

Redemption in Romans

Justification and the Law

Lesson #5 for July 31, 2010

Scriptures: Genesis 15:6; 2 Samuel 11,12; Romans 3:21-23,31; 4:1-17; Galatians 3:19; 1 John 3:4.

1. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for July 24 says, “In many ways, Romans 4 gets to the foundation of the biblical doctrine of salvation by faith alone.” The clear focus of this lesson is on justification by faith alone. It should be noted that the word *alone* is not found in the original Greek manuscript of that verse, but rather, it was added by Martin Luther in his German translation. So, what do we mean when we say that salvation is by faith *alone*?
2. Read Genesis 15:6. This is the famous verse regarding Abraham that is quoted by Paul in Romans 4:3. In the Greek New Testament, Paul used the word *logizomai* to describe that transaction. The Greek lexicon or dictionary goes out of its way to point out that this word means “it is really so.” So what does that in turn mean? If salvation is by faith alone, then the trust that Abraham placed in God’s promises of an heir were sufficient in God’s eyes, and probably in light of the rest of the evidence that God knew about the life of Abraham, that he could be trusted as a future citizen of heaven.
3. Why did God pick Abraham? Why is Abraham so often used as a great example of faith? (Hebrews 11:8-19; Romans 4; James 2:21-24) In the original context, it suggests that Abram, later to be called Abraham, trusted God’s word that he would be given an heir. In Genesis 17:17, after Abraham had tried to help God out by taking Hagar as a secondary wife (Genesis 16) and when God repeated His promise, Abraham just laughed. In Genesis 18, when God repeated His promise again in the presence of Abraham and Sarah, Sarah laughed and then lied that she had laughed. (Genesis 18:9-15) They got their son anyway, so they named him “Laughter”! So what does trust mean in the context of people who laugh at God’s promises? And what does this story tell us about the plan of salvation?
4. In Romans 4, Paul reveals three major stages in the plan of salvation: (1) the promise of divine blessing (the promise of grace); (2) the human response to that promise (the response of faith); and, finally, (3) the divine pronouncement of righteousness credited to those who believe (justification). That’s how it worked with Abraham, and that’s how it works with us. (See *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, July 24, 2010)
5. Human beings who take God seriously are very concerned about how they will be saved. Martin Luther, a lawyer, was preoccupied with it. This brings us to a question which has been raised many times on this subject: Does God declare that we are savable because we are? Or, are we savable because God declares it? How does the divine pronouncement actually affect us? Does it matter how sinful we were before God made such a pronouncement?
6. In our previous lesson discussing Romans 3:25,26, we saw how God took His case into court—the court of the universe—and won because all the evidence was on His side. Through His “blood”—which is a code word for His sacrificial death—Jesus demonstrated the trustworthiness of God’s words despite the fact that He had apparently overlooked men’s and women’s former sins. Notice carefully that Paul repeated this declaration three times! Finally, after this triple pronouncement he said, Oh, yes, and God will put us right if we have faith in

Him. Doesn't this suggest that God's righteousness is more important than our justification?

7. In this context, it might be easy for people to jump to the conclusion that obedience to the law is no longer required. Has God, in fact, taken care of everything? Paul came back with one of his most emphatic statements in all of Scripture, "Does this mean that by this faith we do away with the Law? No, not at all; instead, we uphold the Law." (Romans 3:31, *GNB*)
8. When these words were written, Paul was fully aware that a short time earlier he had written Galatians 3:19,24 regarding the purpose of the law. There, Paul indicated that it is to protect us and guide us until we grow up enough and become mature enough so that we know that the right thing to do is to come to Christ.
9. But returning to the example of Abraham, we notice some very interesting facts: 1) This famous promise was made to Abraham before the law—as we know it—was given at Sinai. (Exodus 20:3-17) Furthermore, 2) Abraham was descended from a group of pagan idol worshipers! (Joshua 24:2) And 3) Abraham had not yet been circumcised. (Genesis 17:10-14,23-27)
10. David is cited as another example of righteousness by faith. We know a great deal about the life of David. At one time, he had idols in his home. (1 Samuel 19:9-16) He committed adultery and arranged for the murder of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. (2 Samuel 11) He was determined to number the children of Israel to see how big an army he could build even though his general advised against it. (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21) But, one outstanding thing we do know about David is that when his sins were pointed out, he immediately confessed them, forsook them, and returned to his faith in God. Paul went on to say that happiness came to David because of his trust in God. (Romans 4:6-8)
11. It is very easy to allow religion to become focused on our own behavior. One of the important things to understand about righteousness by faith is that it should focus us away from ourselves to God. If we do that, we will inevitably be changed by what we see. (*Great Controversy*, p. 555)
12. The sinner must come in faith to Christ, take hold of His merits, lay his sins upon the Sin Bearer, and receive His pardon. It was for this cause that Christ came into the world. Thus the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the repenting, believing sinner. He becomes a member of the royal family.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 215.
13. How does one "come in faith to Christ"? How does one "take hold of His merits"? How does one "lay his sins upon the Sin Bearer"? These are metaphors that we use all the time, but do we actually understand what they mean?
14. Think for a moment what *salvation* means. First of all, remember that the word itself means "healing" or "saving." When God saves us and takes us to heaven, He is saying that we can be trusted to live a life without rebellion, without sin, and without selfishness for the rest of eternity! How could any of us ever in our short lives here on this earth demonstrate that level of trustworthiness? Many Christian theologians have looked at this dilemma and suggested that the solution is a legal transaction. The perfect record of Christ's life on this earth is copied and credited to our account. Thus, it looks like we have lived such a life! If God does that, is He deceiving Himself? Is He trying to deceive the onlooking universe?
15. For many of our Christian friends, the solution to this problem is to do away with the law! If we could eliminate the law, then we would not have to worry about meeting its requirements! But, if we do away with the law, then we have done away with sin. (1John 3:4) Then it would not

have been necessary for Christ to die. So, one wonders, if God can actually do this, why didn't He do it immediately after Adam and Eve sinned? Or, even better, when Lucifer first rebelled in heaven?

16. Read Romans 4:13. This verse clearly points out that Abraham was not saved by keeping the law. Did Paul overlook Genesis 26:5, (*GNB*) where it says, "Abraham obeyed me and kept all my laws and commands"?
17. Read Romans 4:14-17. Let us try to take apart verse 14 and understand it. It seems to say that if those who try to keep the law are heirs of salvation, then faith is made void and the promise is useless. Why is that? Was Paul assuming that—as we have learned by hard experience—no human being could keep the law, and therefore, none would ever be saved? Compare two other translations of this verse:

For if the heirs are produced by legalism, then trust is pointless and the promise worthless. *Jewish New Testament*

If those who get what God gives them only get it by doing everything they are told to do and filling out all the right forms properly signed, that eliminates personal trust completely and turns the promise into an iron-clad *contract!* That's not a holy promise; that's a business deal. *The Message*

18. There are several verses in Scripture suggesting that the principal function of the law is to point out sin. If we turn to considering the ceremonial law and the sacrifices in the Old Testament, the author of Hebrews says plainly that the sacrifices can never take away sin. (Hebrews 10:3,4) If the law is what condemns us, how could it possibly be what saves us or takes away our sin? This leads to the conclusion that since keeping the law could never save us, faith is the only means by which we can be saved.
19. To many Protestant Christians, the most significant event in the life of Abraham was the time when he was willing to take his son to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him. (Genesis 22) This terrible test came to Abraham apparently because he had failed in other tests earlier in his life. In Genesis 12:10-20, he lied about Sarah being his wife and allowed her to be taken by the Pharaoh as a concubine. In Genesis 20, he did the same thing with Abimelech! In Genesis 16, he thought God was not able to keep His promise, so he took Hagar as a secondary wife, and thus, Ishmael became his firstborn son. Finally, in his old age—about 120 years of age—Abraham was given this final terrible test. No doubt, Satan was laughing at God and God's friend here on this earth. He must have toured the universe pointing out Abraham's sins saying, "Look at the kind of people that God calls His friends!" (See 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23) But, when Abraham faithfully went through that terrible three-day ordeal without sleeping a wink and finally took the knife in his hand to actually kill his son, God said, "Are there any more questions about the trustworthiness of my friend Abraham?" And the onlooking universe realized that Abraham could be trusted to follow God's directions explicitly. (*PP* 155)
20. The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion; it had now [36] become the principle of the Jewish religion. Satan had implanted this principle. Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 35,36.

What is implied by this passage? In what sense do followers of pagan religions try to save themselves? Aren't the idols they set up just glorified images of themselves? If a man never looks higher than a glorified image of himself, he will inevitably sink lower. If there was such a

thing as a law that could make us righteous or bring life, then, theoretically, everyone could be put right. But, not even God's law can do that. We are left with no alternative but to turn to God's promise following God's way of righteousness and by beholding we become changed.

21. Have you ever thought that you were capable of keeping the Ten Commandments? All 10 of them? Shouldn't it be possible to keep 10 simple rules? If anything is clear in the Bible, it is clear that we cannot succeed in doing that ourselves. But then, amazing as it sounds, if we trust God, He can transform us into the likeness of His Son. Is that just a legal transaction? Or, are we really changed? Is God just pretending?
22. Read Romans 8:3 especially the last portion. How does God "deal with sin"? 1 John 3:4 tells us that sin is "lawlessness" or "rebelliousness." Can a legal transaction overcome rebelliousness? What does it take to overcome rebelliousness?
23. If we take the time to study the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and understand what actually happened in the light of the great controversy over God's character and government, what effect would that have on our lives? We would learn that: 1) Sin does indeed lead to death. 2) It can even lead to the death of innocent victims. 3) Satan was wrong in all his accusations and claims against God. 4) It is sin—not God—that kills the sinner in the end. 5) By coming forth from His grave in His own power, (John 10:18) Jesus proved that He, in fact, is God, and thus, Lucifer never was on an equal plane with Jesus, thus refuting Lucifer's earliest claims. 6) If we claim Jesus as our Savior and trust Him with our lives—being completely willing to follow His directions recognizing that they are always what is best for us—then He will be more than happy to welcome us into His coming kingdom. Thus, the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus make it abundantly clear that God has always been righteous, has always told us the truth, and can be trusted. On the other hand, Satan has lied and has tried to kill as many of God's children as he could, even trying to kill God Himself in human form on several occasions. If we accept his temptations, we have chosen him as our leader.
24. This lesson has focused on the fact that we are saved by faith alone. But, the Bible also teaches that we are to be judged by our works. Is that why so many people are concerned with the law? (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14) If, in fact, we are saved by faith, does it matter how we are judged by our works? Could we be judged guilty and still be saved? Since we are all sinners, aren't we all judged guilty? (Romans 3:23;10-18)
25. Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner's account.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 367.
26. If Satan can succeed in leading man to place value upon his own works as works of merit and righteousness, he knows that he can overcome him by his temptations, and make him his victim and prey. . . . Strike the door-posts with the blood of Calvary's Lamb, and you are safe.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Sept. 3, 1889.

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