

## Romans Session 55

### Abraham Justified by Grace 1

*Romans 4:9-17 (NASB)*

<sup>9</sup> *Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

<sup>10</sup> *How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;*

<sup>11</sup> *and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,*

<sup>12</sup> *and 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.*

<sup>13</sup> *For 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.*

<sup>14</sup> *For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;*

<sup>15</sup> *for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.*

<sup>16</sup> *For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed 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,*

<sup>17</sup> *(as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.*

It is a terribly sad and oppressing experience to visit Catholic holy sites such as the Shrine of Guadalupe in Mexico.

The shrine is built over the place where Mary supposedly appeared on one occasion.

In the hope of her interceding for them with her Son, Jesus Christ, every year myriads of pilgrims crawl on their hands and knees for a quarter of a mile or so to the shrine.

They then enter and light candles, one for each friend or relative for whom they seek to reduce the stay in purgatory.

Some years ago a missionary to India showed his pastor here in the states a recent copy of the major English-language Indian news magazine.

The feature story was on a great Hindu religious festival called Maha Kumbhy Mela, which is celebrated every twelve years at the confluence of the Ganga (Ganges) and Yamuna rivers, called the fabled waters of the Sangam. It is claimed to be the world's largest single religious event

Disregarding the difficult journey, the great expense, and the chilling waters, multitudes of the faithful are drawn to the celebration.

Caste and economic class are temporarily set aside. The festival is led by a group of stark naked holy men who lead a procession of millions of pilgrims down to the water.

Fakirs sit on beds of nails and walk over broken glass and lie down on hot coals. A common sight is to see worshipers taking long knives and piercing their tongues in order to sentence themselves to eternal silence as a way to appease their myriad gods.

Some worshipers will stare at the sun until they are blinded. Others intentionally cause their limbs to atrophy in gestures of worship.

One man had held his arm upright for eight years. Although his arm muscles had long since atrophied, his uncut fingernails had continued to grow and descended some two and a half feet below his hands.

One Hindu holy book declares, *"those who bathe at the conflux of the black and white river, the Ganga and the Yamuna, go to heaven"*

Another sacred writing says that *"the pilgrim who bathes at this place wins' absolution for his whole family, and even if he has perpetrated a hundred crimes, he is redeemed the moment he touches the Ganga, whose waters wash away his sins"*

At this festival the waterfront is lined with countless shaving booths, in which the devoted strip themselves bare and have every hair on their bodies shaved off, including their eyebrows and eyelashes.

Every shaved hair is collected and all the hair is then thrown into the filthy river.

Hindu writings assure pilgrims that *"for every hair thus thrown in, you are promised a million years' residence in heaven."*

The article closed with the comment; "Millions who come with spiritual hunger depart with peace in their hearts and renewed faith"

What a hellish, damning deception of Satan!

But it perfectly illustrates the work-centered systems of religion that men create under Satan's inspiration, all of which seek to convince people that they can be made right with God and guaranteed of a place in heaven by performing certain rites and ceremonies.

Some religions are much more sophisticated and humanly attractive than others, but all share the common false belief in works righteousness in some form or the other.

The natural man instinctively believes that somehow he can make himself right with God by his own efforts.

Paul, here continuing his assault against works righteousness and establishing that Abraham, the supreme example of a godly man, was saved by faith rather than by works.

**Romans 4:1-8 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> *What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?*

<sup>2</sup> *For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.*

<sup>3</sup> *For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

<sup>4</sup> *Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.*

<sup>5</sup> *But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,*

<sup>6</sup> *just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:*

<sup>7</sup> *"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.*

<sup>8</sup> *"BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."*

Paul now establishes that Abraham was saved through God's grace and not by being circumcised or by keeping the law. His argument was that if Abraham, the greatest man in the old dispensation, was saved through faith by God's grace, then every other person must be justified on the same basis.

And contrarily, if Abraham could not be justified by being circumcised or by keeping the law, then neither could another person.

In Romans 4:9-17 Paul demonstrates three closely related truths:

1. Abraham's justifying faith did not come by his circumcision (vv. 9-12)
2. Abraham's justifying faith did not come by his keeping the law (vv.13-15)
3. Abraham's justifying faith came solely by God's grace (vv.16-17)

#### ABRAHAM WAS NOT JUSTIFIED BY CIRCUMCISION

*Romans 4:9-12 (NASB)*

<sup>9</sup> *Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

<sup>10</sup> *How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;*

<sup>11</sup> *and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,*

<sup>12</sup> *and 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.*

Paul anticipated the question that Jews would be asking at this point in his argument.

*"if Abraham was justified by his faith alone, why did God demand circumcision of Abraham and all his descendants?"*

Most Jews in New Testament times were thoroughly convinced that circumcision was not only the unique mark that set them apart from all other men as God's chosen people but was also the means by which they became acceptable to God.

The Jewish apocryphal Book of Jubilees declares:

*This law is for all generations forever, and there is no circumcision of the time, and no passing over one day out of the eight days; for it is an eternal ordinance, ordained and written on the heavenly tables. And everyone that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, belongs not to the children of the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham, for he belongs to the children of destruction; nor is there moreover any sign on him that he is the Lord's but (he is destined) to be destroyed and slain from the earth (15:25ff.)*

Many Jews believed that salvation was based on their obedience to God in being circumcised, and that therefore, their eternal security rested in that rite.

In his commentary on the Book of Moses, Rabbi Menachem wrote,

*"Our Rabbis have said that no circumcised man will ever see hell" (fol. 43, col 3).*

The book Akedath Jizehak, taught that Abraham sits before the gate of hell, and does not allow that any circumcised Israelite should enter there (fol. 54, col. 2)

Such beliefs were so strong in Judaism that many of them were carried over into Christianity by Jewish converts in the early church.

Circumcision and following the Law of Moses became such issues that a special council of the apostles and elders was called in Jerusalem to settle the matter.

The unanimous decision, expressed in a letter sent to all the churches, was that obedience to Mosaic ritual, including circumcision, was not necessary for salvation.

**Acts 15:19-29 (NASB)**

<sup>19</sup> *"Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.*

<sup>21</sup> *"For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."*

<sup>22</sup> *Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, and they sent this letter by them, "The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.*

<sup>24</sup> *"Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls,*

<sup>25</sup> *it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,*

<sup>26</sup> *men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

<sup>27</sup> *"Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth.*

<sup>28</sup> *"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:*

<sup>29</sup> *that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."*

Paul had come out of a strongly legalistic Jewish background, being circumcised the eighth day, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the Law a Pharisee, (Phil 3:5)

Yet the Holy Spirit had revealed to him, and to the Jerusalem council that circumcision, or any other ceremony or human act, no matter how divinely ordained, could bring salvation.

Circumcision had never saved a Jew and it could never save a Gentile. (Rom. 2:25-29).

Paul therefore warned his fellow Christians, especially Jewish believers to;

**Philippians 3:2-3 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup> *Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;*

<sup>3</sup> *for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,*

**Galatians 5:1-4 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> *It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.*

<sup>2</sup> *Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.*

<sup>3</sup> *And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.*

<sup>4</sup> *You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.*

We will take up this subject again next time.