

SOUND DOCTRINE FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS – Studies in Romans

The Significance of Genesis 15:6 (Romans 4:1-25)

One of the best ways to accurately determine the intent of a Biblical author involves noticing the frequency of repetition which occurs within a particular passage. In Romans chapter 4, that repetition is obvious. The apostle Paul quotes from Genesis 15:6 three times, in vv3, 9 and 22. There is no doubt as to his intent. He is bound and determined to prove to his Jewish readership in particular, that the doctrine of justification by faith has always been central to God's plan of salvation, for Jews and Gentiles alike. So, in Genesis 15:5-6, we read the following –

“And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

After calling Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans, in conjunction with the promise of making him a great nation, so that in him, all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3); God appears again to Abram and repeats the promise of many descendants in Genesis 15:5. His response to the promise of God is that of faith. In addition, God promises him the possession of a land. These promises are then confirmed by a covenant that is unconditional in nature, recorded in Genesis 15:9-21. In other words, Abram did not need to do anything for the fulfillment of that covenant. Its realization would rest entirely with God (Hebrews 6:13-18). What can be easily overlooked in all the future interactions between Abraham and God, in regard to his descendants and the land, is that God **NEVER** repeats the declaration of righteousness in Genesis 15:6. NOT ONCE! Whether it involves his circumcision, the birth of Isaac, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah or even Abraham's greatest test of faith in the command to sacrifice his son, there was no need for God to repeat this judicial transaction of declaring Abraham, His friend, not guilty of any sin and perfectly righteous in God's sight.

The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, understood the magnitude of God making this singular pronouncement of reckoning righteousness to Abraham, and develops it brilliantly throughout Romans chapter 4. Before returning there, we must comprehend its importance ourselves: Justification by faith is NOT an ongoing process which must be maintained by our faithfulness, lest we lose it altogether. Instead, justification is a once and for all judicial imputation of righteousness by God toward the believing sinner, who places their trust in Jesus Christ. The consequence is monumental. God forgives all of our sin and declares us perfectly and forever righteous in Christ; confirmed in 2 Corinthians 5:21, as well as 2 Timothy 2:11-13—

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

“It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”

As Paul will go on to tell us in Romans 4:16, it is this judicial transaction which guarantees our salvation, making us eternally secure in Christ.