

I. Introduction

A. Today, we are continuing our study on justification by faith, which began in Romans 3:21. And as you may be aware of by now, Paul repeats the same theme in different ways in order to answer the questions raised by those who misunderstand or even oppose the truth about justification by faith. For example –

1. In Romans 3:21-26, Paul tells us that it is perfectly just for God to justify repentant sinners on the basis of Christ's redeeming work, instead of justifying them on the basis of keeping the Law.
2. In Romans 3:27-30, Paul affirms that God's method of justifying repentant sinners removes all possibility of boasting, because apart from Christ's redeeming work, only perfect righteousness from birth to death can free us from the penalty for sin. And since no one is perfectly righteous – other than Jesus Christ – justification is a gift given by God to everyone who believes in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and then lives accordingly.
3. And today, we will begin by looking at Romans 4:1-8, where we will see that Paul uses Abraham as Biblical proof that justification is by faith and not by doing the works of the Law.
4. And it goes on like this to the end of chapter 4. So, though it may seem like you are hearing many of the same things over and over, try to catch the differences in the sameness.

B. Prayer

II. Justification by Faith

A. Romans 4:1-8 . . . 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. [3] For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." [4] Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. [5] But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, [6] just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits 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."

1. Here in chapter 4, Paul begins using Abraham as the Biblical proof that God's people have always been justified by faith, which means his teaching is not new except for its emphasis on the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.
2. And as Paul does numerous times in Romans, he asks a question and then answers it. This time Paul asks what Abraham's experience was in relation to begin credited with righteousness so as to be justified before God.
 - a. Did Abraham find that he was justified by works so that he could boast that his self-accomplishments resulted in justification? NO!
 - b. Abraham was justified by faith. And Paul validates this fact by quoting Genesis 15:6, which says: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."
 - c. Now it is important to understand that neither justification by faith nor self-accomplishment through keeping the Law leaves any room for boasting. And the reason is because justification by faith is all God's doing, not ours. And keeping Law, though good on the one hand, is useless for paying the penalty for sin. So even if you keep the Law, there is nothing to boast about in relation to justification.
3. Continuing with Abraham as his example, Paul contrasts the nature of work (*law keeping*) and the nature of "Christian" faith.
 - a. It is the nature of work to earn a wage. Therefore, when we work, we rightfully expect payment according to what we have done.
 - b. In contrast to the nature of work, it is the nature of faith to trust in someone or something so as to turn to, rely on, and hope in what it is you believe in. In other words, it is the nature of faith to produce a life that lives according to what we believe.
 - (1) Therefore, it is the nature of Christian faith to trust in God, to turn to God, to rely on God, to hope in God, to love God, and to fellowship with God, with the result that we willingly obey God's will and word.
 - (2) It is the nature of Christian faith to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ – believing He is the son of God, and the redeemer of mankind, and the Lord of the universe, and the Head of the Church, with the result that we love Him, walk with Him, and live according to what He teaches us and requires us to

do while waiting for His gift of eternal salvation to be realized in eternity.

4. The next thing Paul does is to state the logical conclusion of what he has just said, which is, “to the one who does not work, but believes in Him [*God*] who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.”
 - a. Keeping in mind what we have just said about what it means to have Christian faith, let's look at what Paul means when he says God justifies the ungodly.
 - (1) To justify sinners is to declare them free of guilt and then treat them as if they are guiltless.
 - (2) Now we know that declaring a sinner guiltless and treating them as if they are righteous does not pay the penalty owed for sins committed. But this is where the redeeming work of Jesus Christ steps in and pays that penalty on our behalf, thus making it rational and just for God to not just forgive us, but treat us as if we never owed a sin debt to begin with.
 - b. And what does Paul mean when he says God credits (*imputes*) the ungodly person's faith as righteousness? This is an important question to answer because Paul repeats this truth four times in Romans 4 – in vs 3, vs 9, vs 22 and vs 24. So what does Paul mean when he says that God credits faith as righteousness?
 - (1) First, in crediting our faith as righteousness God is using our life of faith as His reason to justify us. In other words, those who live a life of faith are the “who” God justifies.
 - (2) Second, in crediting our faith as righteousness, God is treating our faith as if it were the righteousness we needed.
 - (a) We see this same principle at work when using a credit card for purchases we currently lack the money for. In other words, the credit card is treated as if we had the money to pay in full for the item being purchased.
 - (b) In this same way, our faith in God and in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ is treated by God as if we had the righteousness required to be free from the penalty of sin and in right standing with God.
5. To prove from scripture (OT) that God credits righteousness apart from works, Paul quotes Psalm 32:1-2 (*Septuagint*) . . . “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.”

- a. To see the significance of this quote, we must first look at its author. The author is David, and he experienced God's gracious forgiveness for sins committed. By Law, his sins of adultery and murder were to be punished by death, yet God forgave him, allowed him live and to remain King of Israel.
 - (1) Was such grace earned by David's righteousness? NO! – for his behavior had earned death. Therefore, the grace he received was a gift from God in spite of what he had earned.
 - (2) Did David ever pay God's required penalty for his sin? No! But it was paid for – and it was paid for by Jesus Christ. And this is how God was both just and the justifier of David in forgiving his sin and allowing him to live.
 - b. We could stop here, but I won't because there are larger implications to this quote which can only be discerned by looking at its context, and its context teaches us –
 - (1) that confession of sin precedes forgiveness (vs 5),
 - (2) that God instructs repentant sinners in the way of righteousness (vs 8),
 - (3) that God exhorts repentant sinners to do what is right of their own free will rather than be like a horse or mule who need a bit and bridle to make them do right (vs 9),
 - (4) and the contest teaches us that trust in the Lord (*faith in God*) is the opposite of living a sinful life (vs 10).
6. Once again, let me remind you that Paul is using a variety of ways to cement into our thinking the truth that justification and the gift of eternal life can never be earned or traded for. They must be given as a gift. And they are given to those who believe that God is real and that His word is true, and who confess their sin, repent, and proceed to live a godly life of faithful obedience to God's will and word.

B. Romans 4:9-12 . . . 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.

1. In this section, Paul is answering the claim that a Christian must be circumcised, or we might say in our day, baptized, in order to be justified and given the gift of eternal life. Paul uses the Jews as his example because they were promoting the belief within the church that the covenantal seal of circumcision was required for justification – as if something other than or along with the redeeming work of Jesus Christ was required to pay the penalty for sin.
 2. And to prove that justification is open to all who believe, regardless of circumcision or any other religious and ceremonial practices, Paul reminds us that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness before he had the seal of circumcision.
 3. The apostle John drove this message home in different words. He said that God so loved the world that He gave His only son so that WHOEVER – not just the circumcised or the baptized, but whoever believes in Him will have eternal life (John 3:16-17; 1 John 2:2, 4:14).
 4. The point Paul is making here is that justification is not, in any way, dependent on being circumcised or baptized, but on living a life of faithful obedience and trust in Jesus Christ as God’s payment for sin.
- C. Romans 4:13 . . . 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.
1. Paul is reaching back to Genesis 17:1-4 to prove that Abraham, on the basis of his faith, was promised by God that he would become a great nation long before the Law was ever given. Here is what Genesis 17:1-4 says: Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty (*El Shaddai*); walk before Me, and be blameless. [2] I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.” [3] Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, [4] “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations.”
 2. The first thing you should notice here is that this happened when Abraham was 99 years old. This is important because –
 - a. 24 years earlier, when Abraham was 75, God told him to leave his homeland, his relatives, and his father's house, and travel to the land which God would show him. Along with that command God promised to make Abraham a great nation, to bless him, and to make his name great (Genesis 12:1-3).

- b. And approximately 10 years later, when Abraham was 85 or 86, and following Abraham's rescue of Lot from the kings who attacked Sodom, God made a covenant with Abraham that He would fulfill His promise to make Abraham a great nation by giving him son (Genesis 15).
 3. Now what is important to see is that after the passage of 24 years (75 to 99), during which Abraham, by faith, had obeyed God by doing what God told him to do, God now tells him two things:
 - a. First, "Walk before Me (*God*) and be blameless,"
 - b. and second, "I (*God*) will establish my covenant with you." And what God meant by establishing His covenant was that He was bringing it to fulfillment, at that time, so that within a year Sarah could deliver God's promised son, who was named Isaac.
 4. The final thing to notice here is that God's promise and covenant with Abraham were not without requirements.
 - a. It is true that Abraham had to believe that what God said would come true. But it is also true that Abraham had to live according to what God told him to do. In other words, Abraham had to obey God, and such faith based living, for any of us, requires faith in God as a person, and faith in the character of God.
 - b. Noah Webster, in his 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language, defines "Christian" faith as an entire confidence or trust in God's character and declarations, and in the character and teachings of Christ, with an unreserved surrender of the will to God's guidance (*obedience*), and dependence on Jesus' merits for salvation.
 - c. This is the faith exhibited by Abraham. And this is the faith that brings from God the gift of justification and eternal salvation.
 5. Therefore, when Paul says that the promise to Abraham that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith, he is telling us that our justification and eternal salvation are not gifts given because we have earned them through keeping the Law but because we have lived a faithful life of confidence in the character of God and obedience to the word and leading of God, or as Paul says in Romans 1:5 & 16:26, we have lived a life marked by the obedience of faith.
- D. Romans 4:14-17 . . . 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, there also is no violation. [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, [17] (as it is written, "A father of many nations have I made you") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

1. Paul's first point is that if being justified and credited with righteousness is dependent on having the Law and living according to the Law, and if God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham about becoming a great nation is dependent on having the Law and living by the Law, then all this teaching about living by faith is irrelevant. But we know it is not irrelevant, for from the beginning, it has been the life of faith, not works, that leads to justification.
2. When Paul says that "The Law brings about wrath," he is not saying that the Law is the source and instrument of wrath against sin or that its only purpose is to bring wrath. Rather, the Law clearly marks God's boundaries for righteousness – which then means that we can choose to step outside those boundaries – thus breaking the Law. And it is in breaking the Law that we experience the consequence of breaking Law, which is God's wrath (*the penalty for sin?*).
3. When Paul says that "Where there is no law, there also is no violation," he is not saying that the Gentiles who do not have the Law are therefore not guilty of any sin. Rather, Paul is making the point that there must be boundaries or laws to break in order for punishment to be just. And since Paul has already taught that God, from the beginning, established His laws in the hearts and consciences of mankind, we therefore understand this statement from Paul to mean that we are all under the curse of sin and the wrath of God, even though only some of us have the written Law. In other words, this is Paul saying, in another way, that it is the life of faith in God and faithful obedience to God that God graciously justifies and not the life of the law-keeper who has the goal of securing by his own doing justification for sins committed.

III. Conclusion

- A. Titus 3:4-7 . . . But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, [5] He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, [6] whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7] so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.