



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

31 MAY - 5 JUNE 2021

INTRODUCTION

We continue with readings from Paul's letter to the Romans. As usual the text in bold type will give a focus for the day's Thought. Much of Paul's writing interrogates the Jewish heritage and its implications for the Gentiles who were hearing about Jesus and his message for the first time. Whenever we can, we'll try to work out how Paul's general approach remains relevant to us as followers of Jesus 2000 years on.

MONDAY - Romans 4:1-12

¹ What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ **For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'** ⁴ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵ But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness ⁶ So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness irrespective of works: ⁷ 'Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸ blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin.'

⁹ Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, 'Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.' ¹⁰ How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, ¹² and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Thought for the day

Paul continues his consideration of the tension between faith and works by using the example of the pre-eminent patriarch Abraham. The quote in verse 3 is from Genesis 15:6: Abraham had no children but God told him he would have as many descendents as there were stars in the sky. In spite of the apparent absurdity of the promise, Abraham believed (that is, had faith) and therefore God attributed to him God's own defining characteristic of righteousness. This was God's gift to him, not because he had earned it (v4) but because of his faith (v5). No works can take away our sin (v6) nor can a physical marker do it (v9). As we saw last week God's righteousness ensures his absolute faithfulness and his promise to Abraham came true. So this example is a compelling one, not only for Jews but for all who, like us, have faith (v11).

TUESDAY - Romans 4:13-25

¹³ For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations')—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ Hoping against hope, he believed that he would

become 'the father of many nations', according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be.'¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,²¹ being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.²² Therefore his faith 'was reckoned to him as righteousness.'²³ **Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him', were written not for his sake alone,²⁴ but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,²⁵ who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.**

Thought for the day

This passage continues Paul's consideration of the example of Abraham, emphasising the strength of his faith even in the face of his own age and his and his wife Sarah's childlessness (v19). The climax is reached in the closing verses where the gift God gave Abraham ('reckoned to him') is available also to us (v23-24). Note that the reason for our faith is different from Abraham's - our faith is in the God who raised Jesus from the dead (v24). Jesus' death set us free from our sins, and his resurrection opens the way for every one of us to have a right relationship with God (v25). That's what justification means, and it's very close to the idea of Abraham being reckoned as righteous. We are well and truly, if surprisingly, in the same category as Abraham!

WEDNESDAY - Romans 5:1-11

¹ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹ But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Thought for the day

If justification is having a right relationship with God (see yesterday's Thought), we might want to think about what that means. Paul suggests that, because of Jesus, we are at peace with God (v1) which means no more struggling, worry or self-doubt; that we are secure in all that the beautiful idea of grace has to offer; that we can aspire to share God's glory (v2). That hope is more than hope because God's love is ever-present in our hearts 'through the Holy Spirit' (v5). These are not mere words but reflect the reality represented by that right relationship. We certainly could boast about it (v3), but perhaps we ought first to thank God for giving us all this.

THURSDAY - Romans 5:12-21

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—¹³ sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷ If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. 19 For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thought for the day

This whole passage describes the contrast between Adam, through whose agency sin and death became inherent in a humanity separated from God, and Christ, through whose sinless life and death humanity was restored to a right relationship with God. Verses 18 and 19 summarise this and distinguish between, on the one hand, sin, disobedience and condemnation, and, on the other, sinlessness (act of righteousness), obedience and justification. The inevitability of death has been replaced by the promise of eternal life (v21). The danger for us is that while we know all this through words and in our minds, we may never allow its implications to make it into our hearts first and then into the way we live our lives.

FRIDAY - Romans 6:1-14

1 What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸ But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³ No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Thought for the day

What seems to be in Paul's mind here is that grace is such a good thing that we can never get enough of it. And one way to get more of it is to need more of it by sinning more (v1). This of course is nonsense because it is the essence of our Christian faith that, because of all that Jesus did for us, we want not to sin at all (v2). Paul goes on to give a striking metaphor for baptism as dying with Christ (v3), so that we also can be raised from death like him (v4-11). We may find the twists and turns of Paul's writing difficult to follow in detail but these ideas have a vibrancy and excitement which could just transform us into the people we have the potential to be. Christ is truly brought back to life again in these words (v10), and all for our sake (v11), by the glory of God (v4).

SATURDAY - Romans 6:15-23

¹⁵ What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, ¹⁸ and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

²⁰ When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death.

²² But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thought for the day

Slavery is oppressive and offensive. So we may recoil at Paul's use of the word enslavement to describe our relationship to God (v22). But Paul makes it clear that he is using the word to describe what happens when we offer our obedience to an idea or a person (v16). Freedom from the involuntary obedience of sin and death is available by voluntary obedience to God, through our faith and his grace (v17-19). This new obedience makes us holy (which is what sanctification means) and opens the way to eternal life (v22,23). This 'slavery' is not oppressive or offensive - in fact, not really slavery at all. What an inspiring end to a week of exciting (if sometimes challenging) readings!

JRE / 9.5.21