

INTRODUCTION

1. We are continuing in our study of justification.
2. We have already looked at the Greetings and Introduction (1:1-15), The Theme (1:16-17), and The Condemnation (1:18-3:20), and now we have been considering Justification (3:21-5:21).
3. We said that justification is a legal declaration whereby God declares the believing sinner righteous.
4. In other words, when a sinner repents and puts his trust in Jesus Christ, he is immediately declared righteous.
5. This is not based on anything he has done to earn salvation.
6. **Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB)** ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.
7. Salvation is because of the redemption of Jesus Christ.
8. **Ephesians 1:7 (NASB)** In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.

Justification: The Provision of God's Righteousness Pt.3

Romans 4 (Preached 2/11/10) © 2010

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9. So as we have been looking at this wonderful doctrine here in the book of Romans, we have first considered the source of righteousness.
10. **Romans 3:21 (NASB)** But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.
11. The righteousness that Paul is referring to in this verse comes from God Himself.
12. It is a comprehensive righteousness that fulfills both the precept and the penalty of God's law, under which all men stand judged.
13. The duration of this righteousness is forever.
14. It is referred to in Psalm 119:142 as an "everlasting righteousness."
15. God said in Isaiah 51:8, "My righteousness will be forever."
16. So we talked about the source of righteousness being God Himself and we talked about its implications.
17. Tonight, we are looking at the next point under justification and it is found in Romans 4 and that is *the example of righteousness*.
18. Paul gives two examples in Romans 4 of justification being by faith.

I. Abraham (vv.1-5, 9-25)

Abraham is considered here as a test case for the view that justification is by faith alone.¹

Verse 1 tells us...

A. He is the “forefather” to the Jews (v.1)

Verse 16 says...

B. He is the “father” of the faithful (v.16)

There were three distinct blessings that came to Abraham by faith:

1. Abraham received righteousness by faith (vv.3-12)

Verses 1-2 sets the stage for the rest of the chapter but it comes off the heels of 3:27.

Since righteousness comes only through faith in Christ Jesus, Paul asks, “Where is boasting then?” (3:27).

Paul answers his question emphatically—boasting is excluded.

Since our justification is by faith alone, by no merit in us or endeavors of our works, there is

¹ ESV Study Bible. Notes on Romans 4:1.

no room whatsoever for boasting, save in Christ.

In this section of the epistle, Paul is going to bring forth exhibit A to prove his case.

Paul says in verses 1-2, “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.”

What Paul is doing here is refuting the unbelieving, arrogant Jews who tried to be justified by works.

They labored under the delusion that their father Abraham was pictured to them as an example of work-righteousness.

He therefore shows that Abraham was justified solely by faith without works.²

Verse 1 again says, “What then shall that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?”

What's the answer? NOTHING.

² Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1954). 82.

Martin Luther says, “Inasmuch as Abraham was their (the Jews’) father according to the flesh, he ‘found’ nothing, just as also we find nothing (according to the flesh).”³

R.C. Sproul says, “Abraham was excluded from boasting because he was not justified by works, anymore than we are.”⁴

How was Abraham made righteous then?

Verse 3 says, “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to Him as righteous.’”

This is the first of the 11 times the word “credited” (logizomai) is found here in chapter 4 of Romans.

It has the idea of crediting to one’s account.

The historical account of verse 3 is found in Genesis 15:6.

This is where God appeared to Abraham and told him that he would be his shield and his very great reward (v.1).

³ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1954). 82.

⁴ R.C. Sproul, *Romans* (Kindle Book). Location 1765-78.

Abraham was staggered by that announcement because he was one of the wealthiest men on earth.

What do you give a man who has everything?

To the Jew you give progeny. You give him sons.

Abraham had plenty of cattle, livestock, and property, but he had no son, so he said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" (v. 2). God told him, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir" (v.4).

This staggering promise that God gave to Abraham in his old age resulted in Abraham's believing God (v. 6).

He trusted the promise of God.

Abraham's faith was not without some admixture of wavering or doubt—"Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?" (v. 8)—but God put him to sleep and gave him a magnificent theophany (manifestation).

God, because he could swear by nothing greater, swore by himself in the drama of that vision (vv. 12—21).

What we are mainly concerned about in Genesis 15 is that Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

That is, **Abraham was reckoned or considered by God to be righteous, not because of any righteous deeds that Abraham had performed but simply because he believed the promise.**⁵

In other words, righteousness came to Abraham by grace (Rom.4:4), and that it was faith which appropriated it (Rom.4:5).⁶

So, verse 4, “to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor” or “grace” “but as what is due.”

Verse 5, “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

William MacDonald says, “When a man **works** for a living and gets his paycheck at the end of the week, he is entitled to his **wages**. He has earned them. He does not bow and scrape before his employer, thanking him for such a

⁵ R.C. Sproul, *Romans* (Kindle Book). Location 1765-78.

⁶ Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology. Studies in Romans*. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1977). 66.

display of kindness and protesting that he doesn't deserve the money. Not at all! He puts the money in his pocket and goes home with the feeling that he has only been reimbursed for his time and labor.

But that's not the way it is in the matter of justification.

Shocking as it may seem, the justified man is the one **who**, first of all, **does not work**. He renounces any possibility of earning his salvation. He disavows any personal merit or goodness. He acknowledges that all his best labors could never fulfill God's righteous demands.

Instead, he **believes on Him who justifies the ungodly**. He puts his faith and trust in the Lord. He takes God at His word.⁷

Before we look at the other two distinct blessings Abraham received from being justified by faith, Paul mentions another OT character...

⁷ William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

II. David (vv.6-9)

In using the example of David, Paul shows the Jew that David was justified by faith while being circumcised and Abraham prior to circumcision. He mentions that in verses 9-12.

“David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works.”

This statement must be joined with the preceding...”His faith is [credited] as righteousness.”

David acknowledges that salvation is granted only to those to whom God counts their faith for righteousness, without works.⁸

In verses 7-9 David quotes from **Psalms 32:1-2 (NASB)**¹
How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!² How blessed is the man to whom
the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit
there is no deceit!

This Psalm was written by David after his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband Uriah (2 Sam.11).

⁸ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1954). 82.

In spite of the enormity of his sin and the utter absence of personal merit, David knew the blessing of imputed righteousness.⁹

Paul returns to his example of Abraham in verses 9-25.

III. Abraham (vv.9-25)

In verses 9-12 Paul anticipated what his Jewish readers would be thinking: If Abraham was justified by his faith alone, why did God command him and his descendants to be circumcised?

His response not only answers those concerned with circumcision, but the millions who still cling to some other kind of religious ceremony or activity as their basis for righteousness.¹⁰

So Paul says, Abraham was not justified by circumcision (vv.9-12)

Most Jews in New Testament times were thoroughly convinced that circumcision was not only the unique mark that set them apart from all other men as God's

⁹ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997).

¹⁰ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997).

chosen people but was also the means by which they became acceptable to God.¹¹

Paul says in verses 9-12 "Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."¹⁰ How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? ***Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;***¹¹ and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,¹² and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

A person who trusts in circumcision, or in any other ceremony or work, nullifies the work of Christ on his behalf.

He places himself under the law, and a person under the law must obey it with absolute perfection, which is humanly impossible.

¹¹ John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996). 247–248.

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).¹²

So...

- A. Abraham Received Righteousness By Faith (vv.3-12)

Notice the second blessing that came to Abraham by faith...

- B. Abraham Received An Inheritance By Faith (vv.13-16)

Romans 4:13-16 (NASB) ¹³For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; ¹⁵for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. ¹⁶For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

¹² John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996). 249.

There are two main ideas presented in verses 13-16: faith appropriated the promise (vv.13, 16) and the Law would have invalidated the promise (vv.14-15).

When God promised **Abraham** and **his seed** that he would be **heir of the world**, He did not make the promise conditional on adherence to some legal code. (The law itself wasn't given until 430 years later—Gal. 3:17.)

It was an unconditional **promise** of grace, to be received by **faith**—the same kind of **faith** by which we obtain God's **righteousness** today.

The expression **heir of the world** means that he would be the father of believing Gentiles as well as of Jews (4:11, 12), that he would be the father of many nations (4:17, 18) and not just of the Jewish nation.

In its fullest sense the promise will be fulfilled when the Lord Jesus, Abraham's seed, takes the scepter of universal empire and reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords.¹³

¹³ William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

Paul says all of this is nullified in verse 14 “if those who are of the Law are heirs.”

Verse 15 says “for the Law brings about wrath.”

Verse 16, “For this reason it is by faith in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”

If only those who perfectly keep the law—an impossibility—receive the promise, faith has no value.¹⁴

All the Law could do is expose man's sinfulness.

Romans 3:20 says, “For through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”

“For this reason,” verse 16, “it is by faith.”

And as Paul says in verse 17, giving us another reference to the forensic nature of justification, “God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.”

¹⁴ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997).

God can declare believing sinners to be righteous even though they are not, by imputing His righteousness to them, just as God made or declared Jesus “sin” and punished Him, though He was not a sinner.

Those whom He justifies, He will conform to the image of His Son (8:29, 30).¹⁵

In verse 17-25 Paul notes another blessing that came to Abraham...

C. Abraham Received A Posterity By Faith (vv.17-22)

Having shown that justification is through faith not works (vv. 1–8), and that it is by grace, not the keeping of law (vv. 9–17), Paul now concludes by showing that it results from divine power, not human effort (vv. 18–25).¹⁶

Note two thoughts in this section...

First, is the promise of seed.

¹⁵ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997).

¹⁶ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997).

This is clearly rooted in the historical account of Abraham recorded in Genesis 15:5; 17:4-8.

His seed was to be numerous.

They were to constitute many nations.

They would inherit the earth.

At the time the promise came, Abraham had no child (Gen.15:2-4).

The only tangible thing he had to hold onto was a God who “gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist” (v.17).

Paul said from a human perspective, it seemed impossible that God would give him seed because he was about a hundred years old and “the deadness of Sarah’s womb” (v.19).

“Yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness” (vv.20-22).

On a human level the circumstances were all against the fulfillment of this promise.

Abraham had reached that age when fertility of the male ceases.

And his wife Sarah was in a similar condition; she was unable to bear children.

But in the face of these circumstances Abraham did not waver back and forth between these two alternatives.

He set his face toward the promise of God and his faith took on power, giving the glory to God;

And he was fully assured that the One who made the promise was able to bring it to completion.

It was not until twenty-five years later that Abraham entered into the realization of the promise.¹⁷

Paul concludes with a summary in verses 23-25.

Romans 4:23-25 (NASB)²³ Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,²⁴ but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,²⁵ *He* who was delivered over

¹⁷ Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology. Studies in Romans*. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1977). 67-8.

because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

William Barclay says, "It was this willingness to take God at his word which put Abraham into a right relationship with him. Now the Jewish Rabbis had a saying to which Paul here refers. They said, "What is written of Abraham is written also of his children." They meant that any promise that God made to Abraham extends to his children also. Therefore, if Abraham's willingness to take God at his word brought him into a right relationship with God, so it will be with us. It is not works of the law, it is this trusting faith which establishes the relationship between God and a man which ought to exist."¹⁸

Justification is by faith alone in Jesus Christ and His righteousness and perfect sacrifice.

When you place your trust in Jesus Christ, God's righteousness is "credited" (v.24) to your account.

How is that possible?

¹⁸ *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. William Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2000). 70–71.

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Verse 25, “He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.”

Let's pray.