

Romans 4

Who is cited as a justification example (v. 1-2)? Abraham – the most highly esteemed man among the Jews of Paul's day....the father of the Jewish nation. **Why would Paul use Abraham, an Old Testament figure, as an example of justification?** He is preparing to tackle the question, "Does the gospel agree with the teaching of the Old Testament?" If Paul could show from the Old Testament that Abraham was justified by faith, he could convince his Jewish readers that there is only one way of salvation.

What would be true if Abraham was justified by works (v. 2)? He would have something to brag about. He would be the author of his salvation. However, Abraham had no grounds for boasting "before God," because he received his justification by faith, not "by works."¹

How was Abraham counted (or declared) as righteous (v. 3)? Abraham's righteousness did not come from performing good works, but from belief in God. It was a righteousness credited to him through faith. Righteousness is a reckoning which takes place in the mind of God. It is not something the believer feels. He knows it has taken place because the Bible says so.

Being in a state of credited righteousness like Abraham means that your sin is not counted against you. Though you are sinning, it cannot condemn you, it does not affect your status before God.

How do you explain the illustration of the relationship between works and faith (v. 4-5)? A worker who gets a paycheck is entitled to his wages. He has earned them. But the justified man does not work, recognizing he can't earn his salvation. Instead he believes in the One who justifies the ungodly. Believing instead of working, his faith is credited to his account as righteousness. Works are all about earning based on merit. Grace is all about receiving a gift (righteousness) by faith.

By this we understand that there are not two ways of salvation – saved by works through law-keeping in the Old Testament and saved by grace through faith in the New Testament. Everyone who has ever been saved – Old or New Testament – is saved by grace through faith, through their relationship of trust with a loving God.

Who does Paul cite next as another eminent man in Jewish history whose words harmonized with what he has been saying (v. 6-8)? David. Whereas Abraham lived before the Mosaic Law, David lived under it.

What was David's message? I know what it was like to be a guilty sinner. I know the seriousness of sin and how good it is to be truly forgiven. I know the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works. I know if I were judged on works alone, the righteous God must condemn me; nevertheless I know by experience that I am blessed because my lawless deeds are forgiven.

It is not the reckoning of people's good works, but God's act in not reckoning their sins against them that constitutes forgiveness. God does keep a record of our works, so that He can reward us when Jesus comes; but He is not keeping a record of our sins.²

What is the relationship between circumcision and righteousness (vv. 9-12)? When God declared Abraham righteous based on his faith (Genesis 15:6), the patriarch was still "uncircumcised." It was fourteen years later that Abraham was circumcised (Genesis 17:24-26). His circumcision was a "sign" of what he already possessed. This point would have encouraged Paul's Jewish readers, who made so much of circumcision, to keep it in its proper place as secondary to faith. Paul used Abraham as more than just an example of faith, but a model of faith. So circumcision has no relationship with righteousness and is not a God-levied requirement for Gentiles.

To whom is Abraham the spiritual father (vv. 11-12)? It must have been a shock for the Jewish readers of this letter to see that Paul called Abraham the father of uncircumcised people! The Jews of Paul's day thought circumcision meant they were the true descendants of Abraham. Paul insists that to have Abraham as your father, you must walk in the steps of the faith that Abraham walked in. Faith, not circumcision, is the vital link to Abraham.

Did Abraham receive God's promise under the Law of Moses or before (v. 13)? God gave His "promise" to bless the Gentiles through Abraham ("he would be heir of the world") long before He gave the Mosaic Law. Consequently it was wrong for the Jews to think that the blessing of the Gentiles depended on their obedience to the Law. It depended on God's faithfulness to His promise.

What does this prove regarding the law (vv. 14-15)? The law cannot bring us (heirs) into the blessings of God's promises. Not because the law is bad, but because we are unable to keep it. Therefore, our inability to keep the law means that the law becomes a vehicle of God's wrath toward us because we rely on the law as the basis of our justification and we fail which brings God's wrath.

What does v. 15 mean? Paul is not saying that if someone does not know the law, they cannot be guilty of sin. But transgression carries the meaning of a deliberate, knowing, contravening of a boundary. If I trespass on private property, I am guilty of trespassing. But if I see a sign saying Private Property Keep Out, and then trespass, then I am a transgressor. I knew the law explicitly and broke it. Knowing the law does not make us heirs but it makes us doubly guilty.³

Why does the promise of God's blessing come through faith (v. 16)? So that it might be by grace and be guaranteed to all of Abraham's descendants. It is guaranteed because it relies on God's promise and not on our obedience or performance. This enables us to live without fear of the future and without despair at our failings.

Who are Abraham's children in God's sight (vv. 16-17)? All who believe, both Jew and non-Jew, including us.

What did Abraham believe that was contrary to hope (v. 18-19)? He had no hope of fulfilling the promise of God for descendants (Genesis 15:5). His hope rested solely on God's faithfulness and not on his ability. Abraham did not look to circumstances (his own body and the deadness of Sarah's womb) but he looked at the promise of God. Faith begins with a death to self-trust.

How does this illustrate true faith? Abraham's example also helps us to understand the nature of faith. The conception of Abraham's son Isaac was a miracle, but it was not an immaculate conception. Abraham's faith did not mean that he did nothing and just waited for God to create a child in Sarah's womb. Abraham and Sarah had marital relations and trusted God for a miraculous result. This shows us that faith does not mean doing *nothing*, but doing *everything* with trust and reliance on God.

In what sense did this give glory to God (vv. 20-21)? He did not waver in his trust in God's ability to fulfill His promise. His strong faith brought glory to God.

For whom was this history of Abraham's justification recorded (v. 23)? It wasn't only for Abraham's benefit that God declared him righteous through faith; he is an example that we are invited to follow. It was counted for him and it shall be counted to us who believe; this wasn't just for Abraham, but for us also.

What is the message of v. 24? Christ being raised up, God announces to me, "Not only were your sins put away by Christ's blood, so that you are justified from all things; but I have also raised up Christ; and you shall have your standing in Him. I have given you this faith in a Risen Christ, and announced to you that in Him alone now is your place and standing. Judgment is forever past for you, both as concerns your sin, and as concerns My demand that you have a standing of holiness and righteousness of your own before Me. All this is past. Christ is now your standing! He is your life and your righteousness; and you need nothing of your own forever. I made Christ to become sin on your behalf, identified Him with all that you were, in order that you might become the righteousness of God in Him."⁴

Abraham was called to believe in a promise whereas we are privileged to believe in an accomplished fact. He was called to look forward to something which was to be done; we look back on something that is done....our redemption at the cross, attested by a risen Savior seated at the right hand of God the Father.

What did Jesus do to make our justification possible (v. 25)? He rose from the dead. He conquered death. There could have been no justification if Christ had remained in the grave. But the fact that He rose tells us that the work is finished, the price has been paid and God is perfectly satisfied with the Son's sin-atonishing work on the Cross.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Romans, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 62

² Ibid. p. 66

³ Timothy Keller, Romans 1-7 For You, 2014, published by The Good Book Company, pg. 103

⁴ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Romans, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 70