

Lesson 11

Romans 4:13 – 4:25

NKJ **Romans 4:13** For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Paul tells us that the promise to Abraham was not through the “law.” What law is Paul referring to? To answer that question, it helps to look at the Greek text. Where most modern versions have “the law,” the Greek text has only “law.” When Paul meant the Mosaic Law, he generally said “the Law” – which he did not say here. Of course, another hint is that Abraham lived long before the Mosaic Law was even given! Whatever law Paul has in mind here, it cannot be the Mosaic Law.

So what law is it? Remember the context! Paul started out this book by explaining that all men are sinners – both Gentile and Jew. No man can come to God and demand salvation. Why? Because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Justification apart from Jesus Christ requires flawless conduct – and so no one can be justified apart from Jesus Christ. Paul is contrasting these two situations – trust in Jesus Christ (“righteousness of faith” in verse 13) versus trust in your own flawless conduct (“law” in verse 13). **Paul uses “law” here to refer to a system that requires flawless conduct.**

Thus, in 6:14 when Paul tells us that we are not under law but under grace, he is telling us that we are not under a system that demands flawless conduct, but we are under a system of grace in which our flawed conduct can be forgiven. He is not telling us that we are under no obligation to obey God because of course we know that just the opposite is true – all men everywhere are called upon to obey God. Paul does not use “law” to mean an obligation for obedience – he uses “law” to mean a system that demands flawless conduct.

When did Abraham receive this promised blessing? Hebrews 11:39 tells us that he died without having received it. Hebrews 11:40 tells us that God later provided something by which he could be perfected – that is, by which he could receive the promised blessing. And what was that? Hebrews 12:23 tells us that those faithful men who died without receiving the promised blessing, received that blessing (were made perfect) under the New Covenant. They received the blessing through Jesus Christ rather than through flawless conduct.

14 For if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect,

Again, in the Greek there is no definite article before the word “law” in this verse. Those who are of law include anyone who is laboring under a system that demands flawless conduct. If obtaining the promise depends upon flawless conduct then no one will obtain the promise – the promise is made of no effect.

Faith would also be made void. Why? Because law does not demand faith; it demands flawlessness. Faith is not going to help us out if we are living under a system of law. Even Abraham would be left out under a system of law. His great faith in God would be void.

15 because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is* no transgression.

The end result of any system that demands flawless conduct is wrath. Men cannot live flawless lives and so under any such system, all men will eventually face the wrath of God. Understanding the first half of verse 15 will help us interpret the second half of verse 15.

What does Paul mean when he says that where there is no law, there is no transgression. First, what would we expect him to say at this point in his argument? He has just told us that under a system that demands flawless conduct, all men will face the wrath of God. Wouldn't we expect at this point to hear what would happen under a system that does not demand flawless conduct? Well, that is exactly what Paul tells us.

When Paul says “where there is no law” he is saying “where there is no system that demands flawless conduct” – that is, where there is a system of faith. The system of faith is the system of “no law” in the sense that the system of faith does not demand flawless conduct. (But, not, of course in the sense that we are not under law at all, because we know we live under the law of Christ.)

What happens when men are no longer under a system that demands flawless conduct? If men are not under that system, then they cannot commit transgression under that system. My conduct is flawed. What is the consequence? Under a system of “law” I am in big trouble – I will face the wrath of God and there is nothing that can be done about it. Even if I lived a perfect life from this point on, my former flawed conduct could not be undone. But, what if I am not under a system that demands flawless conduct? Then what? I might be okay! My conduct is flawed, but I am not under a system that demands flawless conduct. **There is no transgression!** I may be able to be right with God even with my flawed conduct. **My flawed conduct is not a transgression of a system that doesn’t demand flawless conduct.**

This is exactly what Paul will say again in 7:4 and 7:6 when he tells us that we are made dead to the law and discharged from the law. As he says in 6:14, we are not under law, but under grace. A system of grace does not demand flawless conduct. (For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. – Ephesians 2:8.)

But what, you ask, does Paul mean later in 5:13 when he says that where there is no law, sin is not imputed? Didn’t Paul just tell us that where there is no law, there is no sin? Does he change his mind in 5:13 by saying that there really is sin, but it is just not imputed?

The answer is that Paul did not say in verse 14 that where there is no law, there is no sin; he said where there is no law, there is no transgression. That is, my flawed conduct is not a transgression of a system that does not demand a flawless life. But that does not mean that there is no sin under such a system because we know that all men sin under whatever system they find themselves. Indeed, the reason we need the system of grace is because of our sin. If we didn’t sin it wouldn’t matter what system we were living under.

In verse 14 Paul tells us that our flawed lives do not automatically bring us under the wrath of God like they would under a system that demands flawless conduct. That is, in verse 14, Paul tells us what does not happen when we sin under the “no law” system. In 5:13, Paul tells us what does happen when we sin under the “no law” system – that sin is not imputed. That is why we can be right with God under this new system even though we do not live flawless lives. We sin, but that sin is not imputed.

We talked last week about the word “impute.” The Greek word translated “imputed” is a mathematical or accounting term. It does not mean that God is considering us to be more than we are or that he is crediting to us something that belongs to another.

An easy way to see this is to look back at verse 8 – “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” If “to impute righteousness” means to consider a person somewhat more than he is or to credit him with something that belongs to another, then “to impute sin” to a person would be to consider him worse than he is, or to charge him with the sins of another! God isn’t just acting like we are clean. When God makes us clean, then we really are clean.

[Romans 4:16-21] K. C. Moser – “No better description of faith has ever been given than that found in Romans 4:16-21.”

16 Therefore <i>it is</i> of faith that <i>it might be</i> according to 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
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Paul next explains why God has replaced the system of law with the system of faith.

Here the word “law” is preceded by a definite article in the Greek text. Those of “the law” are those under the Mosaic Law. Paul is once again speaking of Jew and Gentile, and he is telling us that God wanted a system under which the promise could be sure to ALL men – both Jew and Gentile.

Abraham is the father of us all. See Galatians 3:7 (“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.”)

Why did God make it a matter of grace rather than a matter of law? Because he wanted us to be sure of getting the promise! God gave us his Son so that our justification would be a matter of grace rather than a matter of law, and why did he do that? So we would be sure of getting the promises!

In Chapters 9-11, Paul will return to the issues about the Jews that he raised earlier in this book, and he will consider them in much greater detail than he did before. During that discourse he will also return to the topics he is considering here in Chapter 4. Specifically, in 10:5-9, Paul writes:

Romans 10:5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. 6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) 7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) 8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; 9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

The quote that Paul is referring to in 10:5 is found in Lev. 18:5 but Paul turns it against the legalistic Jews. Paul has already reminded them that they have not kept the law perfectly and Paul now uses this verse to remind them that justification through the law is possible only if they do keep it perfectly. Thus, Paul tells them that the law is a yoke that they are unable to bear.

Verses 6-9 of Chapter 10 are given in contrast to verse 5. What did Paul say in verse 5? That justification through the law would require a flawless life. That is, faith would be excluded and justification would be earned. Here Paul tells us the task required for justification through faith. In these verses Paul personifies righteousness---he lets righteousness itself answer the question. What does righteousness say? What is required for justification through faith? First, you do not have to do the impossible as you do for justification by law. You do not have to go up to heaven and plead with Christ to come down---he has already done that. You also don't have to go down and raise him from the dead---that too has already happened. Whereas men must do all of the hard work under justification by law, God does the hard work under justification through faith!

17 (as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed -- God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;

How sure was the promise to Abraham? In Genesis 17:5, God told Abraham, "a father of many nations have I made thee." Long before the promise was fulfilled, God spoke about in the past tense! That is how certain and sure the promise was. God "gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did." God often uses the past tense to describe events that have not yet come to pass. Why? Because God has said they will come to pass, and thus we might as well start using the past tense now – because we know with total certainty that the event will occur.

And to whom did God make this sure and certain promise? Just who is it that would be a father of many nations? God made the promise to Abraham, who was 99 years old and Sarah, who was barren.

Verse 16 speaks of the faith of Abraham. Hebrews 11:8-12 describes that faith.

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

Those who try to divorce faith from obedience need to go back and read all of Hebrews 11. By faith Abel offered; By faith Noah prepared an ark; By faith Abraham obeyed and he went out; By faith Abraham offered up Isaac; By faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Faith is always followed by obedient actions. This is precisely what James told us.

James 2:14-24 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? 17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 19 Thou believest

that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. 24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

Would Abraham still have been the father of the faithful if he had not obeyed God? Would Noah have been listed in Hebrews 11 if he had refused to build the ark? Would Naaman have been cleansed of his leprosy if he had not obeyed God's command to wash in the Jordan? Will we be cleansed if we refuse to obey God's command to be baptized for the remission of our sins?

2 Kings 5:13-14 And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" 14 So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Romans 4:18-22 tells us more about the faith of Abraham:

18 who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." 19 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. 20 He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. 22 And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Why does Paul spend so much time telling us about Abraham? He wants us to see that Abraham's greatness was not due to his flawless conduct, but was instead due to his trusting obedience and faithfulness. God did not pronounce him righteous in verse 22 because he was living a flawless life. Indeed, we are specifically told that he did not lead a flawless life. For example, in Genesis 20, Abraham lied about his wife Sarah because he feared being killed, even though God had told him he would live to father Isaac. Abraham was faithful; Abraham was not perfect. If justification required perfection, then Abraham would be in big trouble – just like the rest of us.

23 Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, 24 but also for us.

Genesis 15:6 was not written for Abraham's sake alone; it was also written for our benefit. God wanted us to know that justification would be by grace rather than by law – and he started telling us about it long before Jesus came down to the world. Grace has been part of God's plan all along – even before the Mosaic Law was given to the descendants of Abraham.

This verse also tells us just how important it is for us to study the Old Testament along side the New Testament. Paul is pointing us back to the Old Testament so that we can understand the New Testament. Many problems in Biblical interpretation (Romans and Revelation, for example) arise directly from a lack of knowledge about the Old Testament. If we ignore the Old Testament, then we quickly become adrift from our moorings, and it is not surprising if we then misinterpret the New Testament.

It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

Who delivered Jesus up? Judas delivered him up to the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders delivered him up to Pilate. Pilate delivered him up to the angry mob. But you know who really delivered him up? God did. In Romans 8:32, Paul will write “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” God delivered up his own Son to the angry mob because of our offenses. (John 3:16 – For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”)

There is a song in our song books entitled *Father* (Song # 789). One of the lines in that song says “Father, show me now that you love me.” If ever there was a ridiculous line in a song, that is it! Show me now that you love me? God sent his only begotten Son to die on a cross for our sins – he has already shown us that he loves us! We are the ones who now need to show our love, and we show our love through our obedience. And how do we do that? By our obedience! (John 14:21 – “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.”)

We need to be praying and singing that we will show God that we love him – not that He will show us “now” that He loves us. How absurd! God, we know that you delivered up your Son on our behalf – but what have you done for us lately?

God delivered up his own Son because of our sin. Can anyone who truly understands that action ever doubt the love of God or minimize the seriousness of sin? Paul will later deal with those who argued that since we are under grace, we might as well just sin more and more so that grace will abound. God forbid! Our sin was the reason God delivered up his own Son! How could anyone then argue that we should continue sinning!

Paul has one last point to make in Chapter 4. Our sins made the death of Christ necessary, and our justification made the resurrection of Christ necessary.

How important was the resurrection to Paul? When he preached to the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in Athens they thought he was preaching two new Gods: Jesus and Anastasis (Greek for resurrection). See Acts 17:18. (“Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this babbler want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,” because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.”)

Also read 1 Corinthians 15:12-20.

12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: 14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. 15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. 16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: 17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. 18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. 20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to the gospel. It is the basis of our hope. Apart from the resurrection our faith is vain and we are lost in our sins.

1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

1 Peter 3:21 “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (Like Peter, Paul similarly relates baptism to the resurrection in Romans 6:4.)

Another song in our song book is entitled “He lives” (# 346). That song includes the line “You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.” If anyone ever asks you that question, please give them a better answer than that!

The truth is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact of history that has more evidence behind it than many of the historical facts that are taught in our schools and colleges. The evidence of a literal resurrection is so overwhelming that the rationality should be questioned of one who fails to accept it rather than of one who accepts it as fact.

How weighty is the evidence for the resurrection? Well, one well known Jewish New Testament scholar has written that on the basis of the evidence he is convinced that God raised Jesus from the dead. He does not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, yet he feels that the weight of the evidence is so strong, he does believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.

What would cause such a person to believe in the resurrection? As Luke wrote in Acts 1:3, the resurrection is supported by “many infallible proofs.”

Jesus Christ died on a cross and was raised from the dead three days later. Those are historical facts fully supported by evidence. “Other religions depend on subjective experience and blind faith, tradition, and opinion.” Only Christianity stakes its claim to truthfulness based on historical events open to investigation.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the vindication of all of His claims. It was the visible proof that God had accepted Christ’s atoning work. The resurrection was proof positive that righteousness does rule in this universe.

Romans 5

KJV Romans 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: 2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

So we can be right with God apart from living a flawless life. So God has made a system based on grace so that we can be sure of obtaining the promised blessings. So what now Paul?

“Therefore, being justified by faith, we are to live lives filled with anxiety and worry. We are to constantly doubt the love of God. We are to forever worry and fret about whether or not we are really saved. We are to never have any rest because of constant anxiety about the sin that remains in our lives. We are to walk around in constant fear of death and the afterlife. We are to trust in Jesus, while fully recognizing that his yoke is hard and his burden is all but impossible to bear.”

Is that what Paul said? Do we sometimes act as if that is what Paul said? Paul said we have peace!

What did Jesus say?

Matthew 11:28-30 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

And who did Jesus say that to? Those under law!

Here Paul says “we have peace,” or as some translations render the passage, “let us have peace.” Either way, Paul’s point is clear. The end result of God’s wonderful plan is not wrath, but peace. We can have peace with God.

But Paul, we continue to sin even after we are saved. Our lives are flawed. Can we really have peace? Paul had peace, and he described himself as the chief of sinners!

1 Timothy 1:13-15 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Paul did not let himself off the hook by saying “of whom I was chief.” He used the present tense – and yet Paul had peace.

Indeed it was Paul who in Phil. 4:6-7 wrote about the peace of God that passeth all understanding. He ends the book of Romans (before the closing salutations in Chapter 16) with the words “Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” (15:33).