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BIBLE STUDY.**LETTER TO THE ROMANS. — NO. 5.**

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The principles laid down in preceding lessons cause us to wonder that any should ever suppose that the doctrine of justification by faith is going to lower the law of God. Justification carries the law on the face of it. The only danger is in not getting it. It establishes the law in the heart. Justification is the law incarnate in Christ, put into the man, so it is incarnate in the man.

The third chapter presents the principle of justification by faith. In the fourth chapter the principle is illustrated by the case of Abraham. So far as Abraham had any righteousness, he could glory in that; but as an actual fact, he had nothing to glory in. He was justified by faith alone. Chap. 4:1-3. If a man could do a deed meriting the approval of Heaven, he could boast to that extent. But no flesh will ever be able to glory in God's presence. 1 Cor. 1:27-29; Jer. 9:23, 24.

If a man can work righteousness, then when God gives the reward of righteousness, the man simply receives what he has earned. But eternal life is the "gift of God." Eternal life is the reward of righteousness and since it is the gift of God it can be so only because the righteousness is the gift of God. Verse 4.

Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness (Verse 5). The forgiveness of sins is not simply a book transaction, a wiping out of past accounts. It has a vital relation to the man himself. It is not a temporary work. Christ gives his righteousness, takes away the sin, and leaves his righteousness there, and that makes a radical change in the man.

No man can do any works that would stand in the judgment for a moment. Whether he is a professed Christian or an atheist makes no difference in this point. There is no believer in Christ who would dare go before the judgment with the deeds of any day, demanding an equivalent, and risking his case on the works. Verses 6-8 describe the

blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness without works. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord, when he is working in the cause of God, will not impute sin in that work.

First, righteousness was imputed to Abraham because he believed, and then he received the sign of circumcision, as the seal of the righteousness of faith, which he had. Verses 9-11. Those who make a high profession, must not stand in profession, but must walk in the steps of the faith which Abraham had. Verse 12. The idea obtains that in the Jewish age God did draw a distinction between peoples. But God never has been and never can be a respecter of persons. It was the bigotry and self-righteousness of the Jews which led them to hold themselves aloof from the Gentiles. They were set to be the light of the world, to be the salt of the earth. They refused to do the work, and became as salt without savor, themselves needing to be salted. The salt must permeate the mass which it is to preserve. The same principle applies to-day.

The promise to Abraham was one, though it was repeated a number of times. It was that in him all the nations of the world should be blessed—that he should be heir of the world. Verse 13; Gen. 12:1-3. The gospel brings to view an inheritance. It brings salvation from death; it brings life; and the fact that life is given implies a place to live in. So we can say, as comprising everything the gospel brings, that it gives to men an eternal inheritance. The doctrine of the saints' inheritance is the doctrine of justification by faith; and if we do not preach justification by faith in preaching the saints' inheritance, we are not preaching the gospel. The inheritance promised is the same as that promised to the fathers (2 Pet. 3:4; Acts 7:5), and this does not relate to this present world.

This inheritance is not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. But it will only be for those who are righteous, that is, conformable to the law. Yet "if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect." Verse 14.

Not only can we not work out the inheritance ourselves, but just in so far as we attempt it we are putting ourselves further from the inheritance; "because the law worketh wrath." Verse 15. If the inheritance is by works, it is not by promise. Yet it is for the righteous only, and righteousness is obedience to the law. In other words, we have perfect obedience to the law which doesn't spring from obedience. Chap. 3:21. This is a paradox.

The whole gospel is contrary to human reason; it is infinitely above reason. Yet it is reasonable with God. Christ has promised the inheritance, and his promises are yea and amen. He will give not simply the inheritance, but the righteousness which is to merit the inheritance. And so life, righteousness, and the inheritance are all gifts of God.

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