

## Justification By Faith Alone Illustrated Through Abraham

(Romans 4:1-25)

Intro: Paul, having explained that justification—*being declared right with God*—is a free gift of God’s grace through faith in the redemption accomplished by Christ Jesus on the cross (Rom. 3:21-26); brings forth Abraham as an illustration of justification by faith in God alone (4:1-25). The Jews of Paul’s day held that justification was based on works/obedience to the Mosaic Law. Paul refutes this false teaching by demonstrating that Abraham acquired his justification apart from works, circumcision, or the Law. He quotes Genesis 15:6 “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to Him as righteousness,” to support his claim that justification is by faith alone. Paul quotes or alludes to this passage in Genesis 15:6 in every paragraph of the chapter to support his argument that justification is by grace through faith alone.

### III. Righteousness Provided By God’s Grace: *Justification By Faith* (3:21–5:21)

A. Justification provided by grace through faith in Christ alone (3:21-31)

B. Justification by faith alone illustrated through Abraham (4:1-25)

1. Abraham’s justification was apart from works (vv. 1-8)

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

Paul continues his discourse with his imaginary Jewish opponent, who viewed works as the only way to salvation. The Jews pointed to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. “Didn’t he obey God, and as a result gain righteousness before the Lord? Paul responds, “If Abraham really was justified by works, then he has something to boast about; **but not before God**” (v. 2). Abraham had no ground for boasting before God because he received God’s gracious gift of justification by faith, not by works.

Paul directs his readers to the Old Testament scriptures to prove his claim that Abraham was justified by faith apart from works v. 3,

For what does the Scripture say? “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

In contrast to the Jews’ belief that Abraham was justified by works, Paul uses this passage in Genesis 15:6 to prove that “he believed in the promise of God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Abraham’s justification was not based on any works performed by him, but solely on his trust in God promise. God you recall had made Abraham a supernatural promise to provide him and Sarah with an heir. Even though both he and Sarah were as good as dead, he was 99 and she was 89, yet Abraham believed God, and His faith was reckoned, placed to his account, as righteousness.

Notice that Abraham’s faith resulted in God’s reckoning righteousness to his account. This word “reckon,” used 11 times in this passage, is an accounting term used in banking, which means “to credit, impute, reckon, or place to one’s account.” Because of his faith in God’s promise, God credited righteousness to Abraham’s account. Trust in God’s promise is what constitutes faith, and results in justification.

For believers God’s promise is that Jesus Christ died as our substitute and fully satisfied all of God’s demands against sinners (3:24-25).

#### **Verses 4-5 contrast faith and works.**

4 “Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due.”

All would agree with this general principle, that one who works receives wages for his labor. His wage is not reckoned, credited to him as a favor, but as what is rightly due.

#### **Now, look at the contrast in v. 5,**

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

Faith receives a gift from God that the believing person does not deserve. It is entirely of grace, the person does not deserve it. Notice that **God justifies the ungodly**. Apart from His saving grace you and I would be doomed to eternal damnation and suffering.

Chuck Swindoll explains, “God’s plan of salvation doesn’t come with a do-it-yourself kit. “Neither is the righteousness He offers a wage for anything we might do. “Instead He comes to us, as people who can do absolutely nothing and are totally undeserving. “Based wholly on grace He says, ‘Take My gift of righteousness, which My Son had made available to you. It is yours for the asking’” (*A Study Of Romans 1–5*, 46).

Paul cites a Psalm David wrote, Psalm 32:1-2, as a further support of his argument that justification is based on faith apart from works, vv. 6-8

\* David’s justification was apart from works (vv. 6-8)

6 Just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:

7 “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE  
BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.  
8 “BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT  
TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.”

Paul quotes David here to show that he too believed in imputed righteousness apart from works. “Blessed is the man,” says David, “whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been forgiven.” This 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm was written following David’s terrible sin with Bathsheba, and the murder of her husband Uriah. “Blessed is the man,” says David, “whose sin the LORD will not take into account.”

Paul uses David as a further proof that like Abraham he too believed in imputed, rather than earned righteousness. But he also showed that when a believer sins, his sin does not cancel out his justification.

Warren Wiersbe writes, “Once we are justified by faith, God does not impute our sins to our account. “Once we are justified by faith, our record contains Christ’s perfect righteousness and can never again contain our sins. “Christians do sin, and need to confess these sin so we can enjoy fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-7). “However, God is not keeping a record of our sins, but He is keeping a record of our works, so that He might reward us when Jesus comes” (Romans, 42).

Not only was Abraham's justification apart from works, secondly, it was prior to his circumcision, vv. 9-12,

## 2. Abraham's justification was prior to his circumcision (4:9-12)

9—Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say,

“FAITH WAS RECKONED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

10—How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.

Paul is pointing out that when God declared Abraham righteous in Genesis 15, verse 6, it was actually 13 years prior to his being circumcised in Genesis 17:24-26. The conclusion is obvious, circumcision had nothing to do with Abraham's justification. It was based solely on his faith in God.

Paul goes on to explain that Abraham's circumcision was actually a sign of the faith he already possessed, v. 11,

11—and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them,

Abraham's circumcision became a seal or testimony of his faith, which resulted in God's gracious gift of righteousness. Abraham became the father of faith, not only of the Jews, but to all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them as well.

Paul restates the same truth in the next verse, v. 12

12—Abraham has become the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision (Jews), but to [Gentiles] who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

Believers today are circumcised/sealed spiritually in their heart by the Holy Spirit of God, who has been given to us as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession to the praise

of His glory.” (Eph. 1:13-14). Circumcision did not add anything to Abraham’s salvation, it merely attested to it. In the same way, believers today are not saved by baptism, it merely serves as an outward testimony, a public display or profession of a believer’s faith in Jesus Christ.

Not only was Abraham’s justification apart from works (vv. 1-8), and prior to his circumcision (vv. 9-12), thirdly, it was prior to the giving of the Mosaic Law, vv. 13-15,

### 3. Abraham’s justification was prior to the Law (4:13-15)

13—For 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. 14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; 15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

Paul next argues that Abraham was justified before the Mosaic Law was ever given. He again emphasizes the fact that Abraham was declared righteous because he believed the promise of God, not because he obeyed God’s Law. According to Galatians 3:23-29, Abraham received God’s gracious gift of righteousness 430 years before the Law was even given. The promise God gave to Abraham was based totally on God’s grace. Abraham didn’t earn or merit God’s favor. He simply believed that what God promised He was able to deliver. As a result, Abraham’s belief/faith was reckoned to him as righteousness.

Once again, the Law was not given to save men, but to show men that they were sinners that need to be saved. Paul’s climatic statement in Romans 3:23, that summarized his argument in the first three chapters of Romans bears repeating here: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law.” It is only by faith that anyone will ever stand with a clean slate before our Holy and righteous God. Swindoll summarizes, “Righteousness truly is a five-letter word—FAITH.”

The fact that Abraham was justified by God’s grace, and not the Law proves that salvation is for all men. Abraham is the father of all believers, both Jews and Gentiles. This is Paul’s conclusion in verses 16-25.

### 4. Abraham’s justification was by faith in God’s promise (4:16-25)

16—For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain 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

Abraham's justification was in accordance with God's grace, who promised Abraham that he would be the father of all who believed in the promise of God. He is the father of us all, everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as it is written, v. 17

17 (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

God declared that He would make Abraham the father of many nations. For He is the One who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. His name is El Shadai, the all powerful God. Paul builds on this idea that God gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist in verses 18-21,

18—In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." 19 And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.

The primary reason God delayed in sending Abraham and Sarah the son He had promised was that all might know that this was a supernatural provision. I mean Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 years old. From a purely reproductive point of view, both of them were as good as dead. However, Paul informs us here that "Without becoming weak in faith, Abraham did not waiver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

Verse 22 brings Paul's argument concerning Abraham's justification to a climax. Therefore IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Abraham's justification was based only on his faith in God's promise to give him the son of promise. Because he believed God, it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

Paul concludes his argument concerning Abraham's justification by faith in vv. 23-25 by demonstrating that God will credit his righteousness to all who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead vv. 23-25

23—Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, 24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

Abraham's experience of being reconciled to God by faith, was not only written for him, but for our sakes also; to all of us who believe that Jesus died and rose again from the dead. Jesus Christ was delivered up to die—made sin for us—that we who believe might be justified because of our faith in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

#### Applications:

1. We learn from this lesson that salvation is a gift of God's grace through faith alone.
2. Second, we learn that divine delays strengthen our faith. Abraham trusted in God's promise to give him a son, and his faith was reckoned unto him as righteousness.
3. Third, we learn that everyone who places their faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ, becomes a spiritual descendant of Abraham. Are you trusting in Christ as your Savior?

#### Closing prayer:

Perhaps you are here this morning and might admit that you have never accepted God's gracious provision for your salvation. God has provided His Son, Jesus Christ to be our Savior from sin. If you want to become a child of God, you must place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As I close in prayer, I would ask you to accept Christ as your Savior this morning.

Closing song: *There Is A Redeemer*