.

Before we move on there is another important thing to note about 'justification by faith'; it is not an end in itself but an entrance into what God has prepared. Justification and reckoned righteousness, says Paul, is of faith, that it might be by grace (Rom 4:16). This is stated very clearly in other places; For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: (Eph 2:8 KJV). Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (Rom 3:24 KJV) But grace is more, much more, than 'unmerited favour'; it is also God's enabling power. However, we need grace to enable us to access grace. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. (Joh 1:16 KJV) is better translated as in Jay P. Green, Sr's Literal Translation... And out of His fullness we all received, and grace on top of grace. (Joh 1:16 LITV) This is grace replaced by more grace.

Let me make the point by trespassing into Romans 5. Therefore being justified by faith, 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 5:1-2 KJV) At this point Paul is not referring to Abraham and his experience but to us and ours; the 'he' of Abraham became a 'we' in Rom 4:24. Paul now begins with Abraham but goes beyond him; Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (Rom 5:1-2 NASB) In Romans 4 he has concentrated on 'justification by faith' and its basis in 'reckoned righteous' but now he is moving on. Oh that we might all 'move on' into the 'much more' of Romans 5.

As a result of 'having been justified by faith' we have 'peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'. This is wonderful and not to be hurried, but there is more... 'by whom also'... we have an 'introduction' as the NASB says or more familiarly with the KJV 'we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand'. Justification by faith is a wonderful demonstration of the grace of God, but it is more than that. In this New Covenant it is the open door into 'this grace in which we stand'. Abraham, bless'd man though he was, never accessed 'this grace wherein we stand'. He saw Christ's day and was glad but in the 'much more' of the New Covenant he was one of those who '... all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (Heb 11:13 KJV)

It is challenging to notice the repetition of the phrase 'much more' in Romans 5. 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 KJV) These two verse parallel Romans 5:1,2; they begin with justification and reconciliation but they both take the theme forward by speaking now of 'salvation'. The pattern is very deliberate, justification and reconciliation have been achieved by the cross ; 'his blood' or 'the death of his son'. But 'salvation' is the result of 'his life'. The cross has dealt with the past; His life will determine the future.

His life is available through His Spirit. and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:5 NASB) This is the defining experience of the New Covenant. Paul's question at Ephesus was not 'did you believe correctly' but 'did you receive the Holy Spirit'. He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." (Act 19:2 NASB) It was also Paul's basic axiom and starting point of personal Christian experience; This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? (Gal 3:2-3 KJV) This is righteousness, not only imputed, but 'much more' so, imparted. Righteousness not only reckoned but received.

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The foundation of it all, however, remains 'justification by faith'. God receives us not because of our achievements or experiences but because Christ died... 'for the ungodly'... 'while we were yet sinners'. This wonderful blessing, giving access to so 'much more' is dependent, on man's side, upon a particular kind of faith; Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (Rom 4:16 KJV)

It must all begin here in our response; do I have the faith of Abraham?