

Dr. Bert Jones • North Carolina Capitol Commission • Bert.Jones@capitolcom.org

The gospel of Christ fulfills OT teachings, and this was of special importance to Paul's Jewish readers. It is also vital because all of Scripture, the OT and NT, is God's true word.

Romans 4 details the example of Abraham, the earthly forefather of the Jews. He could not have been justified by the Law, because he lived centuries before the Law was given. But Paul makes clear that Abraham was not justified by works, lest he could then boast about it. There will be no boasting of self before God (*Ephesians 2:9*).

In Genesis 15:6, we are told that Abram (God had not yet changed his name to Abraham) believed God, and God counted to him for righteousness. God justified Abram, declaring him righteous, because of his faith.

God had revealed Himself to Abram, and promised him that he would have as many descendants as there were stars in the heavens. Abram and his wife were already old and had no children, but he believed God although he could not fully understand. God credited righteousness to his account.

Verses 4 and 5 contrast works and faith in reference to the plan of salvation. If someone works, he is entitled to his pay because he earned it. But being justified is a matter of grace, not payment of a debt. God is no one's debtor.

The justified sinner admits he cannot earn salvation by merit or goodness. He puts his faith and trust in God and believes His word. The justified one recognizes that all of the merit lies in Christ, the object of his faith.

David is another example of an OT saint justified by God because of his faith. By referring to Abraham and David, the passage chooses two men with whom God made great covenants – two men the Jews would count among the greatest in Israel's history. Paul reminds the reader of David's words in Psalm 32:1-2. He notes that forgiveness is not earned but by God's grace, and that the Lord forgives sin and does not count it against the justified sinner (meaning that he has a righteous standing before God).

In verses 9-12, we read that justification did not come from circumcision. Abraham was justified before he was circumcised. The circumcision later was merely an outward sign of his obedience and his right standing with God.

Then in verses 13-17, it is explained that blessing and justification does not come through the law. When God made His covenant with Abraham, it was not conditional upon keeping the law. In fact, the law was not even given until 430 years later! (*Galatians 3:17*)

If we can gain God's blessing based on law-keeping, then faith is unnecessary and God's promise would be worthless. The Jews thought they inherited blessing by having the Law, but God gave the Law so that people would recognize transgression (in other words, see sin for what it is). An act can be inherently wrong, but when a law forbids it, it becomes a transgression.

While Abraham was physically the forefather of the Jews, v. 16-17 emphasizes him as a spiritual father of all believers who would also believe God, and indeed a father of many nations. Just because God had chosen Israel as His chosen earthly people did not mean they would be the only recipients of His grace and mercy.

When God renewed His promise to Abraham, Abraham was now 100 years old. He knew it was physically impossible for he and his wife Sarah (age 90) to have a child. But apart from human hope, he still believed God. He trusted in God's promise although he did not know how it could be fulfilled.

This narrative of Abraham being justified by faith is written for the benefit of all who will believe God. When we believe God and trust in His plan of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone – like Abraham, our faith is reckoned for righteousness. God will justify us – He will declare us righteous – and we are reconciled to Him.

The fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead confirms that the work of salvation is finished and the price (the "wages of sin") has been paid. Christ was delivered up because of our offenses, and raised because of our justification (v. 25). Our offenses (sin) were the reason that He had to die. But His resurrection has resulted in our justification. The demands of sin have been fully satisfied.

\* \* \* \* \*

Abraham was called a "friend of God" (*James 2:23*) and David a "man after God's own heart" (*1Sam. 13:14, Acts 13:22*). We are God's friend, after His heart, when we believe Him and place our faith in Him and His Son.

## Romans 4

## Abraham Justified by Faith

What then shall we say that our forefather Abraham discovered in this matter? <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 accounted to him as righteousness.” [Gen. 15:6]

<sup>4</sup>Now when a man works, the wages are not accounted as a gift but as an obligation.

## David Celebrates the Same Truth

<sup>5</sup>But to the one who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted as righteousness.

<sup>6</sup>David says the same thing when he describes the blessedness of the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:

<sup>7</sup>“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; <sup>8</sup>Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not count against him.”<sup>1</sup> [Ps. 32:1-2]

## Abraham Justified Before Circumcision

<sup>9</sup>Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.

<sup>10</sup>How then was it accounted to him? Was it before or after he was circumcised? It was before he was circumcised, not after.

<sup>11</sup>He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be accounted to them as well, <sup>12</sup>and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our forefather Abraham had before he was circumcised.

## The Promise Granted Through Faith

<sup>13</sup>For the promise to Abraham and to his descendants that he would be the heir of the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

<sup>14</sup>For if it is those who live by the law that are to be the heirs, then faith has no value and the promise is worthless.

<sup>15</sup>For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

<sup>16</sup>Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace, and may be guaranteed to all of Abraham’s descendants – not only to those who abide by the Law, but also to those who have the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

<sup>17</sup>As it is written, “I have made you a father of many nations” [Gen. 17:5] in the presence of God who he believed, who gives life to the dead and can call into existence things that do not yet exist.

<sup>18</sup>Against all hope, Abraham believed in hope and so he became the father of many nations, just as God had said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” [Gen. 15:5]

<sup>19</sup>He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body was almost as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.

<sup>20</sup>He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup>being fully convinced that God had the power to do what He had promised.

<sup>22</sup>And that is why his faith “was accounted to him as righteousness.”

<sup>23</sup>Now these words “it was accounted to him” were not written for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup>but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness if we believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup>He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised for our justification.

## Memory Verse for the Week

Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3 – *Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*