

4:4 Gift and Due

DISTINGUISHING GRACE AND JUSTICE.

ORIGEN: Faith relies on the grace of the justifier. Works rely on the justice of the rewarder. When I consider the greatness of Paul's speech, by which he says that the worker receives what is due to him, I can hardly persuade myself that there is any deed which could claim a reward from God as its due.... Therefore, it seems that Paul is really referring here to evil deeds, of which Scripture frequently says that they get their due reward. ²⁴ COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.²⁵

WAGES RECKONED AS DUE.

AUGUSTINE: Paul was speaking here of the way wages are given. But God gave by grace, because he gave to sinners so that by faith they might live justly, that is, do good works. Thus the good works which we do after we have received grace are not to be attributed to us but rather to him who has justified us by his grace. For if God had wanted to give us our due reward, he would have given us the punishment due to sinners. AUGUSTINE ON ROMANS 21.²⁸

4:5 Faith Reckoned as Righteousness

RAIN WATERS THE ROOT AND BEARS FRUIT.

ORIGEN: Faith, which believes in the justifier, is the beginning of justification before God. And this faith, when it is justified, is like a root in the soil of the soul, which the rain has watered, so that as it begins to grow by the law of God, branches appear, which bring forth fruit. The root of righteousness does not spring from works; rather, the fruit of works grows from the root of righteousness, viz., by that root of righteousness by which God brings righteousness to the one whom he has accepted apart from works. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.³²

RIGHTEOUSNESS GREATER THAN REWARD.

CHRYSOSTOM: Think how great a thing it is to be persuaded and have complete confidence that God is able not only to set an ungodly man free from punishment but also to make him righteous and count him worthy to receive these immortal honors.... This is what makes a believer glorious—the fact that he enjoys so great a grace and displays such great faith. Note too that the recompense is greater. For the one who

works receives his reward, but the one who believes is made righteous. Righteousness is much greater than a reward, because it is a recompense which includes many rewards. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 8.³⁴

THE UNGODLY MADE GODLY.

AUGUSTINE: God makes the ungodly man godly, in order that he might persevere in this godliness and righteousness. For a man is justified in order that he might be just, not so that he might think it is all right to go on sinning. AUGUSTINE ON ROMANS 22.³⁵

4:6 Righteousness Apart from Works

4:7 Iniquities Covered

4:8 Sins Forgiven

INIQUITY FORGIVEN, SIN COVERED, NOT IMPUTED.

ORIGEN: Note the order here. First comes the forgiveness of iniquity, then the covering of sin, then the non-imputation of the sin to the sinner. This is the order: First, the beginning of the soul's conversion is the renunciation of evil. Second, the soul begins to do good works, which eventually become more numerous than the evil deeds which preceded them, and in this sense those sins may be said to be covered over. Finally, the soul reaches maturity. Every trace of sin is uprooted from it so that not even the smallest trace of wickedness remains. The height of perfect blessedness is promised. The Lord will not impute any sin to the soul. Wickedness is different from sin in that it applies to things which are done without the law. In Greek the word for this is *anomía*, meaning something which is done without the law. Sin, on the other hand, refers to something which is done against the dictates of conscience and nature. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁴⁴

4:9 Who Receives the Blessing?

FAITH PRIOR TO CIRCUMCISION.

ORIGEN: If Abraham was justified by faith before he was circumcised, then it is possible for anyone who believes in God to be justified by faith, even if uncircumcised. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹

GENTILES INVITED.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul shows that the blessing, far from shunning the uncircumcised, was given to the uncircumcised (i.e., Abraham) before circumcision was instituted. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 8.3

4:10 Abraham's Righteousness Preceded Circumcision

THE FATHER OF ALL UNCIRCUMCISED BELIEVERS.

ORIGEN: In that Abraham was justified while he was still uncircumcised, it is obvious that he is the head and father of all uncircumcised believers. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.5

4:11 Circumcision as a Sign of Righteousness by Faith

A SIGN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS TO COME.

CHRYSOSTOM: See how the uncircumcised had Abraham as their father before the circumcised came into existence! So if circumcision must be honored because it preaches righteousness, uncircumcision is still preeminent, because it came before circumcision in the dispensation of faith. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 8.14

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul taught us both that Abraham received circumcision as a sign and that while he was still uncircumcised he gave evidence of righteousness arising from faith. HOMILIES ON GENESIS 39.18.15

THE PURPOSES OF CIRCUMCISION.

SEVERIAN: Circumcision was given for these three reasons: First, to be a sign of faith; second, to mark out the race of Abraham, and third, to be a sign and symbol of good and wise behavior. It was not given in order to produce righteousness but as a sign and seal of the righteousness which was Abraham's by faith. PAULINE COMMENTARY FROM THE GREEK CHURCH.17

4:12 *Following Abraham's Example*

THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL.

ORIGEN: After believing, Abraham received circumcision as a sign of the faith which he already had ... which is how he can also be the father of those who are circumcised, provided that they share the same faith which he had while he was still uncircumcised. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹⁸

THE REALITY OF WHICH THE SIGN SPOKE.

CHRYSOSTOM: Circumcision is meaningless if there is no faith within. It is a sign of righteousness, but if there is no righteousness, then there is no sign either. The reason the Jews received a sign was that they might seek diligently for the reality of which the sign spoke. If they had done so, they would not have needed the sign in the first place. Righteousness is not the only thing that circumcision proclaims; it also proclaims that righteousness can be found in an uncircumcised man (e.g., Abraham). In effect, therefore, circumcision proclaims that there is no need of circumcision. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 8.²⁰

4:13 *The Promised Inheritance*

THE PROMISE.

ORIGEN: Long before Moses ever existed, the Lord appeared to Abraham and said: Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed. 1 COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.²

INHERIT THE WORLD.

SEVERIAN: Paul says that the righteous will inherit the world because the ungodly will be thrown out and handed over to punishment on the day of judgment, but the righteous will possess the universe which remains, and will have been renewed, and the good things of heaven and earth will be theirs. PAULINE COMMENTARY FROM THE GREEK CHURCH.⁹

4:14 *The Promise Comes Through Faith*

RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED TO FAITH.

ORIGEN: Paul says that the promise given to Abraham that he should inherit the world did not come from the law but by faith, which was reckoned to him as righteousness. It doubtless follows that everyone who hopes that God's righteousness will be imputed to him hopes for this by faith and not by the law. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹⁰

THE PROMISE MADE VOID.

CHRYSOSTOM: TO prevent anyone from saying that it is possible to have faith and to keep the law at the same time, Paul shows that this is impracticable. For one who clings to the law as if it were of saving force dishonors the power of faith. This is why Paul says that faith is made void, i.e., that there is no need of salvation by grace.... And without faith, there is no promise of inheritance, which is what scared the Jews most of all, because that is what they really wanted. For the promise was that they should be heirs of the entire world. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 8.¹²

4:15 *The Law Brings Wrath*

HOW THE LAW BRINGS WRATH.

ORIGEN: Paul says that the law brings wrath in order to underline his point, [made in the previous verse,] that it is not the pathway to the inheritance of the promise. The law which brings transgression cannot be the law of Moses, because there was plenty of transgression before that came into force. Rather, it is the law which dwells in our members and leads us into sin. This is the same law which the apostle says brings wrath. For without a doubt it brings wrath when it leads its captive into sin. But where the law of sin does not obtain, then of course there is no transgression. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹⁵

THE OBSTACLE TO INHERITANCE REMOVED.

CHRYSOSTOM: The law works wrath and makes those who are under it liable for their transgressions, which is a curse, not a promise!... But when faith comes it brings grace with it, and so the promise takes effect. For where there is grace there is forgiveness, and where there is forgiveness there is no punishment. Once punishment is removed and righteousness takes hold from faith, there is no obstacle to our becoming heirs of the promise. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 8.¹⁷

AUGUSTINE: This applies to the second state of man, when he is under the law. AUGUSTINE ON ROMANS 23.18

AUGUSTINE: Paul said this because God's wrath is more severe toward a transgressor who knows sin by the law and still commits it. GRACE AND FREE WILL 10.22.19

4:16 The Promise Depends on Faith

THE PROMISE RESTS ON GRACE.

ORIGEN: It might appear from this that faith is not a free gift of God but that it must first be offered to him by man in order for grace to be given in return. But consider what the apostle teaches about this elsewhere. For when he lists the gifts of the Spirit, which he says are given to believers according to the measure of faith, there among the rest he asserts that the gift of faith is also given. ²² Therefore faith is given by grace.... If the promise rested on works, it would not be guaranteed. But now it is guaranteed because it rests on grace, not on works. I think this can be understood to mean that the things of the law are external to us, but the things of grace are internal... and therefore they have a firmer foundation. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.²³

THE CERTAINTY AND EXTENT OF THE BLESSING.

CHRYSOSTOM: It is not only the law which faith upholds but the promise also.... But the law when kept after its expiry date makes even faith of no effect and blocks the promise. In saying this Paul shows that faith, far from being superfluous, is necessary to the extent that without it there is no salvation. Here Paul mentions two blessings. The first is that the things which have been given are secured. The second is that they are given to all Abraham's descendants, including the Gentiles who believe and excluding the Jews who do not. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 8.25

4:17 God Gives Life to the Dead

LIFE TO THE DEAD.

ORIGEN: The dead here are those whose souls have sinned, for Scripture says: The soul that sins will die. ²⁸ For just as the senses perish in our mortal body so that the body can no longer hear, smell, taste or touch, so also the spiritual senses perish in the soul so that it cannot see God or hear his Word, or sense

the sweet odor of Christ, or taste the good Word of God, or handle the word of life. People like that must be said to be dead. This is what we were like when Christ came, but he has given us life by his grace. 29 COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.30

THE RELATION OF FAITH.

CHRYSOSTOM: Is God here referring to the fact that Abraham was the father of the Ishmaelites, or the Amalekites, or the Hagarenes? 34 No ... God is a father not by way of natural relationship but by way of the relation of faith. It is in this sense also that Abraham is the father of us all. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 8.35

AUGUSTINE: This means that faith is in the inner man, in the sight of God and not in human display, which is what the circumcision of the flesh is. AUGUSTINE ON ROMANS 24.36

OUT OF NOTHING.

AUGUSTINE: Everything which God did not beget of himself but made through his Word he made not out of things which already existed but out of what did not exist at all, i.e., out of nothing. 37 THE NATURE OF THE GOOD 26.38

4:18 Believing Against Natural Hope

THE RESURRECTION HOPE.

ORIGEN: As always, when the apostle Paul talks about faith, he adds hope as well, and rightly so, for hope and faith are inseparable.... Just as Abraham believed against hope, so all believers do the same, for we all believe in the resurrection of the dead and the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. 1 These appear to go against hope as far as human nature is concerned, but when we take the power of God into consideration, there is no problem. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.2

4:19 Trusting God, Not the Body

TRUSTING GOD MORE THAN HIS HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD BODY.

ORIGEN: This may be understood literally or figuratively. In the literal sense, Abraham did not put his trust in his hundred-year-old body, which was obviously incapable of doing what God had promised him, but rather he trusted in God, the Almighty One who could perform what he had promised even when the laws

of human fertility no longer functioned.... Figuratively, however, it may be understood in the light of what Paul says elsewhere: Put to death therefore what is earthly in you. ⁸ It would be absurd to suggest that what Paul had in this respect was somehow lacking to Abraham. For Abraham also had put his earthly members to death, being neither excited by luxury nor inflamed by lust.... Sarah likewise did not suffer from lust or the desires of the flesh.... When they heard what God had promised them, they did not consider their own benefit.... All these things that would make them rich they regarded as worthless in order that they might win Christ, ⁹ whose coming they foresaw. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹⁰

OECUMENIUS: Paul was right to say: about a hundred, because Abraham was not a hundred but only ninety-nine years old. ¹² PAULINE COMMENTARY FROM THE GREEK CHURCH.¹³

4:20 Growing Strong in Faith

TRUSTING THE PROMISE.

CHRYSOSTOM: Abraham trusted God even though God gave him no proof, nor even a sign. Rather, there were only mere words promising things which by nature were impossible. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 8.¹⁴

GLORY TO GOD.

AUGUSTINE: Paul says that Abraham gave glory to God when he was attacking those who were seeking their own glory in the sight of men by doing the works of the law. AUGUSTINE ON ROMANS 25.¹⁵

4:21 Convinced of God's Ability

NO FEAR THAT GOD CANNOT DO THE ENTIRE WORK.

AUGUSTINE: God brings about the faith of the Gentiles, because he is able to perform what he has promised. If it is God who produces our faith, acting in a wondrous manner in our hearts so that we believe, surely we should not fear that he cannot do the entire work. ¹⁷ PREDESTINATION OF THE SAINTS 2.6.¹⁸

4:22 Faith Reckoned as Righteousness

4:23 Not Only for Abraham

4:24 For Our Sake Also

BELIEVING THAT GOD COULD RAISE ISAAC FROM NOTHING.

ORIGEN: Note that Paul does not speak of those who believe that God is supreme, or of those who believe that he made heaven and earth, or of those who believe that he made the angels and the other hosts of the heavenly glory. Rather, he speaks of those who believe in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Did Abraham believe in this God even before he had raised Jesus? ... Abraham's faith contained within it the form and image of this great mystery. For when he was ordered to sacrifice his only son, he believed that God could raise him up from the dead. ²³ Moreover, he did not believe this of Isaac only but also of his seed, which is Christ. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.²⁴