

Abraham Justified by Faith

Romans 4:1-5

Before we look at our text, we will take a quick review of that which the apostle Paul has said concerning the salvation of God in previous chapters.

First, in **Romans 1:16-17**, Paul declares that the righteousness which God accepts is revealed in the true gospel message.

Romans 1:16-17 – “For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation** to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. **For therein is the righteousness of God revealed** from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”

Second, in **Romans 3:19**, the apostle declares the whole world to be made up of sinners who are guilty and without excuse before God.

Romans 3:19 – “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and **all the world may become guilty before God.**”

Third, in **Romans 3: 20**, Paul declares that justification before the holy God cannot be by any obedience concerning the Law of God. Sinners are not justified before God by their attempts at being good!

Romans 3: 20 – “**Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight:** for by the law is the knowledge of sin”

Fourth, in **Romans 3:24-25**, the apostle declares that justification before God is by the grace of God through faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:24-25 – “Being **justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood ...”

Finally, in **Romans 3: 28** Paul states, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”

Now let us take a brief overview of **Romans 4:1-25**.

In this chapter Paul defends his previous statements concerning justification by using two biblical examples: (1) Abraham and (2) David.

He then proves two other truths associated with justification by grace through faith: (1) God justifies the Gentiles in the same manner as he does the Jews (2) God justifies the New Testament saints in the same manner as he justified the Old Testament saints -- by grace through faith!

A Summary of Romans chapter 4:

First: Romans 4:1-5 – Abraham justified by grace through Faith

Second: Romans 4:6-8 – David Justified by Faith

Third: Romans 4:9-25 -- Paul expounds upon Abraham's faith to show when it came and how it was not by any form of works. By doing so, he proves that God intended to bring the Gentiles into that group of people that are called the people of God.

First: Romans 4:1-5 – Abraham Justified by grace through faith.

Romans 4:1-2 -- Paul argues that Abraham could boast if he were justified by works but, he could not boast before God!

Paul's Question: What has Abraham found? Has he found justification before God by his works or by faith in Jesus Christ? What truth can be found in Abraham's life about how God justifies the sinner?

Question: Who is this man Abraham?

He was born a sinner (after the flood which destroyed the whole earth except Noah and his family). (**Romans 5:12**) He was born into the family of Shem one of the sons of Noah.

We know that he and his family were serving idols when they lived in Ur of Chaldees. They were involved in the same idolatry in which the whole land was immersed. He was no different than any other sinner in the land of the Chaldees. The people of the land of the Chaldees were the descendants of Shem and had, at one time, worshipped the true and living God, but by time Abraham was born they had degenerated into idolatry.

Note: Idolatry may take on several forms – there can be metal idols as well as mental idols. The god of our imagination is probably the most terrible idol of all because we suppose the true and living God to be that which we have imagined based upon our faulty and sinful imagination.

Abraham was brought up in the faith and religion of their idolatry. These people came to believe that there was no other God but the sun, moon, and stars. There is some historical evidence that Abraham was one of the priests in their Temple. Eventually, their records indicate that Abraham came to the place where he argued with the common people claiming there was only one Creator.

What had happened to change Abraham from being an idol worshipper to a worshipper of the one true and living God? The question can be put another way: How is it that God justified Abram in his sight since he was an idol worshipper?

Acts 7:2 – “And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; **The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham**, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran.”

God appeared unto him and called him out of his land and away from his family.

“The God of glory appeared ...” Stephen says, “appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran.”

God appeared unto Abraham – God revealed Himself to Abraham - and God drew him to Himself! God intervened in his life! God came to him! God came to where he was!

While he was in the midst of his idolatry and fully convinced of the truth of it, God appeared to Abraham and called him out from those people. He was called to have no fellowship with them and to leave the society of such an idolatrous and superstitious people. He was called by the one true and living God to leave idolatry and to follow Him.

Note: There is nothing in Abraham’s life to indicate that by his works God was pleased and so God called him to Himself. If Abraham were justified it could not be by his works. He was an idol worshipper before God came to him. He had no good works!

Question: How was Abraham justified before God?

Romans 4:2 – For if Abraham were justified by works ...

The issue according to the apostle Paul is “How can an ungodly man be just before a holy God?”

What does Justified mean? A simple definition may be expressed as being, “Just as if I had never sinned!”

Biblically, it is a legal declaration, made by God, whereby by ungodly, guilty, and condemned sinners and “counted” or “reckoned”, as being righteous before God. Then, as a result of being declared righteous before God, that sinner is accepted into the presence of God as being “justified” rather than guilty.

If Abraham were justified by works – What did Paul mean by works? He meant, according to his best efforts produced in his best strength for his best cause.

If he were ... he hath whereof to glory –

Paul has already declared that there is no place for boasting (glorying) in salvation by grace through faith! See **Romans 3: 27**.

However, if justification were by works – by human effort and merit -- boasting would be perfectly acceptable. Works bring merit. Merit brings with it a place of boasting. Men may boast before men because men do not see the imperfection of the work accomplished. God sees all the imperfections and cannot accept anything that is not absolutely perfect in his sight. So, Paul concludes ... **but not before God**.

A man may be justified by his works as a Christian in the eyes of those around him. His works will testify to the fact that he is what he says he is – a Christian. But, the Scriptures allow no such boasting of self-righteousness or self-efforts in the presence of God!

Justification by grace through faith eliminates all boasting in the presence of God.

Instead, the justified one will glory in the one who has justified him. If he could be justified by his own good deeds and works -- he would glory in his own self efforts. But, since he is justified by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone -- he will boast in the work Jesus Christ has done for him!

I Corinthians 1:27-31 – “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: **That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.**”

Romans 4:3 -- What saith the Scriptures --

Paul argues from the final authority on all spiritual issues -- the Scriptures!

Paul appeals to the Old Testament record concerning Abraham. The Holy Scriptures stand alone as the final authority on all matters to which they speak -- especially those matters that pertain to the question of how a man may be just before the holy God.

Does the Old Testament teach that ungodly men are justified by their best efforts? Do they teach that Abraham was justified by works? What do they say about Abraham?

Genesis 15:6 – “And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD; and he (God) counted it to him for righteousness.”

Abraham believed God --

What does it mean that Abraham believed God? There are three things involved in this kind of believing:

When the Scriptures say that Abraham believed God they mean that Abraham had confidence in what God had said and promised especially concerning the Messiah -- the Saviour of sinners. Abraham trusted God to fulfill his word with regard to the Saviour.

What did Abraham believe?

First, he believed that God would send His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ to be the substitute for guilty sinners!

In **John 8:56**, Jesus Christ said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.”

By faith, Abraham was able to see the day that Jesus Christ would offer the perfect sacrifice for

his sins.

Second, he believed that no amount of works, no matter how great or small, can be or ever will be accepted with God.

Abraham knew himself to be a sinner and therefore unrighteous and was convinced that his best efforts would never be good enough to make himself righteous enough to be accepted by a holy God.

The apostle Paul has already declared that the whole world is guilty before God. See **Romans 3:19**. That would include Abraham.

Third, he believed that all who see themselves as unworthy sinners and who call upon Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour shall be saved from their sins.

Believing in the LORD (**Genesis 15:6**) involves calling upon the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness and salvation.

See **Romans 10:9-14a** – “(9) That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt **believe in thine heart** that God hath raised him from the dead, **thou shalt be saved**. (10) **For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness**; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (11) For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. (12) For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich **unto all that call upon him**. (13) **For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved**. (14) How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? ...”

Romans 4:3 -- ... It was counted unto him for righteousness --

The word **counted** means that the thing spoken of was put or charged to the account of the one of whom it was spoken.

In other words, when Abraham believed (trusted, called upon, had confidence in, or relied upon) Jesus Christ as his only Saviour, and God counted him as being righteous! God marked him down as being righteous! God reckoned him righteous! God imputed righteousness to his account!

By faith, a man first becomes truly righteous in the sight of God and then upon receiving God’s righteousness (and forgiveness of sins) he is declared justified.

Look again at **Romans 10:9-13** – “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Note: Faith does not justify the ungodly -- God does! This is very important to understand. Being justified before God is not gained by our making a “decision” it is gained by our trusting God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Romans 4: 5 – “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on **him that justifieth the ungodly**,

his faith is counted for righteousness.”

Romans 8: 33 – “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? **It is God that justifieth.**”

The faith which calls upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and forgiveness of sins is the faith which excludes all works of all kinds at all times before God.

Faith is the heart going out after God. It is the hand reaching out toward God. It is the eye looking up to God. Faith rests upon God to do for the sinner what he cannot do for himself.