

## Romans 4 • Justification by Faith

### Introduction

This is a very important chapter doctrinally for all Christians. It explains how God justifies – that is, declares righteous – ungodly people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Whereas “salvation” is a broad term which includes all that God does for the believer in Christ, “justification” is more of a legal term describing our perfect standing before God in the righteousness of Christ. In this chapter, Paul uses the example of Abraham to illustrate three great facts about justification by faith. Abraham’s a very important example in this regard because he lived and died **LONG** before God through Moses would give the Law. So we’re learning about the greater principles of God’s working.

<sup>1</sup>What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the Scripture say? “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” <sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup>But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, <sup>6</sup>just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

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

[Read v.1-8]

**Q: Why did the Jews refer to heaven as “Abraham’s Bosom”?**

A: It was their acknowledgment of Genesis 15:6 concerning Abraham – “Then he believed in the LORD, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” – as a confirmation of their certainty that Abraham was justified before, and accepted by, God. It was an expression that left no doubt that they believed Abraham to have been saved.

**Q: So knowing this, why is Paul challenging them with the question, “How was Abraham justified in the flesh?”**

A: It established the fact that the gift of righteousness came not as the result of works, but by faith in God’s revealed Word. It couldn’t possibly be the result of works.

**Q: Paul here uses the word “credited”. What similar terms does he use in v.8-11 and 22-24?**

A: He uses again several more times the word “credited”. Some translations will alternate using “reckon”, “impute”, and/or “count”.

**Q: What do these terms actually mean?**

A: They all mean “to put to a person’s account”.

**Point:** Justification means that righteousness has been credited (put to our account) to give us a right standing before God. One might define “sanctification” as righteousness imparted – made a part of our life – to give us a right standing before men so that they will see and believe we are Christians. Both are a part of salvation which James argues are necessary since it’s no good to say one has faith in God if their life does not reveal **faithfulness** to God. (See James 2:14-26.)

**Q: Can salvation be BOTH a reward for works AND a gift through grace?**

A: No, it cannot be both. In v.5 it’s clearly articulated that God “justifies the ungodly” – not the righteous – through faith and not works.

**Q: How did this sharply conflict with Jewish thinking of the day?**

A: They believed God justified religious people on the basis of their works and being born into Israel, a kind of “state church” if you will. Paul proves that “Father Abraham” was saved simply on the basis of faith, someone to whom this happened long before the Old Testament Law was given, and someone not actually born into Israel. (Remember, Abraham being the very first called was actually **BOTH** a Jew and Gentile.)

**Q: Who does Paul use to confirm these things concerning Abraham?**

A: David. Israel’s great king also taught justification by faith apart from works.

**Q: So why doesn't God credit sin to our account?**

A: Because that was charged to Christ's account.

*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.  
2 Corinthians 5:21*

*But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account;  
Philemon 18*

**Point:** Justification comes about as the result of faith, not works.

**[Read v.9-17]**

<sup>9</sup>Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

<sup>10</sup>How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; <sup>11</sup>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, <sup>12</sup>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.

<sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; <sup>15</sup>for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

<sup>16</sup>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, <sup>17</sup>(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.

**Q: Abraham lived many hundreds of years before the covenant to come through Moses. Which covenant is therefore being referred to here?**

A: This is the covenant God first made with Israel through Abraham. The sign of this covenant was circumcision.

**Q: How is Paul's example of Abraham a confirmation that salvation comes about by faith alone and not merely because one is born into Israel – that is, circumcised?**

A: Paul highlights the fact that Abraham's faith and salvation, which the Jews were so confident in that they referred to heaven as "Abraham's Bosom", took place fourteen years **BEFORE** he was circumcised.

**Point:** Circumcision is the seal of the covenant, the rite making a Jewish child a part of the system of law. Yet Abraham, the "Father" of the Jews, was in effect a Gentile (that is, uncircumcised) when he was saved!

**Q: What is the purpose of circumcision?**

A: It's supposed to be an outward sign of a spiritual relationship, much like baptism today.

**Point:** No physical ceremony can produce spiritual changes, yet the Jews of Paul's day, like many "religious" people today, trusted in the ceremonies – the outward signs – to the degree that they began ignoring the saving faith required of them.

*And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.*

*Romans 2:27-29*

**Q: In v.1-8 Paul contrasted faith and works. What is he contrasting in v.13-17?**

A: Law and grace.

**Q: What is the key word repeated throughout these verses?**

A: "Promise".

**Q: What do you suppose is being referred to in v.13 when God promises Abraham "he would be heir of the world"?**

A: It's an indication of the glorious kingdom ruled over by the Promised Seed, Christ, and how it was not given in connection with the Law or

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circumcision, but by God's grace alone.

**Q: According to v.14-15, can works and faith exist side-by-side?**

A: No. the Law only brings wrath and reveals sin. The Law completely cancels grace just as works will cancel faith. The two cannot exist side-by-side.

**Q: So how could Abraham be saved by the Law when the Law was not yet given, a belief Jews strongly held about themselves?**

A: Paul concludes that justification comes by grace through faith and therefore **ALL** people – **BOTH** Jews and Gentiles – can be saved. Abraham is not merely the father of the Jews, but “*the father of us all*” (v.16), that is all who follow in his steps of faith.

*Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.*

*Galatians 3:6-9*

**Point:** Justification comes about as the result of grace, not Law.

**[Read v.18-25]**

**Q: In v.1-8 Paul contrasted faith and works and in v.9-17 he contrasted grace and the Law. What is he contrasting in this final section?**

A: Life and death. In v.17 Paul identifies that God “*gives life to the dead*”, and that Abraham and Sarah were “*dead*” in their bodies because of being well past the normal age of child-bearing.

*By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.*

*Hebrews 11:11-12*

**Q: So what is the greater spiritual teaching behind two people who were so old that their flesh was considered dead and yet enabled by God to bear a son?**

A: It's the greater example of the resurrection power of the Spirit at work.

**Q: What things comprised Abraham's faith?**

A: All Abraham had was God's promise, and his faith in God to keep that promise accomplished God's salvation in his life.

**Point:** *This is exactly how it is with each of us as an example of the miracle of salvation. As long as people depend on the flesh and feel they have enough strength to please God they will never be justified. But when we come to the end of ourselves, admit we are dead, and cease to strive in our own efforts, God is able to “raise us from the dead” to give new life and standing before Him. Just as Abraham's simple faith in God's Word justified him, so sinners today are justified.*

<sup>18</sup>In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.” <sup>19</sup>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; <sup>20</sup>yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup>and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. <sup>22</sup>Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. <sup>23</sup>Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, <sup>24</sup>but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup>He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

**Q: Did this come about because Abraham was an exceptional individual of extraordinary importance?**

A: No, that's the point of v.24. We are saved the same way he was, by faith.

**Point:** *When a sinner believes the promise of God's Word he becomes a Christian through the same resurrection power as Abraham.*

**Q: So how does Paul summarize in v.25 the basis for justification?**

A: The death and resurrection of Christ.

**Point:** *The fact that Christ died proves we are sinners, and the fact that God raised Him from the dead proves we are justified by His blood. This is, again, evidence that justification is the result of His resurrection power, not human effort.*

### **Overall Application**

*How do you view your standing before God through Christ? Justification is not just a talking point to be discussed, but an application for Christian living. Many false doctrines and cults have been formed around the misapplication of the basic characteristics of justification. Do you struggle with any of these areas? How might you need to change your behavior or ways to better apply them to your walk?*

- *Justification is by faith, not works. (v.1-8)*
- *Justification is by grace, not Law. (v.9-17)*
- *Justification is by resurrection power, not human effort. (v.18-25)*