

Our Standing in Grace

When you look across the spectrum of Christianity today, you see a wide variety of both doctrine and practice. One of the reasons for this is that not all Christians know that different parts of the Bible are written to different groups of people. Thus, parts of the Bible that are written TO the Church are grouped together with parts that are written FOR the believer's learning. The part of the Bible that is specifically addressed TO the Church are the epistles Romans through Thessalonians.

It is an interesting point that these epistles are always in the same order in the ancient texts. While the order of the other books in what we call the New Testament may vary, that is not true of the Church epistles. Romans stands first because it is the starting point, the foundation for that which is addressed to the Church. Let's look at Romans 1.

Romans 1:1 – 4

Paul writes that he was separated unto the Gospel of God – we jump over the parenthetical phrase of verse 2 – concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. This gospel of God had been promised by the prophets all through the Old Testament scriptures. There were some aspects of this gospel that were hidden in God until He revealed them to the Apostle Paul. But the good news concerning His son was not hidden. And it is this gospel, this good news, that Paul begins to write about by revelation in Romans.

The opening chapters of Romans describe the state of mankind: lost, separated from God, unrighteous, deserving of judgement. The picture that is painted is not a pretty one. Mankind needed a redeemer. And

this state of separation from the righteous God was true of all mankind. We will pick up the record in Romans 3.

Romans 3:9

Every human was under sin. This was true of both the Jew and the Gentile.

Romans 3:10 – 20

Man is shown to be in desperate straits. The natural man of body and soul did not have the capacity to obtain righteousness. They did not have the capacity for a true, vital relationship with God. They did not have the capacity to do good. They did not have the capacity to redeem themselves.

Romans 3:21 – 23

The word “but” sets that which follows in contrast to that which has preceded. And what a contrast this is! The righteousness of God is manifested, it was promised by the prophets and witnessed to in the law and the prophets. This is the good news of God concerning His Son Jesus Christ. Because of the believing that Jesus Christ did, the righteousness of God is unto all and upon all that believe. All that had been in sin and come short of the glory of God are now declared righteous because of the believing that Jesus Christ did.

Romans 3:24 – 26

Our justification, our being declared righteous, is freely given to us because Jesus Christ paid the price for our redemption. The righteous God set His Son Jesus Christ as the complete payment through believing. We obtain this justification, this righteousness not because of our own works but because of believing in what Jesus did.

Romans 3:27 – 31

So, there are no grounds for any boasting at all. No one's works or abilities bought them redemption. Justification and righteousness came because of what God did in Christ and it is obtained by believing. Now we come to the great 4th chapter and the example of Abraham. He obtained righteousness not because of his own actions, but because of his believing.

Romans 4:1 – 3

The scripture that is mentioned in verse 3 is Genesis 15:6.

Romans 4:4 – 10

This is an interesting question – especially in the first century Church when the Jews were insisting that the Gentiles had to be circumcised before they could be saved.

Romans 4:11, 12

Abraham was declared to be righteous in Genesis 15:6 as we saw. He was not circumcised until Genesis 17:23. And Genesis 15:6 will always be before Genesis 17:23.

Romans 4:13 – 15

The promise that was given to Abraham and his seed was not a part of the law. The law came hundreds of years later. The promise and righteousness were obtained by believing, not by being circumcised or by keeping the law.

Romans 4:16 – 22

There was no hope of Abraham being the father of many nations. But against that hope, Abraham believed in the hope of becoming the father of many nations. He was strong in believing because he was convinced that what God had promised, God was able to deliver.

Romans 4:23 – 25

The record in Genesis concerning Abraham is a part of what is written FOR our learning. It helps us to understand that our justification and righteousness is not because of our own actions, but by believing what God did in Christ when he raised him from the dead. This is the good news of God concerning His Son. Jesus was marked out as God's son by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4).

Romans 5:1,2

We are no longer at enmity with God. For the natural man, there were none righteous – now the believer is made the righteousness of God. The natural man did not know the way of peace – now the believer is at peace with God. For the natural man, there was only guilt – now the believer is justified because of the believing that Jesus Christ did. His accomplishments give us access to the grace in which we stand. All of this is not because of our own actions or efforts. It is freely given by what God did in Christ.

Now let's consider some questions. If a Gentile accepted and believed what God did in Christ, he obtains the righteousness of God. Agreed? Could that Gentile then become circumcised? Sure he could. Would he obtain more righteousness? Not at all.

If someone accepted and believed what God did in Christ, they would obtain the righteousness of God. Could that person then be water baptized? Sure they could. Would he obtain more righteousness? Not at all.

If someone accepted and believed what God did in Christ, they would obtain the righteousness of God. Could that person then decide to keep the Old Testament feasts? Sure they could. Would they obtain more righteousness? Not at all.

I think you all understand that I accepted and believed what God did in Christ and therefore I am made the righteousness of God. Some of you know that I choose not to eat peanut butter. Does that increase my righteousness? Not at all.

Now Charlie over here has also accepted and believed what God did in Christ and therefore he is made the righteousness of God as well. But Charlie does eat peanut butter. I have seen him eat it with my own eyes. Does the fact that he does eat peanut butter increase his righteousness? Not at all.

But the problems start to arise if I begin to judge or look down on Charlie because he eats peanut butter. Or vice versa, if he would start to judge me or look down on me because I don't eat peanut butter. The problems would get even worse if I would try to keep Charlie from eating peanut butter or if he would try to force me to eat it.

Now that might seem like a silly illustration, and it is. But that is the type of thing that has happened in Christianity for centuries.

Remember where we started with this sharing – the wide variety of doctrine and practice. Only the understanding and acceptance of the great revelation given in the Church epistles will ever deliver a believer from all the new sects, doctrines, theories and schools of thought which have led us away from the inspired Biblical doctrine.

Now there is a lot more in Romans, but this is where we are ending today.