

Study 5 – The epistle to the Romans by Neville Clark

Reading: Romans Ch 4

“The Righteousness of God Revealed”

We concluded our last class, as you will be aware, and you may recall, that in doing so we commenced the next major section of the Book of Romans. Between Ch 3:21 and Ch 5:21, we have this section, which we have called here, “The Righteousness of God Revealed,” by which we mean, the righteousness of God revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now as you know, the epistle to the Romans is all about the righteousness of God, and between the opening verses of the book and the closing verses of the book we have these 6 sections as we have delineated them on the screen before you this evening.

Ch 1:16-17 commenced by explaining the righteousness of God in the gospels, how that God would intervene in the affairs of humankind and reveal a process by which sinful man could be made righteous based upon the practical outworking of his faith. From there, the Apostle speaks about man’s failure to attain righteousness, be they Gentiles in Ch 1, or Jews in Chapter 2, or all humanity in Ch 3:1-20, universally man has failed to attain that righteousness.

Well, of course, the Jews didn’t agree with that assessment so in the early verses of Ch 3 the Apostle Paul’s uses six quotations from the Old Testament, from the Jewish Old Testament, to demonstrate that as with the Gentiles so the Jews were equally incapable of administering righteousness or attaining righteousness in their own lives. Not only that, but the Law of Moses which the Jew wore like a crown on his head to distinguish himself from all other men could not save him, was never intended to save him, in fact, in the last line of Ch 3 and v 20, all it could do was expose the knowledge of sin, could never really deal with the problem of sin. You’ll appreciate that the offerings the Law could offer for you were only for the very most paltry of sins, anything major, there was no offering that could help you – it was execution!

The revelation of the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ

Well, the solution to the problem then is this next section. The revelation of the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. There had to be another solution. In order for man to be saved, God’s righteousness would have to be upheld. That would require a demonstration that there was nothing in man worth saving and that flesh was only worthy of death, as if it wasn’t obvious already from the first three chapters so far, but to achieve that, God would have to meet sinful man in one who would both be a true representative of God and at the same time a true representative of the human race. He would need to bring into the world the son of God and the son of man, both those things combined; a true representative of the human race, and a perfect manifestation of God. And that’s the point you see, of Ch 3:25. It says that “God has set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood. You may remember that we made the point that “propitiation” here only appears in one other place in the New Testament, in the book of Hebrews, where it is translated “mercy seat.” What was the “mercy seat?” Well, in simple terms, it was the lid upon the box, that is the box

which was the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place, the lid over which the Cherubim of Glory were enthroned, but it says in Exodus 25:22 that God would meet with man there. It represented the Lord Jesus Christ because that's where God would meet man. So there's the Tabernacle version, if you like, of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore Christ is the anti-typical mercy seat, you might say. And of course, in rendering perfect obedience Christ declared the righteousness of God that God was right, that man was wrong, that flesh had to be put to death. If a man could accept that and live a life consistent with those principles, then in the words of v 26 of Rom Ch 3, that crowning verse, if you like, as a summary of the atonement, then and only then, could a righteous God take an unrighteous man and make him righteous, without compromising God's own righteousness. That is the simplicity, you see, of the atonement, that's where we have got to by the end of Ch 3. Well, having said all of that the Apostle has now established a basis upon which he can now continue into Ch 4. This is how the section looks. Now what I have given you here on the screen is everything from Ch 3:21 all the way through to Ch 5:21, because of course, this is the section on "the righteousness of God revealed in Christ," tonight as you are aware, we are only going to deal with Ch 4.

Look at what you have got on the screen regarding Ch 4 for a moment. Abraham justified by faith; Abraham justified before circumcision; Justified before the Law; Abraham's pristine example of faith; and finally Abraham's seed also justified by faith. Don't you find this rather a peculiar digression in this section? This is a major section on the subject of the Atonement in the book of Romans. Ch 3 and Ch 5 as you can see by skimming down that slide, are all about the work of Jesus Christ. The meeting place between God and man; how God would demonstrate righteousness in a man, and in the middle you've got this little section on Abraham. Ch 3:21-31 and Ch 5:12-21 both the first and last sub-sections of that major section are the two most valuable sections on the Atonement in the Bible. And in between that you've got a little section on Abraham. What's going on? Why are we talking about Abraham in the middle of a discourse on the Atonement?

Well, you see, the problem is with the Jews. The Jews at this point do not accept the logic of Chs 1 to 3, despite everything Paul has said and despite the fact that Jewish history proved that they hadn't attained righteousness, despite the fact that he is quoting 6 times from the Old Testament between vv 10-18 of Ch 3, despite the fact that he's got a powerful answer as to what the Law could really offer for you in Ch 3:20, they don't agree, they don't agree, they still cling to the fact that because they've got Abraham's blood in their veins, there's something special about them which means that God has to save them despite their conduct and life. They ascribe personal greatness, you see, to Abraham because of Abraham's life.

The Jews believed that Abraham kept the Law of Moses

They even believe, now listen to this, carefully, they even believe that Abraham kept the Law of Moses. Now you are going to say to me, 'How could they ever believe that when Abraham pre-dated the Law of Moses by hundreds of years.' Let me tell you they did believe it, and I will show you how, shortly. Abraham was circumcised, Abraham kept the Law. They were circumcised, they kept the Law, there's something special about them, they don't need the logic of the first three chapters, you see? Well consider the power of the argument you are going to meet in Ch 4.

'Was Abraham righteous?' says Paul. 'Yes he was,' says the Jew. 'Did he keep the Law of Moses?' says Paul? 'Yes, he did,' says the Jew. 'Then what do you make of God's promises?' says Paul, 'Then what do you make of the promises of God to Abraham?' says Paul, 'If Abraham earned those promises by law-keeping then they are wages, they are not promises.' Now consider the power of that, it is true. If you can earn something by work then it is not a gift, it's an obligation, by your employer. 'Ah!' Says the Jew, 'but Abraham was circumcised.' 'Oh, yes?' says Paul, 'and tell me when was Abraham circumcised?' Gen 17, 'Well, when was Abraham first called righteous?' Gen 15! God took him out by the hand and said 'Number the stars. Do you believe you can have children that numerous?' 'Yes, I do,' Gen 15:6. Upon that confession, Abraham was pronounced righteous, he was pronounced righteous therefore, two chapters before he was circumcised. 'Well, I'm glad you raised that,' says Paul, 'because if Abraham was pronounced righteous before he was circumcised then surely circumcision avails nothing? In fact, if Abraham was pronounced righteous before he was circumcised, we might say, in a manner of speaking, that he was made righteous when he was still a Gentile.' Now think of that, because circumcision was the very thing that marked you as a descendant of the nation of Israel. If you weren't circumcised you were excommunicated from the nation. Abraham was righteous before he was circumcised, he was a Gentile when he was pronounced righteous, and immediately, you see, we've just opened the gate to incorporate the entire believing Gentile world as children of Abraham. That's the logic of Romans Ch 4. So rather than Abraham becoming a problem for Paul to solve, he now becomes the test case, doesn't he? He now becomes the test case, and what a test case.

The Structure of the Book

But there is one other thing I need to show you before I begin on Ch 4, and that's the structure. Do you realise that Ch 4 and 5, everything that's yet to come in this major section on the righteousness of God revealed in Christ, is all based on the opening words of Ch 3:21-31. This section on the Atonement in the last 11 verses of Ch 3 is the springboard for everything he will now say in Ch 4 and everything he will now say in Ch 5. Let me just show you what I mean. You see in Ch 3:27 he says, "Where is boasting then?" That's exactly what you read in Ch 4:2, "If Abraham were justified by works, he had whereof to boast," same word. Ch 3:28, and this is important, listen carefully and look at this. Ch 3:28, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law." Now you might say it is saying the same thing twice, that is if you were forgiven, if you were made righteous by your faith, you were evidently made righteous "without the deeds of the Law." Yes, but that is the springboard for the first section of Ch 4 because look, in v 3, "What saith the Scripture, Abraham believed God," he had faith in God and "he was counted righteous." V 6, "David, to whom God imputeth righteousness without works." So the keywords are in Ch 28, "faith without the deeds of the Law," Ch 4:3, "believed," that's 'faith,' and Ch 4:6, "without works," that is, "without the deeds of the Law." You see, so Ch 3:28 becomes the springboard for Paul to introduce two remarkable characters, Abraham in v 3, David in v 6.

Man is justified by faith and without the deeds of the Law

What about circumcision? Ch 3:30, "There is one God that shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith," he says. Well that's the basis of Ch 4:9, "Cometh this blessedness upon the circumcision only or upon the uncircumcision also?" You see? And the 'blessedness there is, of course, the forgiveness of sins, I will show you that shortly. Finally, let me just show you Ch 3:21, "But now, the righteousness of God outside the Law is manifested being witnessed by the law and the prophets," that's the basis for Ch 4:13 "the promise that Abraham shall be heir of the world was not to him or his seed through law but through the righteousness of faith," you see the point? He's begun all these threads in the concluding verses of Ch 3 which he now elaborates on in Ch 4 and in Ch 5. There they are, on the screen, you can take them down in your own time.

Well, Ch 3:28, Paul has made a conclusion, he's concluded that man is justified by faith and without the deeds of the Law and as I said, this is now going to be the basis for Ch 4:1-8, he's going to introduce Abraham a character of faith, and David, a character who was saved without the deeds of the Law. V 1, "What shall we say then, did Abraham our father as pertaining to the flesh hath found?" And of all the faithful characters in the Old Testament, of course, none could surpass Abraham, as far as the Jew was concerned, none could surpass Abraham. Isa 41:8, he's the "friend of God." Neh 9:7, he is "the chosen of God." Psa 105:15, he's "God's anointed." Gen 20:7, he's the "prophet of God." In the mind of the Jew, therefore, Abraham was the exemplar, wasn't he? He's called in v1 "Our father Abraham," and you know that phrase runs all the way through the New Testament. Matt 3:9, John the Baptist warned the Pharisees to repent and to think not to say within themselves "we have Abraham for our father," as if that was all you needed to do in life to be born of Abraham, so this is how he begins, you see, Abraham was their Father. They abused the relationship they had with Abraham, pretending that that meant that they had to do nothing. So very critical that Paul calls him "our Father," because this was the appeal to the Jew who was at this point, or at least, up until this point, unconvinced by the argument. The critical point here, however, is that the Jew's believed that Abraham was justified by works, because, of course, his whole life was filled with the works of God. He left Ur of the Chaldeas, he built altars in the Land of Israel, he delivered Lot in battle, he was circumcised, he tried, he interceded, to try to save Sodom from destruction, he sacrificed his son, well what do we find, therefore, Paul says, regarding Abraham? V 2, "Well if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, or to boast, or to brag, but not before God." If Abraham attained righteousness by works, that is to say, if he was forgiven his sins by works he did, then he could boast that he had saved himself by his own will-power, couldn't he? That's what he could boast. There is no question, will power must be exercised in the life of the believer, you've got to try. But human ingenuity itself will not achieve perfection. You won't live a sinless life just by trying as hard as you can. That, however, is not what the Jews thought of Abraham. Abraham, if he was justified by works could boast, but not before God, the point is, that the Jews put Abraham on a pedestal, God did not. Now there is no question that Abraham was a great man of faith, but he wasn't Jesus Christ, that's the point.

V 3, "For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God," or had faith in God, "and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Now where is that quotation from, because it is from Scripture? Let's forget about what the Jew says, let's forget about what Abraham says, what does Scripture say? Well it's a quotation, and you need to

mark this, it is a quotation from Gen 16:6, that's the circumstance where God told Abraham that he would have sons like the stars of heaven for multitude. I don't have time to turn this up, but just cast your mind back to Genesis 15, what's happened? Well at Gen 14, or course, Abraham has just returned from the battle of the Kings, five kings from the north came against the land and they took Lot captive, Abraham goes up with his trained soldiers, fights the kings, defeats the kings, rescues Lot and all the baggage of Sodom. The problem was, of course, that Abraham could have died in that battle and it appears as though he made a will, his last will before he left town, and when he returns he has a discussion with God in Ch 15 and says 'Well, I'm going to have a son, you promised me that, back in Ch 12:7 of Genesis, is Eleazar the son you had in mind?' and it appears as though Abraham has got his house in order before he went to battle and presumed that if he never came back, Eleazar would be the inheritor. God says, 'No, that's not the son I have in mind, you are going to have a literal son, a literal son of your own. Come with me Abraham,' God says, 'come out here and I'll show you something,' and he says 'look up and look at that, do you believe you are going to have children as numerous as the stars in the sky?' Abraham says, 'Yes I do believe that.' What did he do? He simply took God at his word, he believed him. It wasn't a blind faith, he knew his wife was barren, they'd obviously been married for many years and had been unable to have children, but despite that fact, he knew God could do the impossible, could open the barren womb, if you like. So there's a certain 'character' to his belief, it wasn't just a blind faith. He believed God could do the impossible, he believed God could bring life from the deadness of Sarah's womb, and it tells you, that as a consequence of that belief, in the second to last line of v 3, it was "counted to Abraham for righteousness." The word "counted" means 'to add up,' or 'to credit,' and that word is an important word, it appears 11 times in Ch 4. Get your pencil out, make a note right now. Ch 4:3, it is the word "counted." Ch 4:4, it's the word "reckoned." I'll give you five seconds to catch up. Ch 5, last line, it's the word "counted." V 6, "imputeth." V 8 "impute." V 9, second to last line, "reckoned." V 10, first line "reckoned." V 11 second last line, "imputed." V 22, 23,24, "imputed," and hopefully, that's 11. And it means, as I say 'to add up,' or 'to credit.' So what it means in v 3 is that because of Abraham's faith he was credited with righteousness. He was pronounced 'righteous.' Now what does that actually mean, to be 'pronounced righteous?' Well, just compare v 6 with v 8, and you will have your answer immediately, Rom 4:6-8. Rom 4:6, speaking about David, it says, "David described the blessedness of the man to whom God imputeth righteousness," well, that's 'counting righteous' in v 3, it is the same phrase. What does it mean? It means, v 8 "Blessed is the man whom the Lord will not impute sin." So being imputed righteous in v 6 is the same as not having your sins imputed, that is to say, being forgiven your sins. So when Abraham counted the stars that night, his sins were immediately forgiven. It was as if he had just exited the waters of baptism. He was forgiven his sins because of his relationship with God, that's simply what it is saying, and that's all it is saying. "Counted righteous?" Forgiven his sins. Abraham pronounced sinless at that instant.

Rom 4:4 "Now to him that worketh is the reward not imputed of grace, but of death." What does that mean? Here is the New International Version, "When a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation," so it's very simple in v 4, if you've done a day's work then wages are due, your employer is in debt to you, but if you get paid even if you did nothing, then your payment is by grace, it is a gift, and when we talk about Abraham's works the best you could say he did under that

night sky, was crane his neck and look backwards, that was the only work he did, the rest was a moral reaction to God's statement, you see? He was forgiven because he believed, not because of what he did because he did, well, apart from walk outside, basically did nothing, that's the point. V 5, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly his faith is counted for righteousness," and this is the opposite statement to v 4. God says to Abraham, 'Abraham, you are going to have a son.' Abraham says, 'I believe you.' He believed God was right, that is to say he declared God's righteousness. Isn't it simple? That's what it means, it is as simple as that, and that's the basis of Abraham's forgiveness. He declares the righteousness of God because he believes God means what he said, he believes God is right, that declares God's righteousness, forgiveness of sins. Now let's put a perspective on that. Paul is emphasizing faith as opposed to works, that Abraham would have a seed and in time his seed would inherit the land. When they did so, however, look at the criteria that's established. In Gen 15:6, Abraham counts the stars and he is commended as being righteous, or imputed righteous, forgiven his sins. Later on in Gen 15, those promises are elaborated, and in vv 15 and 16, the promise of the land comes again and it says, "Abraham thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace, thou shalt be buried in a good old age, but in the fourth generation your descendants will come hither again, that is from Egypt, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." So what was it that would be the trigger for the Jews to return back to the land, the wickedness of the inhabitants of the land, the wickedness of the existing inhabitants of the land, not the Jewish righteousness in Egypt. Look what Moses said in Deut 9. "Speak not in thine heart, after that Yahweh thy God hath cast them out from before thee saying, 'For my righteousness Yahweh has brought me in to possess this land,' but for the wickedness of these nations Yahweh doth drive them out from before thee." So you see the point, they were the descendants of Abraham, Abraham was pronounced righteous, but there was nothing intrinsically good, about Abraham's descendants, and it certainly would not be their righteousness that got them the possession of the land, it would be the unrighteousness of the existing tenant of that land. And you know, it is exactly the same with us.

We are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, think about this, it will not be the righteousness of the Christadelphian organization that calls the Lord Jesus Christ back from heaven to establish the kingdom of God. 2 Thess 1:7, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that's what calls the Lord back from heaven, we will be saved by God's grace, there is no intrinsic righteousness in us, baptism or no baptism, is there? Never think we are better than other men. There are Gentiles out there who can put us to shame by their characters and by their conduct, the only difference between us and them is that we believe God can get us into the kingdom of God, whereas they believe they can do it for themselves. That's the faith of Abraham, that God could do the impossible, that God could do something he couldn't do himself, and you can see on that basis, and if that's true in 2 Thess 1, it would be foolhardy for us to presume upon God's favor without effort on our behalf, wouldn't it, because that's the condition that will bring Jesus Christ back to the earth.

Abraham was forgiven without doing any works

Well, from the heights of the faithfulness of Abraham, now to the depths of faithlessness. Now lest I decry the otherwise remarkable character of David, we have, however, here the major glitch in his life, between vv 6-8 of Rom 4. Think about David, says the Apostle, “even David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,” so Abraham in v 3 was credited with righteousness by faith, that is, without works at all, but by his faith, David clearly not credited righteousness by his faith, because he was on death row, wasn't he? He ought to have been killed for his sin, so he was forgiven without doing any works. And what was his sin? Adultery, concealment, betrayal, manipulation, murder, without works and David is forgiven. Now we needn't turn this up, perhaps put something in Rom 4, come back with me to Psalm 51. Psalm 51, as you know is a Psalm of David, and it is the Psalm of David that he wrote concerning his sin with Bathsheba, and this is extremely illuminating because David, in fact, speaks volumes on this incident in his life because of what he learned from this incident, and Paul is going to quote this incident in a couple of verses time in Rom 4. In fact, he quotes Psalm 51 for another reason in Rom Ch 3, but I won't go there. The superscription, “A psalm of David when Nathan the prophet came unto him after he had gone in to Bathsheba,” so we are left in no doubt as to what the content of Psalm 51 is. It tells us in v 1, “Have mercy upon me O God according to thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly, wash me from mine iniquity, cleanse me from my sin,” so you can see David's guilt as he explains it in v 1-2. “I acknowledge mine transgressions,” v 3. “Against thee, thee only God have I sinned.” Of course he had sinned against God and man, but in a relative sense, God most considerably.” Look at the problem v 16, “for thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it, thou desirest not burnt offering,” now of course, it is true, that God wants obedience and not sacrifice, that's a Sunday School lesson from Samuel, however, do you understand that in v 16 here, even if David had wanted to give a sacrifice there was no sacrifice that he could offer for his sin. The Law didn't give him any solution for the capital sins that he had committed here. So there is no sacrifice that David could give, even if he did want to give one, you see? What David instead does, is in v 13, he says, ‘All right, I've been forgiven, my desire now is to teach transgressors thy ways, that sinners might be converted unto thee, that is to say, that everybody in history learns what I have done,’ and the word “teach” there in v 13, is the Hebrew word Maskil, מַשְׁכִּיל the Hebrew word Maskil, which simply means to give instruction. Now, there are a number of Psalms in the Psalter which are called Maskil Psalms, Psalms of instruction. The first one of those is psalm 32. Come back to Psalm 32. Psalm 32 we believe, is a Psalm, concerning the incident between David and Bathsheba, so here is the fulfilment, if you like, of Psalm 51 and v 13, where David desires to teach other people not to sin, here's the Maskil, look at the superscription of Psalm 32, “A Psalm of David, a Maskil, a Psalm for instruction,” you see, and this I believe is the instruction he had in mind from Psalm 51:13.

V 1, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered,” “Blessed is the man unto whom imputeth not iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile.” Those two verses as your margin will tell you are quoted in Rom 4:7-8. So that's David's instruction and what he is saying here, very simply is, he's been forgiven his sins. God has not imputed iniquity to him, that is to say he's been imputed righteous without works, that's how these verses are used in Rom 4. But look at v 3, look at David's mind, at this time. “When I kept silence, my bones waxed

old all through my roaring all the day long, for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me my moisture was turned into the drought of summer, I acknowledged my sin, however, unto thee, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Yahweh and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” Why was David in such agony in vv 3-4 before he finally confessed his in v 5. Well, because he was a dead man walking wasn’t he. What do we mean by a “dead man walking?” He was on death row. He never knew whether it would be this day or the next day when there would come a knock at the door and the High Priest wanted to talk to him. Half the city knew what David had done. You don’t believe me on that you go and look at 2 Sam 11 and look at the word “sent,” he sent messengers this way and he sent messengers that way, he sent messengers to Joab, everyone, there were messengers running around the city, don’t tell me that the court of the king didn’t know something was up, and how come Uriah wouldn’t go back to his own home? What is happening, you can imagine the rumour mill in Jerusalem at that time, and he knew there was no possible offering for his sin. So for month after month 9 months, 12 months whatever it might have been he knows that one day will be his last. And there’s going to come a knock at the door and he’s sitting there wondering if he whether he’ll make it to the end of the day, every day, month after month, well you can imagine it would just gnaw you to pieces, wouldn’t it. It destroyed the very fibre of a man, not knowing if this day would be his last. “Would God it were morning,” “Would God it were evening,” you can imagine what David is going through, and add to that his relationship with God is in tatters, and so the day that is last, will be the day right before judgment and what will he do then? How would you cope in that situation, when his only prospect is judgment to come and he doesn’t expect to be an old man. “I kept silence and my bones waxed old through my roaring, all day long.”

All right, what was the result, come back to 2nd Sam 12, here’s the result, David was forgiven, and look how it worked, 2 Sam 12:1, “Yahweh sent Nathan to David, and he came to him said to him, ‘David, I’ve got a story for you,’ there were two men in one city the one rich and the other poor, and the rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds. The poor man, however, had nothing save one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished up and it grew together with him and with his own children and it ate of his meat and drank of his cup and lay in his bosom and was to him like a daughter,” that brothers and sisters is a commentary of the marriage between Bathsheba and Uriah. They were in love, they were deeply in love and that’s what David ruptured by his lust. Well not only were there no works that David could possibly commit, but look what happens in v 13, Nathan comes to David, he tells him the story, he tells him the meaning of the story and in v 13, David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against Yahweh,” and Nathan said to David, “Yahweh has also put away thy sin, thou shalt not die.” Wow! As I say, not only were no works that David could have done, but between his confession and his forgiveness there was no time to do any works, even if could have done a work. Forgiveness comes in v 13 in the very next breath after confession, doesn’t it, and that’s how forgiveness works. A man repents genuinely and whole-heartedly, God forgives him immediately, doesn’t hold past sins against him. But now we can look at this and be fooled into thinking that this is an easy thing. I’ve got no doubt that David was genuinely repentant, he’d just spent month after month biting his fingers to the bone wondering whether he was living his last day. You will appreciate that it is easy to believe that David was genuine in his repentance before Nathan and before God at this moment,

in fact, back in Rom 4:6 it said, that David “describes the blessedness of sins forgiven” just before he quotes Psalm 32, because David, of course, was a man rescued from the grave so no doubt, no doubt, there is no doubt that David was genuine. We say, ‘Well, David was forgiven murder, David was forgiven adultery, what greater sins could there be?’ Ahah! We say it too quickly, another man’s wife, a little ewe lamb, lust comes upon David, he takes her, he delivers Uriah into the hand of Joab, a man he never liked his entire life, almost couldn’t live with him, couldn’t live without him, a man without a spiritual bone in his body, was Joab. David took her, cold blooded, premeditated murder, lying, deception, arrogance, lust, one breath, God forgives it! But as we did with Abraham, let’s complete the perspective on that.

There were two sets of promises to David

Are you familiar with the promises to David, did you know there were two sets of promises to David? In 2 Sam 7, words from God came by Nathan in response to David’s desire, the desire David had to build a house, and those words said, that from your own house, David, will come a special descendant who will be established by God and that God would build you a house. In 2 Sam 12, you’ve got the second promises to David, and in the promises of Ch 12, words came again from God, again through Nathan, in response to David’s desire, only this time it was David’s desire to take another man’s wife. But from David’s own house would come a special descendant, Absalom, established by God who would bring a sword that would never depart from David’s house, that’s the second set of promises. So when David says, in Psalm 51:3, my sin is ever before me, now you know why, he had destroyed his family. He was forgiven, no doubt, but in the same breath that Nathan offers forgiveness to David, he bestows upon him the second set of promises which were enormous consequences for David’s sin. Forgiveness wasn’t so easy was it. Oh, forgiveness might have been easy, but God made very clear and very sure to David, that he would never ever forget the gravity of the sin that he had committed. In the very same moment that he forgave him he made sure that David would never take that forgiveness lightly. That’s serious isn’t it, that’s serious, come back to Romans, because that leads directly to the next section. We’ve just done vv 1-8. Vv 7-8 quote Psalm 32 and you can see that those first eight verses are the exposition upon the conclusion, if you like, of Ch 3:28 that the man is justified by faith and he is justified without the deeds of the Law, look at Abraham, look at David. When I say look at Abraham and David, look at the full picture of Abraham and David, don’t presume that justification comes easily, comes glibly, when it comes, it comes instantly, but it has got to be genuine, it’s got to be genuine.

Well, in Ch 4 of Romans and v 6, 7 and 8 you will see the same word occur, David describes the “blessedness of the man,” the saying in v 7, “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven.” V 8, “Blessed is the man to whom God won’t impute sin.” V 9, “Cometh this blessedness upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also?” Is this forgiveness of sins for Jews only, or is it available for Gentiles as well? Now this, of course, vv 9-12, is the next great section of the Chapter. “For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.” Paul has already said, in Ch 3 and v 30, that salvation is available to Jew and to Gentile, that circumcision means nothing, well now he’s got to prove it, and he says at the end of this verse, v 9, “Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness,” now there’s a quote from Scripture,

and the quote of course is, Gen 15:6, and the reason I draw your attention to that, brothers and sisters and young people, is that this is now the second time that Paul has quoted Gen 15:6 in Rom 4, the first time was back in v 3. So he has just pulled the same quote again as he commences his next section, he's going to say 'Ah Ah, Gen 15:6 is vitally important to understand that forgiveness applies to Gentiles as well as Jews. It is quoted, I'll tell you now, a third time in this chapter in v 22. So in v 3, v 9, v 22, all quote Gen 15:6, Abraham's forgiveness beneath those stars. Well, in v 9, if righteousness came by faith and not law, then it applies to anybody who exercises faith, be they Jew or be they Gentile. 'Well,' says the Jew, 'what about circumcision? What about circumcision?' V 10, 'Well how was it then reckoned? How was Abraham's forgiveness reckoned, when he was in circumcision or when he was in uncircumcision?' what's that saying? When was Abraham's forgiven his sins in Gen 15:6, before or after he was circumcised? Answer: v 10, "not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision." Gen 15:6, Abraham was pronounced righteous when he was 75 years old. Gen 17:10, Abraham was circumcised when he was 99 years old. He wasn't circumcised until 14 years after he was pronounced righteous in Gen 15, 14 years! V 11, "And Abraham received the sign of circumcision a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised," What does that say? Abraham received the seal of the righteousness of faith, that is to say, he received a stamp of approval or a mark in his body, a mark of genuineness, of the genuineness of his righteousness. The point is, circumcision was a stamp of approval of Abraham's character. Circumcision is not made him righteous, he was righteous before he was circumcised and he was only circumcised because he was righteous you see. Circumcision doesn't help you, Abraham was righteous 14 years before he was circumcised, so there's no doubt that Abraham was uncircumcised when he was pronounced righteous. "That he might be the father of all them that believe though they be not circumcised," you don't have to be circumcised to be righteous, circumcision came afterwards, as an indication that you were righteous. "That righteousness might be imputed to them also," you see? It's a simple argument, it is simply an argument from chronology. Circumcision doesn't make you righteous because Abraham was pronounced righteous by God 14 years before he was circumcised, and what's more, he was only circumcised because of what he was, it was because he was righteous, you see? And he becomes the father, in v 11, of "all them that believe," now think about the consequences of those words. Abraham, as a consequence of being circumcised becomes the father of all them that believe, but the very moment that Abraham was circumcised, he couldn't have been the father of anyone could he? It would have been a physical impossibility, so the only way, immediately you start to read those words, you start to realise that the only way these could be fulfilled is spiritually. Not only that, when Abraham was circumcised, in Gen 17, it says in Gen 17 and v 5 that when Abraham was circumcised he was made "the father of many nations," plural, plural, in fact, Gen 17:5 is quoted down in v 17 of this chapter. Abraham was made the father of many nations the day he was circumcised, and his name was changed from Abram to Abraham to commemorate that fact, well who were all those nations that were going to descend from Abraham? Not just Jews, the Jews were one nation, he would be made the father of many nations, plural. Evidently circumcision was going to apply to more than just the Jews, even on the very day he was circumcised. That's quite a powerful answer. V 12, "Abraham was the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only," that is, he was the father of spiritual circumcision to them who are not just naturally circumcised, Jews, "but who also walk in the steps of that

faith of our father Abraham,” Gentiles, “which he had when he was uncircumcised,” you see? So circumcision avails nothing, Abraham’s the father of the Jew and of the Gentile, that is the believing Jew and the believing Gentile. Think about that.

What did circumcision actually teach?

Now what did circumcision actually teach? Well it taught the nation to cut off the flesh, that is to rely upon God and not the power of the flesh. Wouldn’t you say that an obvious lesson of circumcision therefore would be that if circumcision is teaching you not to rely on flesh and blood, that you wouldn’t also rely on fleshly descent? Wouldn’t that be almost ipso facto? If the point of circumcision is to cut off the flesh so that you don’t rely on flesh, why would you presume that blood descent through the flesh from Abraham is going to count anything in relation to your salvation? If flesh profits nothing, Abraham’s flesh profits nothing either, does it? You want proof of that, back in Gen 17:25 it says that “Ishmael was circumcised,” and there wouldn’t have been a Jew alive that believed that that man was in the least righteous. That’s why Paul says in Gal 4 Ishmael’s a type of Israel, unrighteous natural Israel. Isaac is a type of spiritual Israel, so forgiveness is available to Jew or Gentile whether they are circumcised or not. ‘All right,’ he says, ‘that deals with circumcision, what about the Law,’ vv 13-17, ‘what about the Law of Moses, and in particular, the Law of Moses in relation to Abraham?’ If Abraham was not justified because he was circumcised, perhaps the Jew could argue that Abraham was justified because he kept the Law of Moses. Well Paul has already made a number of comments about that back in Ch 3:21 “Righteousness comes apart from Law.” Ch 3:28, We conclude that a man is justified by faith “without the deeds of the Law.” So he has set us up now to consider Abraham in relation to the Law of Moses. Now how would the Jew defend that do you suppose? How would the Jew defend the fact that Abraham kept the Law of Moses? If circumcision, the argument from vv 9-12, if circumcision was irrelevant, because Abraham was pronounced righteous 14 years before he was circumcised, how could the Law possibly be relevant when Abraham lived 430 years prior to Moses. And why, what’s more, vv 13-17, why in this section wouldn’t Paul just roll out the chronology argument again? Simply saying, ‘Well, was Abraham pronounced righteous before or after he obeyed the Law of Moses, when evidently the Law of Moses was centuries after?’ He doesn’t, he doesn’t use that argument, he’s going to use an argument which simply says, ‘if you gain righteousness by the law then God has to pay it to you as an obligation against a debt, it’s not a gift.’ This is the argument he’s going to use in vv 13-17, and this is why, look carefully. Gen 26:5, “because that Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, my Laws,” that’s what Abraham’s life was like, and Moses said in Deut 11:1, “Therefore thou shalt love Yahweh thy God and keep his charge, his statutes, his judgments, his commandments, always,” exactly the same language. Do know what the Jews said? ‘Abraham kept the Law of Moses by anticipation.’ Proof? Gen 26:5 compared with Deut 11:1, can you see why? Is it true to say ‘that Abraham kept the Law of Moses by anticipation?’ It is evidently not true to say that he kept the actual Law of Moses, it wasn’t given to Moses. Did he anticipate the Law of Moses? Yes, he did, the spirit of the Law of Moses, and this is what it says in Jer Ch 31, this is what Israel never ever understood. I’ll read you this quotation and then I will explain it to you. Jer 31:33. “But this shall be the covenant,” in the kingdom age “that I will make with the House of Israel,” says God, “after those days, saith Yahweh, I will put my Law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts,

I'll be their God, they'll be my people." Do you think it is possible that Abraham had the Law of Moses written in his heart? Well, of course it is, so think about what happened. God's got a relationship with Abraham, God speaks to Abraham, Abraham believes what God says. As a consequence of that, God forgives Abraham. Now let's multiply Abraham into 2 million people, what proportion of them do you think will have anything the calibre of character of Abraham? A very tiny fraction, and so the Law of Moses was given like fences in a stock, to guide the nation of Israel, to stop them going this way and to stop them going that way, that they might at least, in measure, copy the character of their father Abraham. He didn't need that kind of restraint, he got it immediately, he appreciated what God said, but when he becomes a nation of 2 million people, very few of them are like him. So it's true, you see, in a sense, Abraham kept the principles of the Law of Moses, not that he had the Law of Moses, but he kept it by faith, the nation kept it by Law. And the motivation of Abraham, compared with his people was 1800 different, you see? And the Jews never ever appreciated that fact, never ever appreciated that Abraham might do exactly the same works as them but for an entirely different reason, that would mean that Abraham would be accepted by God and they would be rejected. They never ever got it, they never ever understood that principle. The Gentiles understood it when they came to the truth, understood it immediately. One day, so will Israel, when those principles, Jer 31 and 33 are written upon their heart, you see? Well, v 13, "For the promise that Abraham should be heir of the world was not to Abraham or his seed through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith," what's the point? You don't earn a promise, promises are gifts, promises are given, you earn wages. "For if," v 14, "if they which are of the law be heirs," that is to say, 'if you inherit the promises to Abraham by keeping the Law, then faith is made void, faith is irrelevant, and the promise is made of none effect, it is not a promise any more, it is an obligation, it's a payment for services rendered,' you see? This is Paul's argument. In fact, exactly the same argument as v 4 of this chapter. But my point from before, you see why Paul is not using the chronology argument in here, and simply saying that Abraham predates the Law so rub out the Law, the Jew would point to those quotes and say 'Ah, not so fast, he did keep the Law,' well, the Jew is half right, he kept the principles of the Law, in his heart, as opposed to them.

The Law works wrath

V 15, "Because the Law worketh wrath for where no law is there is no transgression." Let's pause a minute and explain that carefully, "The Law worketh wrath," what was the purpose of the Law? Rom 3:19, "That all the world might become guilty before God," the law could only bring judgment, you see? It was never intended to bring promise, that's why it brings wrath. "For where no law is there is no transgression." What that means is, that there is no knowledge of transgression. It is the same idea as in Ch 5:13, "For until the law, sin was in the world but sin is not imputed where there is no law. There is no question, sin existed before the Law of Moses, there is no question about that at all, I mean, the men of Sodom were sinners exceedingly before Yahweh, they knew nothing of the Law of Moses, the point is, the law came to expose sin and to identify sin. Paul says, 'I didn't know covetousness was a sin until the Law said don't covet,' in Rom Ch 7, so that's what the Law did, you see, so the point is, the correct way to read v 15 of Ch 4, is that where no law is there is no knowledge of transgression, it is not true to say there is no transgression at all. "Therefore it," the promise of v 14, "is of faith that it might be by grace to the end that

the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the Law," that is, not to the Jews who have a heritage in the Law, "but to them also which are of the faith of Abraham who is the father of us all," both Jew and Gentile, "as it is written, I have made thee, Abraham, a father of many nations," plural, Jew and Gentile; quotation, Gen 17:5. And look at the end of v 17, "Abraham, I've made you a father of many nations before God whom Abraham believed, even God who quickeneth the dead and calleth those things which be not as though they are." What does that mean? It means simply this, that God made Abraham a father of many nations, in v 17, before Abraham even had a child. Oh, he had Ishmael, but he didn't have Isaac. Isaac doesn't come until Gen 21, and so God calls Abraham the father of many nations when, in fact, Abraham is childless as far as the promise is concerned because God calls those things which be not as though they are. He calls him the father of many nations in anticipation of the seed to come.

Can God bring Life out of Death

Well, there's the calibre of Abraham's faith, however. In Gen 15 he's promised that he would have a son, his wife's body was dead, his was not, evidently, because he fathered a son by Hagar in Gen 16. Abraham might have thought naturally that perhaps a son was possible, even if it wasn't probable. By the time that son finally came, in Gen 21, Abraham's body was dead and it had "ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women," Gen 18:11. No longer was a son improbable, a son was physically impossible from either of them, and look what went through Abraham's mind as the promise of that son was repeated and repeated and repeated, the older he got, he's 100 years old, he cannot father children, his wife cannot mother children, barrenness was one thing, it has "ceased with her," it is an impossibility, look what goes through Abraham's mind when the promise comes again, v 18. Now I'm just going to read this but look at the key words. "Who against hope, believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, so shall thy seed be, and being not weak in faith he considered (delete the word 'not'), considered his own body now dead," when he was about 100 years old in Gen 17, "and yet the deadness of Sarah's womb." So you've got to delete the word 'not,' and you've got to delete the word 'neither.'" "He did consider his own body, and he did consider his wife's body, neither could parent children. Despite that, v 20, he "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able to perform, therefore, it was imputed to him for righteousness." And there's your third example, Gen 15:6. Now what are the key words in vv 18-21? "Against hope, believed in hope." "Considered his own body," and the "deadness of Sarah's womb," "staggered not at the promise," "strong in faith," "fully persuaded," v 21, one word after another, isn't it? This is the calibre, you see, of Abraham's faith. When it talks about at the end of v 16, "walking in the faith of Abraham, that's calibre of the faith of Abraham, despite all the tests that came upon him in life, that's the calibre of his faith. V 19, here's Moffat's translation of v 19, "He never quailed, even when he noted the utter impotence of his own body, he was fully persuaded," and what was Abraham fully persuaded of, brothers and sisters? That God could do the impossible, that he could bring life out of death. And v 22 quotes for the 3rd time Gen 15:6 as the fulfillment, now Abraham wasn't given a son until Gen 21, he wasn't considering the "deadness of Sarah's womb" in Gen 15 because she might have been barren but she wasn't "dead in the womb" until Gen 18, yet we've fulfilled Gen 15:6 by

Abraham's consideration in these previous verses. How can this be? Why does Paul keep repeating this quote? Three times! Gen 15:6, well he says in v 23, "now, it was not written," that is the quotation from v 22, Gen 15:6, "was not written for Abraham's sake alone that it was imputed to him, but for us also to whom it shall be imputed if we believed on God that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." Do we also believe that God can bring life from death? Do we believe the same things as Abraham believed? Just what kind of faith did Abraham have, let me conclude with you James Ch 2, look at this. Three times, Jas 2, three times the Apostle Paul quotes Gen 15:6. James also quotes Gen 15:6 at the end of Jas Ch 2, and look at the context of this, v 20, Jas 2. "Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead," now here's the contrast, if you like, to Rom 4. Rom 4 is saying you are saved by faith and not by "the deeds of the Law," please don't presume from that that no works at all are required, we've already established the fact that the works of faith are required, you've got to live a life consistent with your belief. Works of Law are not required. Therefore, James says, "Wilt thou know O vain man, that faith without works is dead. Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou," reader, he says, "how faith cooperated with Abraham's works and by his works was faith made perfect, and the scripture was fulfilled, which said, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness and he was called the friend of God." And the first half of v 23 is a quotation from where? Gen 15:6. Here's the question, James is explaining the fact that Abraham has just offered Isaac his son from vv 20-23, what verse of scripture would you have expected him to have quoted when he got to v 23? You would expect him to quote Gen 22, because that is the chapter in which Abraham offers Isaac, he doesn't quote Gen 22, he quotes Gen Ch 15. How does that work, when the sacrifice of Isaac was 7 chapters after Gen Ch 15? Well, what was the faith of Abraham in Gen 15. He went out and he counted the stars, he believed he could have a son, even though his wife was barren. Two chapters later in Gen 17, Abraham turned 100 years old. His body is dead, Sarah's womb is dead, he still believes he can have a son. Gen 21, the son is born, "Who would have believed that Sarah could give children suck," she says? She's only got one son, but she is already anticipating the multitude that's been promised to David. Then Gen 22 is the final test, 'Abraham, go and take that boy and kill him. It might be easy for you, Abraham, to believe that a Barren womb could bear, it might be easy for you, Abraham, to believe that a dead a body and a dead womb could bear, now go and put a knife in him. Do you still believe I can bring life from death, do you still believe that, Abraham, after all these years? And don't just put a knife in him,' Gen 22:2, 'offer him up for a burnt offering, burn him to a pile of ash, a pile like this, do you still believe I can bring life from death? From that, do you believe I can do that Abraham?' Look at the trial, brothers and sisters, for 25 years those promises have been made, chapter after chapter, Abraham's waited for that boy, for most of the time Sarah never believed that it would happen. She thought the son might come through another woman like Hagar. God said "No, the son is going to come through you Sarah," she laughed, in Gen 18:12, at the prospect of her having children. All her life she had been unable to bear children and in Gen 20, Abraham finds himself in the house of Abimelech, he's lied, of course, for the second time, about his true relationship with Sarah, and now Abimelech thinks to make Sarah his wife, so God shuts the wombs of the house of Abimelech, and Sarah sees that and then finds that her husband is being asked to pray for that Philistine king, and Sarah saw that and her eyes were opened that God can shut wombs and he can open wombs and all of

sudden she realizes when she's 90 years old that God, in fact, can do the impossible. In Gen 21:1, the very next verse after Gen 20, Sarah can see that at 90 years old and then in Gen 22, the trial comes again, 'Do you still believe I can bring life out of death, Abraham,' and what was the answer? 'Yes I do, yes I do,' and he takes that boy, a grown man, up the hill, probably 30 years old, if the type fits to that degree, takes him up the hill to kill to kill him, and the scripture was fulfilled says James in v 23, which Scripture? Gen 15:6, the very infant believe that Abraham had in that chapter has now run full course and what began as a 'justification by faith,' becomes the justification now, by the 'works of faith,' because that simple belief has run its entire course of life, some 50 years between when Abraham was first promised, and when he now offers Isaac, he still believes God can bring life from the dead, and he's prepared to put his own son on the line. It's ever so simple you see, that's the "faith of Abraham," that's the faith that God forgives. God says 'Abraham you are going to have a son,' do you believe in it brethren? 'I believe, Father, he says.' He believed God was right, he therefore declared 'the righteousness of God,' it's as simple as that, that was the basis of Abraham's forgiveness, and the Jews never ever understood the works of Abraham, works motivated by faith, an implicit belief in what God said, a lifetime of consistency, consistent with what God said, that life could come from a dead womb and that life could come from a dead tomb. Because of course when Abraham saw Isaac come off the altar, he realised that was typical of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Isaac was simply a type, wasn't he? Abraham understood that, we understand that. Our job is to live a life consistent with it.