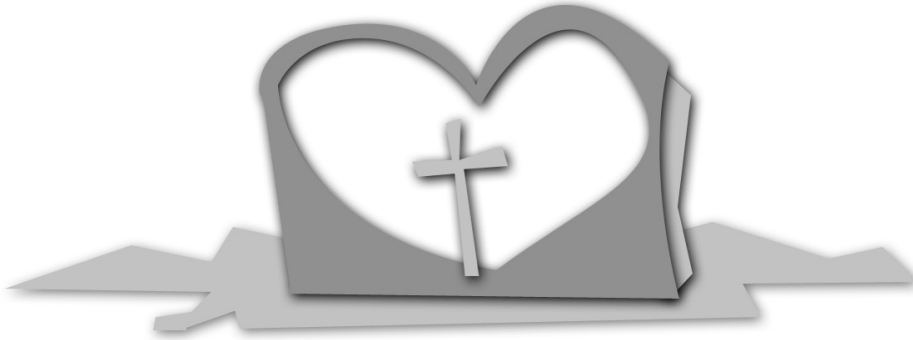


Justification¹ and the Law



SABBATH—JULY 24

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 15:6; 2 Samuel 11; 2 Samuel 12; Romans 3:20–23, 31; Romans 4:1–17; Galatians 3:19; 1 John 3:4.

MEMORY VERSE: “Does faith make the law useless? Not at all! We agree with the law” (Romans 3:31, NlrV).

IN MANY WAYS, ROMANS 4 DEALS WITH THE FOUNDATION (BASIS) OF THE BELIEF THAT WE ARE SAVED BY FAITH ALONE. Paul used Abraham, who was holy and pure, as a perfect example of someone who needed to be saved by grace,² without the deeds of the law. Paul made sure his meaning was clear so that no one could misunderstand him. If the best person's works and law-keeping were not enough to make him right with God, what hope does anyone else have? If Abraham needed grace, then so do we.

In Romans 4, Paul shows three important parts of the plan of salvation:³ (1) the promise of God's blessing (the promise of grace); (2) our answer to that promise (the answer of faith); and, finally, (3) God's gift of righteousness (holiness) credited (given) to those who believe (justification). That is how it worked with Abraham. And that is how it works with us.

It is important to remember that for Paul, salvation⁴ is by grace. To prove his point about salvation by faith alone, Paul goes to the book of Genesis: “Abram believed the Lord. The Lord accepted Abram because he believed. So his faith made him [Abram] right with the Lord” (Genesis 15:6, NlrV). Here is justification by faith⁵ in one of the earliest pages of the Bible.

1. justification—being forgiven and made clean from sin.

2. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

3. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

4. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

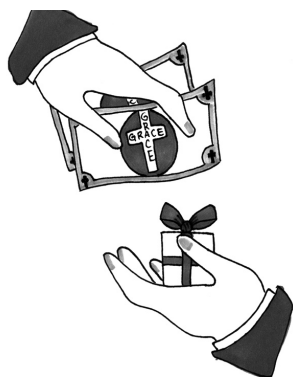
5. justification by faith—the belief that being saved and forgiven depend only on the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins.

SUNDAY—JULY 25**THE LAW STANDS STRONG
(Romans 3:31)**

What is Paul’s point in Romans 3:31? Why is this point important to us as Adventists?

In this verse, Paul argues that faith does not cancel (do away with) God’s law. God’s law never saved anyone, even those who obeyed all kinds of laws in the Old Testament. The religion of both the Old and New Testaments has always shown that God’s grace is given to sinners by faith.

How does Romans 4:1–8 show that even in the Old Testament salvation was by faith and not by keeping the law?



God’s grace is given to sinners by faith.

According to this Old Testament story, God made Abraham righteous (holy) because he “believed God.” So, the Old Testament also teaches righteousness by faith.⁶ Any teaching that claims that faith “makes void” (from

6. righteousness by faith—the truth that we are saved through faith in Jesus.

7. legalism—the practice of believing that one can earn salvation (the act of being saved) by obeying the law.

the Greek word *katargeo*, “renders [makes] useless”) the law is false. Salvation by faith is a very important part of the Old Testament. Grace is taught all the way through the Bible.

Also, only grace can explain how David was forgiven after his foolish affair with Bathsheba. Certainly it was not law-keeping that saved David. This is because David broke many principles (rules) of the law. The law judged him guilty on many charges. If David were to be saved by the law, then David would not be saved at all.

Paul tells of the return of David to divine favor as an example of justification by faith. Forgiveness was an act of God’s grace. This is another example from the Old Testament of righteousness by faith. In fact, many people in Israel during Old Testament times became too strict with God’s law. But the Jewish religion was always a religion of grace. Legalism⁷ went too far away from the purpose of the law.

Think for a few minutes about David’s sin and his return to God (2 Samuel 11; 2 Samuel 12; Psalm 51). What hope does this sad story give to you? What does this story teach about how the church should treat those who have fallen in sin?

MONDAY—JULY 26**GRACE OR DEBT
(Romans 4:6–8)**

In Romans 4 Paul is dealing with much more than just a study of God

and religion. He gets to the real center of salvation and of our relationship to God. Suppose someone believes that he or she must earn God's favor. That would mean that he or she must become holy to a certain point before being made right with God and being forgiven. If that were true, it would be very easy for the person to turn inward and to look to himself or herself and his or her actions. Religion can become very self-centered. If true, this would be the last thing anyone needs.

But suppose that person accepts the great news that justification is a gift from God. He or she has not done anything to deserve this gift. So, how much easier it would be to focus on God's love and mercy⁸ instead of on self.

In the end, who is more likely to show the love and character of God⁹—the person who is self-centered or the person whom God has made righteous?

How does Paul discuss further the theme of justification by faith in Romans 4:6–8?

Paul explains that salvation by faith was not only for the Jews but for the Gentiles (non-Jews) too (Romans 4:9–12). For example, Abraham was not Jewish. Abraham came from a pagan¹⁰ background (Joshua 24:2). The Gentile-Jewish difference was



The sinner must put his sins on the Sin Bearer.

not known in Abraham's times. When Abraham was made righteous (Genesis 15:6), he was not even circumcised.¹¹ So, Abraham became the father of both the uncircumcised¹² and the circumcised. Abraham's case was also a great example for Paul to use to make his point about how widespread salvation is for everyone. Christ's death is for everyone. It does not matter who someone is or of what race or country a person is from (Hebrews 2:9).

The Cross reaches everyone. The Cross also tells us about the worth of every person. Why is hatred of others who are different from us such a horrible thing? How can we learn to recognize the hatred in ourselves and remove it from our minds through the grace of God?

8. mercy—kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly.

9. character of God—who God is; God's Ten Commandments make known to us who He is.

10. pagan—having to do with the worship of many gods or goddesses or the earth or nature.

11. circumcised—the cutting away of the foreskin of the penis, a man's sexual organ.

12. uncircumcised—when the foreskin of a male's penis is not cut off or not removed; to be uncircumcised also was a sign in Bible times that a person had not separated from sin and agreed to serve God.

TUESDAY—JULY 27**PROMISE AND LAW
(Romans 4:13)**

In Romans 4:13 Paul points out the difference between “promise” and “law.” He uses the story of Abraham from the Old Testament to explain the teaching of righteousness by faith. Paul uses Abraham as an example because all the Jews accepted him as their forefather. Acceptance with God or justification had come to Abraham, separate from the law. God made a promise to Abraham that he was to be “heir [receiver] of the world.” Abraham believed this promise. He accepted the responsibility (duty) that came with it. So, God accepted Abraham and worked through him to save the world. This remains a powerful example of how grace was working in the Old Testament. No doubt, this is why Paul used it.

In Romans 4:14–17 how does Paul again show that salvation by faith was important in the Old Testament? Read also Galatians 3:7–9.

It is important to remember the people to whom Paul is writing. These Jewish believers knew Old Testament law very well. Many came to believe that their salvation depended on how well they kept the law. But that was not what the Old Testament taught.

Paul tried to correct this false thinking. He argued that Abraham



God accepted Abraham and worked through him to save the world.

received the promises even before the law at Sinai. Paul tried to show that Abraham did not receive these promises by works of the law. This would have been hard, because the law (the whole Torah and ceremonial system)¹³ was not in place yet. Instead, Abraham received the promises by faith.

Even if Paul were talking only about God’s law, the point would remain the same. Perhaps even more so. Trying to receive God’s promises through the law, Paul said, makes faith useless. Those are strong words. But Paul’s point is that faith saves, and the law judges everyone guilty. Paul is trying to teach about the uselessness of finding salvation by the law, which makes everyone guilty. This is because we all, Jew and Gentile, have broken the law. So, we all need the same thing as Abraham did. We need the saving righteousness of Jesus given to us through faith.

¹³. ceremonial system—a system for the sanctuary (God’s house on earth) and its sacrifices (offerings). God gave the Jews a ceremonial system to help them better understand how He would save them.

WEDNESDAY—JULY 28**LAW AND FAITH
(Galatians 3:21–23)**

As we saw yesterday, Paul showed that God’s work with Abraham proved that salvation came through the promise of grace and not through law. If the Jews wished to be saved, they could not trust in their works for salvation. Instead, they would need to accept God’s promise to Abraham. This promise has been fulfilled in the first coming of the Messiah. It is the same for everyone, Jew or Gentile, who thinks that “good” deeds (works) make him or her right with God.

“The belief that a person can save himself by his own works is the basis of every false religion. . . . This belief takes away every safeguard against sin.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 35, 36. What does this mean? Why does the idea that we can save ourselves through our works leave us so open to sin?

How did Paul explain the relationship between law and faith in Galatians 3:21–23?

If there had been a law that could give life, it certainly would have been God’s law. But Paul tells us that no law, not even God’s, can give life. This is because all of us have broken that law, and all are guilty.

But the promise of faith is better shown through Christ. It frees all who believe from being “under the law.” They are freed from trying to earn salvation through it. The law becomes a burden when it is presented without faith and grace. Because without faith, grace, and the righteousness that comes by faith, being under the law means being under the burden and the judgment of sin.

How important is righteousness by faith to your walk with God? What can you do to make sure it does not get blurred by other parts of the truth? How can you stop yourself from forgetting this important teaching? What good are other teachings without the proper understanding of righteousness by faith?



All have broken the law and are in need of grace.

THURSDAY—JULY 29**THE LAW AND SIN
(Romans 3:20)**

What do 1 John 2:3–6, 1 John 3:4, and Romans 3:20 tell us about the relationship (tie) between law and sin?

A few hundred years ago, Irish writer Jonathan Swift wrote, “Suppose that the words *drinking, cheating, lying, and stealing* were thrown out of the English language by an act of British law. Should we all awake next morning honest and just, and lovers of truth? Would this be a fair result?” —Adapted from Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal and Other Satires* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995), page 205.

In the same way, if God’s law has been thrown out, then why are lying, murder, and stealing still sinful or wrong? If God’s law has been changed, then the meaning of sin must be changed too. Or if the law of God was thrown out, then sin must be thrown out too. And who believes that? (Read also 1 John 1:7–10; James 1:14, 15.)

In the New Testament, both the law and the gospel¹⁴ appear. The law shows what sin is. The gospel points to the cure for that sin. This cure is in the form of the death and resurrection (return to life) of Jesus. If there is no law, there is no sin. Because if not, then what are we saved from? Only in the setting (meaning) of the law does the gospel make sense.

We often hear that the Cross got rid of any need for the law. That is odd, because the Cross shows that the law cannot be taken away or changed. If God did not take away or even change the law before Christ died on the cross, why should He do it after? Instead, why not get rid of the law after man first sinned? Why not save man at the Fall from the legal punishment¹⁵ for breaking the law? That way, Jesus never would have had to die. The death of Jesus shows that if the law could have been changed or removed, it should have been done before, not after, the Cross. The death of Jesus shows that the law must still be honored. And the price for breaking it must be paid. The death of Jesus took place because the law could not be changed. Suppose the law could have been changed to meet our sinful condition. Would it not have been a better answer to the problem of sin than Jesus having to die?

Suppose there were no law of God against adultery.¹⁶ Would the act cause any less pain and hurt than it does now to those who suffer from it? How does your answer help you understand why God’s law still must be honored? What has been your own experience with the result of breaking God’s law?

14. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.

15. punishment—a penalty (price to be paid) for, or the result of, doing something wrong; when someone must suffer loss or pain for doing something bad, wrong, or against the law.

16. adultery—the act of breaking the marriage vows by having sex with a person who is not one’s spouse; not being faithful.

FRIDAY—JULY 30

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “Christ the Center of the Message,” page 388, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “The Call of Abraham,” pages 125–127; “The Law and the Covenants,”¹⁷ pages 363, 364, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*,¹⁸ “The Sermon on the Mount,” pages 307, 308; “Controversy,”¹⁹ page 608; “‘It Is Finished,’” pages 762, 763, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Righteousness means obeying the law. The law asks us to live holy lives. And the sinner owes his righteousness to the law. But he cannot live a holy life on his own. The only way the sinner can be holy is through faith. By faith he can bring to God what Christ has done for him through His death. Then the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account [credit].” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 367.

“Suppose Satan could succeed in leading man to put value upon his own works of righteousness. Then Satan knows that he could overcome man by his temptations.²⁰ Strike the doorposts²¹ with the blood of the Lamb on the Cross, and you are safe.”—Adapted

from Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, September 3, 1889.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Why is it so important to understand salvation by faith alone apart from the works of the law? What kind of false beliefs can that knowledge protect us from? What dangers await those who forget this important Bible teaching?
- ② What other reasons can you give to show that God’s law still stands, even when we know that it does not save us?
- ③ Think more about the idea that because of the Cross all humans are equal. Why do Christians often seem to forget this important truth? Why are they often guilty of hating others who were born in different countries or are from different races (groups)?
- ④ We have been given grace as a gift from God, whom we have sinned against. How should this fact influence²² how we work with others? How full of grace and favor are we toward those who have wronged us?

17. covenants—promises or agreements between God and His people. If the people obeyed God, God would bless them.

18. patriarchs and prophets—patriarchs were leaders of God’s people in early Bible times, men such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men or women who are spokespersons for God.

19. controversy—strong disagreement.

20. temptations—things that can turn us away from God and that try to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

21. doorposts—Moses told the children of Israel to put lambs’ blood on the doorposts of their houses to protect their firstborn from the destroying angel. The angel went through the land of Egypt and killed all the firstborn who did not have the blood on their doorposts. The blood represents (shows) Jesus’ death on the cross to save us from sin.

22. influence—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.