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The Priority of Faith

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY

monthly (interim) schedule

*** 1st Tuesday of the month ***

TUESDAY, 5TH OF MAY

12 NOON in 123 CAP

Capitol Commission (Interim) Bible Studies are held the *first* Tuesday of each month at 12 Noon. The *monthly* Bible study is nonpartisan and non-denominational. We are currently studying the book of Romans, chapter-by-chapter, and verse-by-verse.

I pray that this study will be edifying to you. I am here to serve you and to be a resource for prayer and counsel. Please accept my study in the Word of God, as an evidence of my desire to be serving you. – Dr. Ron J. Bigalke, Georgia State Minister, Capitol Commission

Capitol Commission (Interim) Bible Study
is
Tuesday, 5 May 2015

Romans 4 – “The Priority of Faith”

The story is told that, many years ago, a conference was convened to discuss the study of comparative religions. Theologians and experts from various fields of religious studies gathered from all over the world to tackle certain knotty questions relating to Christianity and its similarities or dissimilarities to other faiths. One particularly interesting seminar was held to determine whether there was anything unique about the Christian faith. A number of Christianity's features were put on the table for discussion. Was it the incarnation? No; other religions also had various versions of the gods coming down in human form. Might it be the resurrection? No, various versions of the dead rising again were found in other faiths as well.

On and on the discussion went without any resolution in sight. At some point, after the debate had been underway for a time, [Christian apologist] C. S. Lewis wandered in late. Taking his seat, he asked a colleague, “What’s the rumpus about? And was told that they were seeking to find Christianity’s unique trait among the world’s religions. In the straightforward, no-non-sense, commonsense approach that was to make Lewis famous, he immediately said, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.” As the other scholars thought about that for a moment, they concluded that Lewis was

right: It is grace. No other religion had ever made the ultimate acceptance by the Almighty so absolutely unconditional. In other faiths, there is usually some notion of earning points . . . one had to *earn* the favor of the gods [Soetj Hoezee, *The Riddle of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 41-42].

THE PRIORITY OF FAITH

(Rom 4:1-25) Romans 3:21-31 discussed God’s righteousness (as a general idea and basic truth), in addition to explaining how one may attain it. Romans 4 continues the discussion by developing the argument from fundamental principles to specific personalities. Normally, doctrinal truths are more easily understood when they are illustrated, especially with a personal example.

Scripture clarifies the fundamental truth of justification by faith, with the life of Abraham as evidence of the truthfulness of this doctrine. According to Romans 3:30, there is only God (cf. Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:6), and because only God exists, then He must be the God of all people. The truth that God is one means the true way of salvation is the same for all people: faith in Christ Jesus.

Justification is a legal (forensic) term with regard to acquittal; it refers to God’s action whereby He makes human beings, who are sinners and worthy of condemnation, to be made acceptable before a God who is holy and righteous. Romans 4 reinforces the truth that justification is by faith, and proves this doctrine by referencing Abraham, who lived prior to Christ. Similar to individuals today, Abraham was justified by faith alone, as the Bible states,

“Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6).

People sometimes refer to God in the Old Testament, and God in the New Testament, as if they were two different Beings. Christianity simply continues the biblical faith of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, in view of end-time fulfillment by Christ Jesus, as demonstrated by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:1-4, 14-21). Romans 4 conveys the continuity in God’s plan for history by demonstrating that justification is not a new concept; rather, it was always the priority of God’s relationship with those who trust in Him.

Abraham is not merely an example of justification by faith, he is *the* example (as the national patriarch). Using the example of Abraham, chapter 4 of Romans explains three aspects of justification by faith: (1) it *is not* by works (vv. 1-8); (2) it *is not* attained by religious ritual (vv. 9-12); and (3) it *is* based upon the promises of God (vv. 13-25). Therefore, justification is by faith alone.



Capitol Commission (Interim) Bible Study

1st Tuesdays (monthly) @ 12 Noon - 12:45 pm, 123 CAP
lunch provided from sponsorship by Coastal Bible Fellowship (BMW)



Enhancing Trust

Works did not justify Abraham; rather, he was justified by God's grace through his faith (vv. 1-5). Scripture explains that to be credited with righteousness as the result of works would mean that God was obligated to give "what is due;" however, if righteousness is due to faith, then it is an unmerited, free gift of God.

The principle of grace is entirely opposed to the principle of works. A fallen human being could never assert a claim upon the Almighty God. If the basis of salvation is works, then one receives wages resulting in debt. If the basis of salvation is faith, then one receives the gift of God, resulting in his favor. Obviously, the Lord God imputes righteousness – to those with faith – as a free gift.

THE PRINCIPLE OF GRACE IS ENTIRELY OPPOSED TO THE PRINCIPLE OF WORKS.

Verses 7-8 contain a quotation from Psalm 32, in which the word "impute" ("take into account") is used of both Abraham and David. God credited (imputed) righteousness to Abraham, just as He did not "impute iniquity" to David. God was not gracious to David as a result of his good works because the context of Psalm 32 reveals that it was written in reference to David's sin with Bathsheba. Just as Abraham received God's grace, so also did David, which was manifested to him as the result of his faith and not his good works.

ROMANS 4 DEMONSTRATES THE BASIS OF JUSTIFICATION AS BEING FAITH. JAMES 4 REFERENCES THE DEMONSTRATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH ACTIONS OF FAITH.

James 2:20-22 complements the teaching of Romans 4:3-5. Scripture does not reveal that faith saves a person without any works (cf. Rom 4:3-5), nor does the Bible teach that works are essential for salvation (cf. Jas 2:20-22). Nevertheless, both Romans 4:3-5 and James 2:20-22 use the illustration of Abraham.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works . . . faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; (Jas 2:21-22).

Romans 4 refers to dead works that are the result of self-effort, while James 2 mentions living works that are the natural effect of faith. Romans 4 refers to genuine faith, which is the absolute commitment of an individual to God. James 2 confronts a bogus faith that is merely an intellectual assent to specific doctrines.

Romans 4 addresses the basis of justification, and James 2 mentions the results and outward manifestation of the person who is truly justified. Romans 4 references Genesis 15:6, where it is written, "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." James 2 mentions Genesis 22:10, which records Abraham offering his son Isaac to God. Romans 4 demonstrates the *basis* of justification as being faith. James 4 references the *demonstration* of righteousness through actions of faith.

Similarly, circumcision was a demonstration of righteousness and an indication of faith (Rom 4:9-12), which is why Abraham's justification is recorded in Genesis 15, which was prior to his circumcision (Gen 17). Moreover, the covenant promises of God also demonstrate that the righteousness credited to Abraham was foreign to him (Rom 4:13-16) because it is "God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist" (v. 17).

The method by which the promise was given to Abraham is explained negatively (vv. 13-15) and then positively (vv. 16-17). *Stated negatively*, the promise "was not through the Law" for then faith would not have any meaning and the promise would result in nothing. *Stated positively*, the promise came "by faith" so that it could be assured and be universal.

Saving faith is based upon an understanding of God's character. In the biblical sense, faith is always trust in a proper object. God is the object of faith! When faith is *in Christ*, the believer not only receives God's promises but also his very righteousness.

IN THE BIBLICAL SENSE, FAITH IS ALWAYS TRUST IN A PROPER OBJECT. GOD IS THE OBJECT OF FAITH!

The greatness of Abraham's faith is evident in how he trusted God's impossible promise of a son (vv. 18-22). Occasionally, the faith of Abraham experienced lapses in belief, yet those failures were isolated incidents because his life was generally characterized by increasing maturity in faith. Abraham's justification by faith constitutes him as the spiritual ancestor of both Jewish and Gentile Christians (vv. 12, 16-17, 23-25).

Just as Abraham's trust in God resulted in righteousness being credit to him, so also our faith in God will result in righteousness being credited to us. The *content* of our faith is different because God promised Abraham a son, whereas our trust is in God's promise to grant forgiveness and eternal life by his grace through faith in Christ Jesus. The *object* of faith is always God!

Thank you for allowing Capitol Commission the honor to provide Bible studies to you. If you have any questions, please talk with us, or contact by email or phone.

About Capitol Commission

Capitol Commission state ministers are pastors-missionaries who teach weekly verse-by-verse Bible studies for legislators, lobbyists, and staff members. The Bible studies are hand-distributed to each legislative office, emailed, and made available throughout the Capitol community. Capitol Commission is a ministry of the church seeking to proclaim the gospel message, and to help believers mature through verse-by-verse Bible teaching. In the Bible, we see God's love for the world, especially those who have been placed in authority. This is the foundation for our ministry to you.

The church is instructed to submit and to honor government leaders (Rom 13:1-7), and to pray for their eternal salvation (1 Tim 2:1-4). The desire of Capitol Commission is to witness God transform the hearts and lives of elected officials, lobbyists, and staff members. We apply this mandate to four primary areas of discipleship: (1) *evangelize* those who have not known saving faith in Jesus Christ; (2) *establish* those who desire to grow in their faith and knowledge of Scripture; (3) *equip* those called to spiritual leadership; and, (4) *encourage* churches to participate with us in ministry.

Bible study luncheon sponsored by:



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NEXT CAPITOL COMMISSION (INTERIM) BIBLE STUDY:
Tuesday, 2nd of June @ 12 Noon in 123 CAP
(always the 1st Tuesday of each month, during interim)