

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 124

Romans ~ Part 12

Note: To examine the graphics in this series, click on them for a pop-up version.

As I've stressed in my previous post, our journey to comprehend the profound significance of **Sha'ul's Letter to the Romans** is not just a study but a crucial cornerstone of our faith.

The Righteousness of God ~ Part 2

If you have family members who are struggling with past mistakes or feelings of shame, take a moment to sit down with them and read Romans 5:1-8 together. Discuss how understanding justification through faith brings peace. Encourage them to share their burdens with you and pray together for **God** to help them accept His forgiveness. This can foster a more profound sense of love and accountability within your family.

Righteousness Without Law

4¹ Then what should we say, Avraham, our forefather, obtained by his own efforts? 2 For if Avraham came to be considered righteous by God because of legalistic observances, then he has something to boast about. But this is not how it is before God!

Then what should we say, Avraham, our forefather, obtained by his own efforts? Having reassured his hypothetical **Jewish** questioner that the **Gospel's** focus on faithful trusting does not destroy **Torah** but confirms it (3:31), **Sha'ul** addresses a second objection he might raise: What about **zkhut-avot**, the "merits of the fathers"? (See Romans 11:28-29.)

Undoubtedly, in the 1st century CE, the doctrine was widespread that descendants could benefit from and even claim salvation on the ground of their ancestors' righteousness. **Yeshua's** opponents made exactly such a claim at Yochanan 8:33, **Sha'ul's** opponents used the idea at 2 Corinthians 11:22, and Yochanan the Immerser rebuked his investigators before they had a chance to say, "**Avraham is our father**" (Mattityahu 3:9).

But even **Avraham's** trust is of no avail to his descendants; they must have their own trust. Romans 9-11 can be viewed as an elaboration of this principle. The present chapter investigates the nature of **Avraham's** "merit": what is it that he **obtained by his own efforts?** Didn't he have "works," meritorious "deeds" that earned him his salvation? This is what **Sha'ul's** hypothetical questioner is asking.

In one sense, the answer is "Yes"—if trusting can be counted as a "work," or if trusting in its proper sense implies appropriate good works that stem from it, which is what **Sha'ul** himself speaks about in Ephesians 2:8-10 and Ya'akov at Ya'akov 2:14-26. But, as explained at 3:20b, "works" here are understood contrary to "faith" as **legalistic observances**. If **Ya'akov's** point is that "**faith without works is dead**" (Ya 2:26), **Sha'ul's** point here is complementary and equally valid: **works without faith are dead**.

³ For what does the Tanakh say? "Avraham put his trust in God, and it was credited to his account as righteousness."⁴ Now the account of someone who is working is credited not on the ground of grace but on the ground of what is owed him.⁵ However, in the case of one who is not working but rather is trusting in him who makes ungodly people righteous, his trust is credited to him as righteousness.

David Recognized Grace

⁶ In the same way, the blessing which David pronounces is on those whom God credits with righteousness apart from legalistic observances:

⁷ "Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered over;

⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin Adonai will not reckon against his account."^q

David, Israel's greatest king, sang about the **blessing** that **God** gave him in the forgiveness of his deliberate **sins**—no works-righteousness here. **David** understood that his sins were wiped out in **God's** accounting ledger, and righteousness was inscribed in their place. **Sha'ul's** quotation of Psalms 32:1–2 clarifies and explains Genesis 15:6. **Sha'ul** similarly links justification and the forgiveness of sin in his synagogue sermon recorded in Acts 13:38–39.

Circumcision's Value

⁹ Now, is this blessing for the circumcised only? Or is it also for the uncircumcised? For we say that Avraham's trust was credited to his account as righteousness; ¹⁰ but what state was he in when it was so credited—circumcision or uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision! ¹¹ In fact, he received circumcision as a sign, as a seal of the righteousness he had been credited with on the ground of the trust he had while he was still uncircumcised. This happened so that he could be the father of every uncircumcised person who trusts and thus has righteousness credited to him, ¹² and at the same time be the father of every circumcised person who not only has had a b'rit-milah (the process of being circumcised) but also follows in the footsteps of the trust which Avraham avinu (our father) had when he was still uncircumcised.¹

Sha'ul finishes destroying the argument that physical circumcision (i.e., being a member of the **Chosen People**) is the **Jews'** significant advantage (refer back to Romans 2:25–29). He consistently maintains that the advantage of **Jews** is spiritual, not physical (Romans 3:1–2, 9:4–5, and most explicitly at 15:27). At the same time, he shows that the righteousness that comes from trusting **God** is available equally to **Jews** and **Gentiles** not merely because it antedates the **Mosaic Law**, but because it antedated even the **Avrahamic Covenant** when **circumcision** was given **as a sign** of **Avraham's** already demonstrated faith and **as a seal** guaranteeing **God's** promises, but not as something to boast about.

In our next post, we will continue **The Righteous of Faith**.

^p Genesis 15:6

^q Psalm 32:1–2

¹ Romans 4:1–12.