



Sunday September 7, 2014

ZWTF

Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

Volume 3, Issue 33

ROMANS Part 35

Chapter 4:11-16

And [Abraham] obtained the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which was in uncircumcision, for him to be the father of all those who are believing through uncircumcision, for righteousness to be reckoned to them, and the father of the Circumcision, not to those of the Circumcision only, but to those also who are observing the elements of the faith in the footprints of our father Abraham, in uncircumcision.

For not through law is the promise to Abraham, or to his Seed, for him to be enjoyer of the allotment of the world, but through faith's righteousness. For if those of law are enjoyers of the allotment, faith has been made void and the promise has been nullified, for the law is producing indignation. Now where no law is, neither is there transgression. Therefore it is of faith that it may accord with grace, for the promise to be confirmed to the entire seed, not to those of the law only, but to those also of the faith of Abraham, who is father of us all.

In what way is Abraham "the father of us all"? Certainly we do not become his literal descendants by approaching God through His chosen avenue of faith. Of course not. Those who cannot claim literal descendancy from this famous patriarch do not miraculously become literal descendants the minute they believe God's message of grace. Believing God fails to alter the constitution of one's blood, or change one's nationality. Yet I am afraid that many people tend to think this way. They may not speak or even consciously think in such drastic terms, but this is the practical result when one uses passages like this to imagine that God has raised up a substitute people

(the nations) through whom to fulfill His literal promises to a disappointing and disobedient Israel.

Paul's use of "Abraham is the father of us all" is figurative. It's a simple metaphor. For the sake of strong association, a metaphor boldly states that one thing is another thing that it isn't really. Abraham is not literally the father of us all. He is our father in the sense that whoever believes in the manner of the man who had nothing but God's pure word to cling to, becomes "a chip off the block" of that man. Abraham is called "the father of faith." Surely it is easy to see the figure of speech here. Faith cannot have a literal father, can it? Did Abraham's wife Sarah literally conceive faith, push it from her womb and suckle it? Abraham is called the father of faith because of his close association with faith; God gave him bucket-loads of the stuff. In such a manner is Abraham *our* father. God has given us bucket-loads of being *like* Abraham in the faith department. In this way only are we Abraham's offspring.

"THIS IS A LOT LIKE MY BODY"

Paul employed a related metaphor in Galatians 3:7, "Know, consequently, that those of faith, these are sons of Abraham." Most of us learned about metaphors in grammar school; and yet this figure trips up people all the time. Scriptural metaphors, ignored, drive care-



less seekers to all sorts of irrational, unscriptural conclusions. The simile is much easier. If only Paul had said, “Those of faith, these are *like* sons of Abraham.” No one would be insisting—due to verses like this—that God has replaced His literal favored nation with non-Israelites. (“We’re the sons of Abraham now! See these verses? Abraham’s literal sons have been thrown out permanently!”)

“You are *like* sons of Abraham.” If only Paul had said that, then millions of people could have avoided the snare that is called, “replacement theology.” Israel is not replaced by the nations; the nations are merely like Israel in some ways. (Many of us “come out of Egypt” in the sense of leaving organized religions, don’t we? Yet the figure of speech leaves the literal country intact; check your atlas. Thus also with all Israel analogies. The literal nation and the promises made to her never go away.) Ah, but the simile is weak, isn’t it? Similes are for sissies. The



metaphor is much stronger, carrying great force of feeling. Thus, Jesus says, “I am the door.” Guess what? He’s not a literal door. He doesn’t have hinges and a handle. He isn’t made of wood. (Why must I insist upon these things? It is because of the general state of ignorance concerning figures of speech, especially the metaphor.) Saying, “I am the Door” is much stronger than saying, “I am like a door.” I wish that, at the Last Supper, Jesus had held up the bread and said, “You know, this bread is a lot like My body in that My body will be broken for you. Get it?” Instead, He uses the stronger metaphor—“This is My body”—and leaves it there. He probably figured no one would ever be so stupid as to take such

a statement literally. *Oops!* Apparently, the famous Roman organization known for its man-made sacraments missed the metaphor lesson in fourth grade. That’s really unfortunate—although I suppose the vendors of factory-produced unleavened wafers aren’t complaining.

DOUBLE DADDY

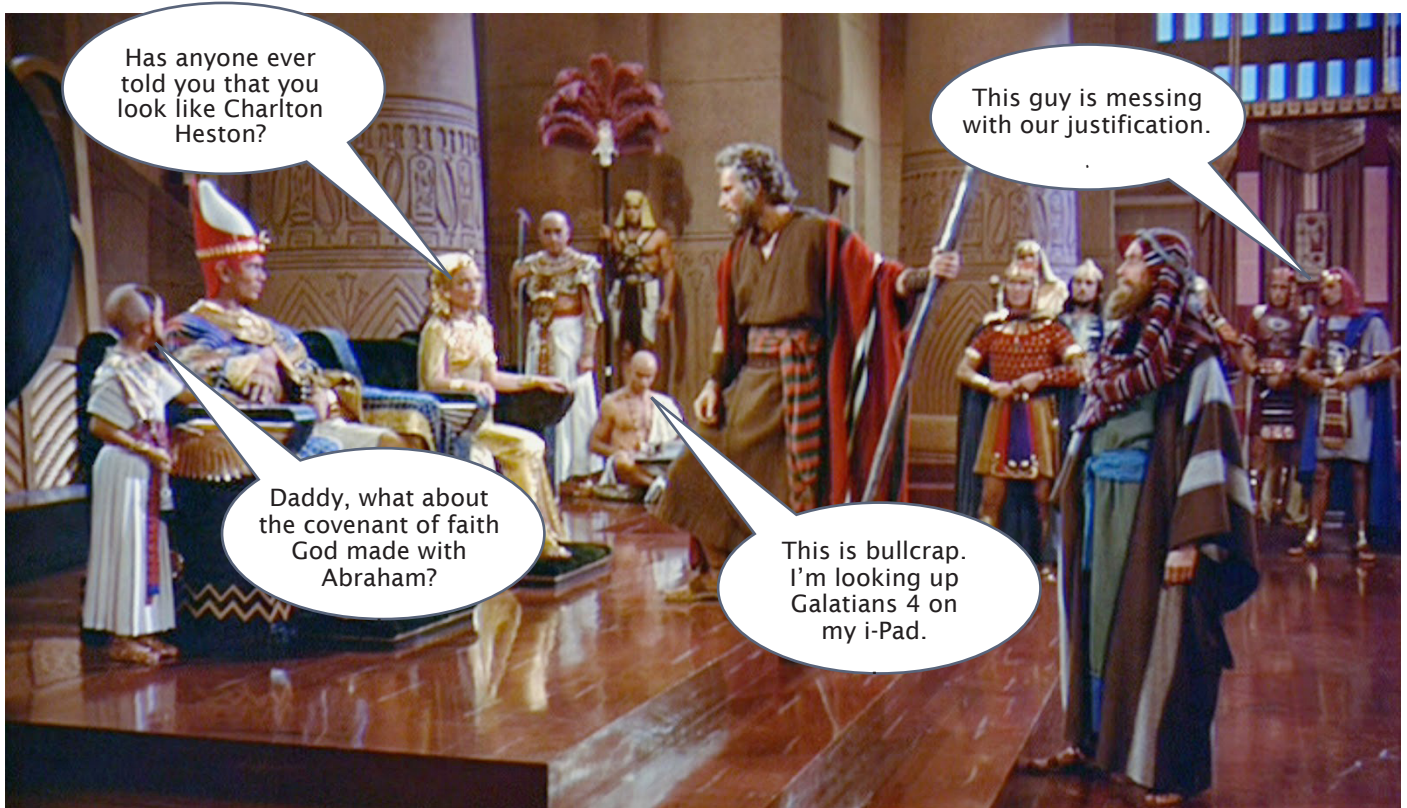
I will admit that verse 11 of Romans 4 is confusing:

“And [Abraham] obtained the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which was in uncircumcision.”

This verse makes it sound like the rite of circumcision “sealed the deal” on the justification Abraham enjoyed before his surgical procedure. In a way, this is true. Circumcision was God’s stamp of approval upon Abraham’s faith. It is as though God were saying: “Because of your faith, Abraham, I will now move on with you, and use you to do something else.” I would have said, “Can’t you just give me a cookie and leave my penis alone?” God doesn’t see it this way. He has destined Abraham to become not only the father of faith, but the father of the Israelites as well. That is, he is to become the father of the Circumcision. With the rite of circumcision, God now begins calling out the nation that will one day shepherd all the nations of Earth. There must be a common rite to bind these people, and it must constantly remind them of their weakness of flesh. God chose circumcision. This is why Paul writes in Romans 4:11-12—

... for him to be the father of all those who are believing through uncircumcision, for righteousness to be reckoned to them, *and* the father of the Circumcision, not to those of the Circumcision only, but to those also who are observing the elements of the faith in the footprints of our father Abraham, in uncircumcision.

Remember what I told you in a previous edition? Abraham does double-daddy duty, not only as the father of faith (an example of believing God upon which we, the nations, would eventually pattern ourselves), but also the father of what would become Israel, a people bound together by rites, ceremonies and miracles. These rites, ceremonies and miracles would begin with circumcision; but before circumcision, God sealed another deal: He accounted Abraham righteous by his faith. Note this: Circumcision added nothing to Abraham’s faith. Abraham’s faith stood alone.



As soon as Abraham performs the rite of circumcision, he stops being the father of faith (our father) and moves on to his next role as father of Israel. He is “the father of us all”—Israel literally, and the nations figuratively.

AARON-COME-LATELY

God did not institute the law until four-hundred and thirty years after Abraham stood outside his tent and believed the Deity’s simply proclamation (Galatians 3:17). Thus, law cannot undo the righteousness that comes by faith. How can it? It came four-hundred and thirty years later. Why are so many people so interested in justification by works of law? It’s impossible anyway. Abraham was called “our father” four-hundred and thirty years before Moses put Mt. Sinai on the map. Yet so many people still cling to Mt. Sinai. Mt. Sinai is conditional favor dependent on the faithfulness of those clinging to it. The promises Abraham received, on the other hand, depended only upon the faithfulness of God.

Don’t let law make you nervous. Don’t let it seduce you. Law never invalidated the promise God made to Abraham, to which Paul directs us. Paul makes this clear in Galatians 3:17-18—

Now this am I saying: a covenant, having been ratified before by God, the law, having come four hundred and

thirty years afterward, does not invalidate, so as to nullify the promise. For if the enjoyment of the allotment is of law, it is no longer of promise. Yet God has graciously granted it to Abraham through the promise.

What is the purpose of the law, then? Law came “to produce indignation” (Romans 4:15), for where there is no law, neither is there transgression. God brought the law to show one nation, Israel, the futility of trying to obtain what He originally gave Abraham for free. For as Paul says of Israel in Romans 10:3-4—

For they, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, were not subjected to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the consummation of law for righteousness to everyone who is believing.

Why didn’t God simply bless Abraham for his raw faith and leave it at that? Why go on with the Israel plan? Why bring in law when faith was so beautiful? God’s law-plan with Israel was an object lesson for all humanity. The world learned (or didn’t learn), through this hapless yet eventually-blessed “guinea pig” nation, the inability of flesh to please Him. Yet we of spiritual insight must never to forget that something of greater signifi-

cance occurred four-hundred and thirty years before law, to which our apostle would point to help explain a gospel based entirely on grace: God justified Abraham by faith.

THE FAITH/GRACE PACKAGE

“Therefore it is of faith, that it may accord with grace” (Romans 4:16).

Our faith is graciously granted to us by God (Romans 12:3). Paul says it this way here in this chapter of Romans: “Faith accords with grace.” Faith was the easiest channel God could think of to convey His righteousness to us. He could have demanded push-ups, or so many laps around a track, or (as He did later), the sacrifice of animals. Before He brings the object lesson to poor Israel, He demonstrates His preferred method of simply being believed. When people believe God, it ought to be accompanied by gentle piano music. Or a light rain. Or

“Faith was the easiest channel God could think of to convey His righteousness to us.”

a rainbow. It’s so damn easy. Abraham did it in a second. How hard is it to believe *God*? I would think that when *God* says something, it can be counted on. This would be in opposition to, say, being asked to believe something coming from the mouth of

a human being.

I thank God for faith. I thank Him for the simple example of Abraham. I thank Him for directing Paul to the case of Abraham before God brought in the scalpel and formed a nation to mess with (poor Israel; poor guinea pigs), but to also eventually bless. I thank God I was born in this era, when Scripture is complete and I can see the purpose of law without having to live it out. I thank God that I was not introduced to law first, then forced to struggle out of it to see grace. Thank You, God, for keeping that baggage from my back. Thank You for bringing me the grace message right out of the gate. I pray for those who are now struggling to escape the clutches of law, who are just now starting to appreciate its purpose.

May we all learn the lesson shouldered by Israel, and move on; it is not our burden. Abraham learned the lesson of faith, but then moved “backward” to become the father of the Circumcision.

I thank God that I was not born Abraham. —MZ

GOING TO WASHINGTON

I thank God for the saints in Vancouver, Washington, who have pitched together to gather my round-trip airfare for the conference there in less than two weeks. I will be teaching with Dan Sheridan and Clyde Pilkington. There is still time to make plans. Here are the details:

http://archive.aweber.com/martin-zender/NEke9/h/Vancouver_WA_Meetings_.htm

Hope to see you there!

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