

Romans 4:1-8
The NT Gospel Agrees with OT Teaching that Justification is
Through Faith Alone By Grace Alone

Introduction: Paul proves his point by arguing from both the Law and the Prophets (3:21). In this chapter he storms the citadel of traditional Judaism (and mainline Christianity as well). Abraham & David illustrate the principle of 3:27-31. These are very important men in Israel's history. God made a covenant with each of these men. If Paul can establish as true that the father of the nation of Israel was justified by faith rather than by works, he will have scored heavily, especially with his Jewish readers. (E. F. Harrison, EBC)

- 1) **Abraham's example of justification through faith alone—4:1-3** (cf. 3:27)
 - a) The question concerning what Abraham "*gained*" [perf. infin. eu`ri,skw]—4:1
 - i) Abraham is the biological Jewish *forefather according to the flesh*, but he was 500 years BEFORE the Law. Some Jewish leaders taught that Abraham obeyed the whole law before it was even given!
 - ii) Abraham discovered these truths by God's grace. Why would God select Abraham out of the approximately 300,000 sinful inhabitants in Ur of the Chaldees? Grace alone!
 - b) The "if/then" statement concerning Abraham not boasting—4:2
 - i) Why? *For* [ga,r] *if* (1st class, let us assume for the moment) *Abraham was justified by* [evk] *works, he has something to boast about* (take credit for, personal satisfaction in one's achievements), *but not before* [pro,j] *God*.
 - (1) Having to come to God emptyhanded attacks human pride, but there is no other way to come before God. If God were to allow human works, then He would have to lower His standards, and thus cease to be God.
 - ii) Some rabbis taught that Abraham had a surplus of merit before God that he could pass on to the Jews. They also taught that his righteousness was a result of his abundant good works. Jewish writings emphasized that Abraham was right with God because of his obedience to God. Some stated that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob never sinned. Others stated that Abraham was justified because he was faithful in temptation.
 - (1) But did Abraham sin? Yes! He went down to Egypt, he lied, he had relations with Hagar, just to name a few. Thus, God chose Abraham in spite of his lack of righteousness, not because of his righteousness.
 - c) There is scriptural proof that Abraham simply trusted God's Word—4:3
 - i) Quote from Genesis 15:6, "*Abraham **believed** (emphatic) God, and it was counted to him (by God) as* [eivj] *righteousness.*"
 - (1) Gen. 15:16 is the first time the word "believe" occurs in Scripture.
 - ii) Abraham's faith was at a specific point in time, based upon specific revelation from God (4:21), namely a son, a nation, literal land, and being an instrument of blessing to all nations (Gen. 12:2-3).

- (1) All Abraham needs are the essential components for nationhood—land and descendants. Otherwise, he’s ready to go. ;-)
- (2) No faith in God is really valid unless it involves faith in specific revelation or promise from God. Faith is not a vague thing or emotion. It is not a “leap of faith.” It is, however, choosing to believe God’s specific revealed truth. (Francis Schaeffer)
- iii) God credited Abraham’s account [logi,zomai] “*unto [eivj] righteousness.*”
 - (1) This means that God placed on Abraham’s account a righteousness that did not inherently belong to him. This is pure grace.

2) David’s example of justification by grace alone—4:4-8 (cf. 3:28)

- a) **General principle of WAGES, stated negatively:** *To the one who works, his wages are not counted [logi,zomai] as a gift [kata, ca,rij] but [avlla,] as his due (obligation).—4:4*
 - i) Working is the result of one’s own capabilities.
- b) **Theological principle of GRACE, stated positively:** *And to the one who does **not** work but believes [pres. ptc.] in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted [logi,zomai] as [eivj] righteousness.—4:5*
 - i) Faith is trusting in the capabilities of another.
 - (1) Abraham’s faith honored God because he believed that God could do the impossible by making his offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven. (Thomas Schreiner)
 - ii) Man is taken as he is and pardoned by the Judge. God doesn’t take those who are 80% righteous and “fix them up a little.” God never justifies the godly, only the ungodly. God does not justify the praying person, or the Bible reader, or the church member. God only justifies the UNGODLY (including Abraham). God has no regard for anything in the person justified. He sees him only as an ungodly creature. (combining Schaeffer and Edwards)
 - iii) A person cannot be genuinely saved until he acknowledges that he genuinely and justly deserves the wrath of the holy God. Are you that sinner?
- c) David illustrates the principle of justification by faith alone—4:6-8
 - i) *David also speaks of the blessing (favorable circumstances) of the one to whom God counts [logi,zomai] righteousness apart from works:*
 - (1) Abraham lived @ 500 years BEFORE the Law while David lived 500 years AFTER the Law had been given.
 - ii) A **plural, positive** focus: from LXX of Psalm 32:1—“*Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven [avfi,hmi], and whose sins are covered [evpikal,ptw].*”
 - (1) These “lawless deeds” [avnomi,a] are specific violations of specific laws
 - (2) “Sins” [a`marti,a] includes all kinds of sin.

iii) A **singular, negative** focus: from LXX of Psalm 32:2—“*Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not [ouv mh,] count [logi,zomai] his sin [a`marti,a].*”

3) **Things we need to remember**

- a) Works have NO part in bringing about one’s justification. God’s justification is not earned but given freely. God is never obligated to His creatures. He always acts graciously, without compulsion or necessity. Grace does not come because of faith.
- b) Justification is available to all but will be received only by those who agree with God that they are ungodly. Remember that there are NO godly ones. EVERYONE is ungodly. But not everyone wants to admit that. Have you?
- c) At salvation, God credits the ungodly person’s sin to Christ’s account. And He also credits Christ’s righteousness to our account.
- d) The way of salvation has always been the same throughout human history. The elements involved in saving faith have been summarized in a helpful acrostic in the following manner:
 - i) F—facts you need to know
 - ii) A—agreement with those facts
 - iii) I—internalization—to my own life
 - iv) T—trust in the God who has revealed those facts
 - v) H—hope because God has kept His Word

Next time: Romans 4:9-12

Romans 4:9-12
Salvation by Grace Through Faith Comes Before Important Signs

Introduction: This illustrates the principle taught in 3:29-30: God justifies everyone, Jew and Gentile, by faith alone. And by using the word “blessing” (cf. 4:6-8) he transitions from David back to Abraham.

1) The questions are asked—4:9-10a

- a) *Is this blessing* (of forgiveness of our sins) *then only for [evpi,] the circumcised (Jews) or also for [evpi,] the uncircumcised (Gentiles)?*
 - i) One Jewish Rabbi wrote, “no circumcised man will ever see hell.”
- b) Summarizes Genesis 15:6 (cf. 4:3), *For we say that faith was counted [logi,zomai] to Abraham as [eivj] righteousness.*
- c) *How then* (in what way) *was it counted to him [logi,zomai]? Was it before or after he had been circumcised?*
 - i) I.e., at what time was Abraham circumcised?
- d) In other words, must the Gentile come to a Jewish-type faith, or must the Jew come to a non-Jewish-type faith?

2) The importance of sequence—4:10b-12

- a) *It was not after, but [avlla,] before he was circumcised.—4:10b*
 - i) Lit., “not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.”
 - ii) Paul’s point is that Gen. 15 comes before Gen. 17. Abraham was 99 when he was circumcised (Gen. 17:11). He was declared righteous in Genesis 15:16, at least 13 years (some Jews say 29 years) **before** he was circumcised. He trusted God before there were any Jews!
 - iii) In a very real sense, Abraham was justified while still on Gentile ground, and this leaves the door wide open for other Gentiles to be justified, entirely apart from circumcision. (Wm. MacDonald)
 - iv) Faith came first, then came the covenant of circumcision.
- b) *He received the **sign** [shmei?/on, indicating mark, points to something beyond itself] of circumcision—4:11a*
 - i) *As a **seal** [sfragi,j, authenticating proof, confirms the genuineness] of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.* (lit. “in uncircumcision”)
 - (1) Abraham did not have the covenant mark of the Jews when he first had faith in God.
 - (2) Circumcision became a mark of the covenant relationship God had with Israel; but the covenant was not established on the basis of circumcision. Circumcision does not contribute to one’s status before God in any way.
- c) Why does this matter?—4:11b-12

- i) To Gentiles: *The purpose [eivj] was to make him the father of all [pa,j] who believe [pres. act. ptc. pisteu,w] without being circumcised, so that [eivj] righteousness would be counted [logi,zomai] to them as well,—4:11b*
(1) Abraham is the **physical** father of the Jews and the **spiritual** father of all believers, both Jews and Gentiles.
- ii) To Jews: *And to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but [avlla,] who also walk [pres. act. ptc. stoice,w; keep in the ranks, keep in harmony with] in the footsteps [i;cnoj] of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised—4:12*
(1) Remember Rom. 2:28-29? True circumcision is of the heart, not only the body.
- iii) What joy to know that we don't have to become Jewish to be saved. In fact, you don't become a spiritual Jew when you get saved. Instead, we have to become a child of Abraham, by grace through faith alone.

3) Things we need to remember:

- a) Remember that God does not justify those who merely observe ordinances or sacraments. He justifies only the ungodly.
 - i) If you somehow regard any religious ceremony (baptism, the Lord's Supper, Mass, christening, confirmation, etc.) as having anything to do with God's declaring you righteous, you do not truly understand the Gospel. You must recognize yourself simply as ungodly.
- b) Everyone must come to God in the same way, by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, not through any external ceremony.
- c) The **outward** sign must come **after** the **inward** work of God's grace. Consider the issue of water baptism.
 - i) Matt. 28:19-20—the one command is “make disciples” accompanied by 2 modal participles explaining the HOW of making disciples
 - ii) Acts 2:41—those who received the Word were baptized
 - iii) Acts 16:31-35—having believed they were baptized

Next time: Romans 4:13-25

Romans 4:13-25
Abraham's Faith Establishes the Law

Introduction: This parallels Romans 3:31.

1) The promise to Abraham was through faith, not through law—4:13-15

- a) Why? *For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs ...*
 - i) *Faith is null* [keno,w] (invalid)
 - ii) *And the promise is void* [katarge,w] (makes useless)
 - (1) The promise to Abraham (given about 430 years before the Law) included: a land; a people; a blessing; and a redeemer
- b) Why does the Law do that?
 - i) *For the Law brings* [katerga,zomai] *wrath* [ovrgh,]
 - (1) By exposing man's sinfulness against the clear revelation of God's will; it condemns those who fail to obey it perfectly
 - ii) *But where there is no law there is no transgression* [para,basij] (specific violations of specific laws)
 - (1) Gentiles with the Law of Moses still sinned against the inner law in their conscience (2:14-15).

2) Why is the promise of faith necessary?—4:16a

- a) Primarily: *In order that the promise may rest on grace* [kata, ca,rij]—
- b) Secondly: *and be guaranteed* [be,baioj] *to all his offspring*
 - i) *Not only to the adherent of the law* (believing Jews)
 - ii) *but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham,* (believing Gentiles)

3) So, who was Abraham and what was his faith like?—4:16b-21

- a) *Who is the father of us all* (Gentiles and Jews)
 - i) Quotes Gen. 17:5—*I have made you a father of many nations*
 - (1) This was before Isaac was born in Gen. 21
- b) *In the presence of the God (the Father) in whom he believed*
 - i) *Who gives life to the dead*
 - (1) A child to Abraham and Sarah
 - ii) *Who calls into existence the things that do not exist*
 - (1) The creation of the many nations
- c) *In* [para,] *hope he believed against* [evpi,] *hope—4:18*
 - i) It seemed illogical from a human standpoint to believe that God could use Abraham and Sarah to produce a child
 - ii) Why? *that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."*
 - (1) Quotes from Gen. 15:5
- d) *He did not weaken in faith when he considered* [katanoew] *his own body,*
 - i) *Which was as good as dead* [nekro,w] (since he was about 100 years old)
 - (1) He had been following God for 25 years at this point

- ii) *Or when he considered the barrenness [ne,krwsij] of Sarah's womb*
 - (1) Remember, Abraham had already fathered Ishmael in the flesh.
- e) *No unbelief made him waver [diakri,nw], ... but he grew strong [aor. pass. evndunamo,w] in his faith*
 - i) Struggling faith is not the same as doubt, just as temptation is not the same as sin.
 - (1) A Christian who claims to understand all of God's truth and to envision the fulfillment of all His promises is not demonstrating great faith but great presumption.
 - ii) *Concerning the promise of God*
 - (1) Faith rests in a specific revelation or promise of God
 - iii) *As he gave glory to God*
 - (1) Godly faith glorifies God because it rests in who He is, what He has promised, and what He is able to do (see next phrase)
 - (2) *Fully convinced [plhrofore,w] that God was able [dunato,j] to do what he had promised*
 - (a) Abraham's faith was rooted in his understanding of who God is

4) The result of Abraham's faith—4:22-25

- a) *That is why his faith was "counted [logi,zomai] to him as righteousness."* (Gen. 15:6)
- b) Why?
 - i) **Negatively:** *But the words, "it was counted [logi,zomai] to him" were not written for his (Abraham's) sake alone*
 - ii) **Positively:** *But for ours also. It will be counted [logi,zomai] to us who believe [pres. act. ptc. pisteu,w] in Him (God the Father) who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,*
 - (1) *Who was delivered up for our trespasses*
 - (a) The crucifixion was the judicial punishment of a criminal
 - (2) *And raised for our justification.*
 - (a) Proof of God's acceptance of His substitutionary sacrifice

5) Things we need to remember:

- a) Abraham was an ungodly, idolatrous sinner who trusted in God's gracious promise.
 - i) Faith is the act whereby you raise your empty hands, believe God's specific promise, and accept the finished work of Christ on your behalf.
 - ii) God patiently waits until the sinner recognizes himself as dead and unable to help himself before He releases His saving power. As long as the sinner thinks he is strong enough to do something to please God, he cannot be saved by grace.
- b) Have you placed your faith in the same God Abraham did?
 - i) He is able to give life to the dead—4:17
 - ii) He is able to call into existence what does not exist—4:17

- iii) He is able to perform what He promises to perform—4:21
- iv) He handed Jesus over to die for our sins—4:25
- v) He is able to raise Jesus our Lord from the dead—4:24, 25
- c) For Abraham, it was a matter of, “God said it, and that settles it.”
- a) As far as he was concerned, there was only one impossibility, and that was for God to lie. Do you trust God in that same way?

Next time: Romans 5:1-5