

Paul's Letter to the Romans Lesson 3

At the close of chapter 3, Paul clearly says that the forbearance of God is not for the Jews only, but also for the Gentiles. Simply put, God overlooks the sins previously committed when we believe in God. Continuing with this thought into the fourth chapter, Paul reaches back in time to remind the Roman church, specifically the Jews, about Abraham's relationship with God.

Romans 4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? **2** For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. **3** For what does the Scripture say? "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

Forbearance of God – Born in Ur in 2165 B.C., Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Hebrew. He was a Chaldean called by God out of the city of Ur in the Chaldean providence located on the Euphrates River in modern day Iraq. Seventy-five years later Abraham obeyed the word of God and began his journey out of Ur. He moved 300 miles to the north and established the area of Haran where he stayed for 15 years. When Abraham's father died at the age of 205, God instructed him to move to Canaan. Abraham never knew where God was taking him, but in blind faith, he knew he had heard the instruction of God. He believed in God as seen in Scripture.

Genesis 15:6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

God considered Abraham a righteous man because of his belief in God and his faithfulness to follow God's instruction blindly. Abraham did not do anything of his own accord to become righteous except to follow his belief that God was God. Abraham put his trust in God; therefore, God overlooked his sin and considered him righteous.

4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due.

Forbearance of God – God did not bestow righteousness on Abraham in payment for work done, but as a favor. Regardless of Abraham's past sins, God overlooked those sins and granted him a blessing.

5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, **6** just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: **7** "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. **8** "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

Forbearance of God – Paul quotes the words of David from Psalms 32.
Psalms 32:1-2 How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! **2** How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!

God does not reward a person who tries to obtain righteousness by personally accomplishing various plans and goals. Rather, He rewards a person through his faith in God. Abraham did not move his family from Ur on his own account but on the instruction of God. He did not establish a backup plan in case something went wrong. Abraham trusted God to provide for his entire clan wherever He led them. God overlooked the sins of Abraham because of his trust in Him.

⁹ Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS RECKONED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." ¹⁰How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; ¹¹and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them, ¹²and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

Forbearance of God - Paul brings the topic of circumcision back into the discussion. Abraham's faith was recognized and considered righteousness by God before Abraham was circumcised. The circumcision was only an outward sign of God's recognition of Abraham's heart. With the birth of Abraham's grandson Jacob, the Jewish line begins. Circumcision becomes a ritual for every male child, performed on his eighth day of life, well before the child can choose for himself to have faith in God. By the time Paul is writing this letter, Jews across the world relegated this outward sign as God's blessing regardless of the secrets of their hearts. Circumcision means nothing in the forbearance of God. For the descendants of Abraham to be considered righteous by God and receive the blessings of the promise to Abraham, they must follow in the same Abraham-like faith. Here is the record of God's promises to Abraham.

Genesis 17:4-6 As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you.

Genesis 22:16-18 By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.

¹³For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Forbearance of God – God’s promise to overlook the sins of Abraham and his descendants was made 657 years before the Law was delivered through Moses. It centers on in a person’s heart, not on the letter of the Law.

¹⁴For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; ¹⁵for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation. ¹⁶For this reason *it is* by faith, that *it might be* in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, 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, ¹⁷(as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the sight of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

Forbearance of God – Are the Jews heirs of the Law? Yes, they are. If a Jew relies totally on the Law, then the faith which brings the promise is not present in his life; therefore, the essential element required to bring about righteousness is absent. Abraham is the father of the Jews as well as the Arabs. God will consider an Arab righteous if, and only if, he has the same Abraham-like faith in God.

¹⁸In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."

Forbearance of God – Hope and belief are not the same. Hope is something you wish would happen; belief deals with where you put your trust. Abraham did not put his trust in his hope that things would turn out well for his family; he put his belief in God and followed God’s direction even when hope was dim. Paul’s quotation from the Old Testament records the vast magnitude of God’s promise to Abraham because of his faith.

Genesis 15:5 And He took him outside and said, Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them. And He said to him, So shall your descendants be.

¹⁹And 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; ²⁰yet, with respect to the **promise of God**, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.

Promise of God – When God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, Abraham was about 100 years old and childless. Abraham and his wife Sarah thought she could never bare children because she was 90 years old. In a wonderful combination of events, Abraham fell on his face with joy and laughter when God proclaimed the news of the coming birth of his son. Abraham was not wavering in his belief in God’s promise, but in joy he reminded God of his and Sarah’s ages and conditions. God assured Abraham of the fulfillment of the promise.

Genesis 17:17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a *child*?"

Genesis 18:11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.

²²Therefore also IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. ²³Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, ²⁴but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

Promise of God – Paul ties together the whole package of God's promises in the last sentence of this chapter. His promise of considering a man's faith as righteousness is not just for the Jews and not just for the descendants of Abraham, but for all of mankind through the promise granted at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God will overlook the past sins of all who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and grant righteousness. The Lord was crucified because of our sin. He justified us because of our faith in Him. The promise to Abraham was a foreshadowing of the ultimate promise from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul performs an interesting transition in verses 22 through 25 when he uses the terms "righteousness" and "justification." Although righteousness and justification have the same root word, the ultimate meanings are different. God promises righteousness to Abraham and his descendants because of their faith in Him. It is an act of fairness where God overlooks the sins previously committed. When addressing our faith in Jesus Christ, Paul uses the word justification which carries the meaning of being acquitted of all our past sins. Our sins are not just overlooked; in God's eyes our past sins never happened.

Romans 5:1 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through 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**.

Glory of God – With our sins forgiven through the Lord's justification because of our faith in Him, a peace with God introduces us to the grace of God pointing to the glory of God in which we rejoice. The glory of God is the promise of eternity with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. However, we rejoice in times of trouble.

³And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵and 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.

Love of God – When we know that God is pouring His love into our hearts, our outlook on everyday life changes. Troubles and tribulations bring about

the perseverance of the saints and that perseverance proves our character as Christians and establishes a hope in God that never disappoints.

⁶For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Love of God – The love of God comes to the faithful when we are helpless. When nothing can be done on our part to obtain justification, God provides the way through Christ's death. Hidden within the original language is the real intent of this passage. Verse seven might be better translated "scarcely would a man die for an unsympathetic man whose sins have been overlooked; though someone might die for a beneficent and kind man whose sins have been overlooked." Paul did not consider himself a sympathetic, kind, or beneficent man; in fact, he was a wretched man when Christ died on the cross. Nothing good was found in Paul to deserve Christ's death, but Christ died for Paul anyway just as He died for all mankind.

⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the **wrath of God** through Him. ¹⁰For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Wrath of God – Simple faith in Christ Jesus and what He did on the cross for each of us will save us from the wrath of God. Our faith in Christ Jesus declares our sins acquitted, erased, and forgotten by God. We do not deserve our reconciliation with God. This reconciliation was probably more personal to Paul than to any of us today for Paul had been an enemy of Christ while He was alive on earth, persecuting Christ and His followers. But the joy for each Christian is in the reconciliation received from the Lord when we were helpless, and unworthy, and enemies of the Lord. Jeremiah records the Lord's words.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus says the LORD, Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; ²⁴but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things, declares the LORD.

¹²Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned-- ¹³for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

Wrath of God - Because of Adam's sin, death was brought into the world, but the sin was not imputed upon (charged against) man because God had not given the Law yet. Therefore, sin was not charged against those who did

not have the Law ultimately given to the Jews. But wickedness was in the world causing the Lord to send the flood to destroy every creature and human being. Here is the account of that destruction.

Genesis 7:21-22 And all flesh that moved on the earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind; ²²of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died.

Man knew about sin and he knew what pleased God. How do we know? Romans 1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

¹⁵But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the **grace of God** and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. ¹⁶And the gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment *arose* from one *transgression* resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift *arose* from many transgressions resulting in justification. ¹⁷For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. ¹⁹For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Grace of God – Sin came into the world because of the transgression of Adam; the grace of God came into the world because of Christ. Just as sin permeates the world, grace permeates the world and is the gift of God to all who have faith in Christ.

²⁰And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Grace of God – When the Law was finally given to the Jews, mankind knew what God considered a sinful act in this world. The Law began to reveal the sins of mankind in tremendous numbers. Sin seemed to increase because the Law exposed all the sins of mankind. Sins were always present in people's lives; the Law simply exposed them. Although sin increased, the grace of God increased all the more. The sins of those who have faith in Christ Jesus are not only overlooked; they are removed and washed away by the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord.