

Romans 3:31-4:25  
Justification – Part 2: Justification Has Always Been By Faith Alone

Introduction

1. In the first part of Romans, Paul laid out his case in regard to God’s judgment and wrath being poured out on all men, Jew and Gentile alike, in response to sin
2. Last week he began to lay out his case for justification by faith alone
  - a. The first thing we learned was that Justification by faith alone reveals God’s righteousness
  - b. We also learned that justification by faith alone eliminates boasting
3. This week Paul continues his case for justification by faith alone by focusing on the OT, especially Abraham, to show that justification has always been by faith alone and never by religious works (including the Law):
  - a. We have to remember that Paul’s primary audience at this point is still the self-righteous Jew who felt that works of the Law not only protected him from God’s judgement, but also justified him before God.
  - b. So, in this midst of his defense for justification through faith alone, and in the last verse of chapter 3, Paul anticipates a question from his Jewish readers (3:31): **“Do we then nullify (make void, put an end to) the law through faith?”**
  - c. Paul’s response is absolutely not: **“May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law”**
  - d. Another way to understand Paul’s words here is that what he was writing actually validated the OT Law—it confirmed what the Law actually taught
  - e. To support such a claim, Paul will spend the next 25 verses discussing the faith of Abraham and provides four proofs that justification is by faith alone

A. Proof #1: Abraham was declared righteous as a result of his faith as an act of God’s grace (4:1-8)

1. Paul begins with a question (1): **“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?”**
  - a. Common Jewish belief was/is that it was Abraham’s adherence to the Law through which he acquired righteousness
    - 1) Paul debunks this in Galatians 3 by citing the fact that the Law didn’t come until over 400 years after Abraham!
    - 2) Here, however, Paul uses a different argument
  - b. Abraham could not boast in works (2): **“For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.”**
    - 1) The phrase **“he has something to boast about”** implies that if works could justify then certainly Abraham would have something to boast about
    - 2) However, the phrase **“but not before God”** negates even the possibility of works based justification and boasting
  - c. Instead, it was Abraham’s belief (e.g. faith) that resulted in his justification (3): **“For what does the Scripture say? “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”**
    - 1) **“believed”** is the verb form of pistis, faith.

- 2) Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 which is a reference to Abraham believing God's promise that he would have a son and his descendants would be as numerous as the stars.
  - 3) The text tells us that since Abraham believed God, God "**credited**" to Abraham righteousness:
    - a) The Greek word *logizomai* is used 11 times in this chapter
    - b) In this context, it means to make a deposit into someone's account
    - c) In other words, God bestowed upon Abraham the status of righteousness
  - 4) And, lest there be any confusion, this act of justifying Abraham was purely an act of God's grace (4-5):
    - a) When someone works for something, his reward is not given according to grace, but according to obligation (lit. Greek; 4): "**Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.**"
    - b) However, it's the one who does not work, but rather believes, to whom God credits righteousness as a free gift (5): "**But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,**"
2. As further support for this, Paul quotes David (6-8): "**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."**"
  3. The point of this proof is simply this: Abraham wasn't justified because of any religious works, because God's Word claims he was justified based on his faith

B. Proof #2: Abraham's faith came prior to God's requirement for circumcision (4:9-12)
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1. Paul begins this segment with another questions (9): "**Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also?**"
  - a. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant which God gave to Abraham, and ultimately to all Jews
  - b. The Jews believed that circumcision was not only necessary for salvation, but believed that such "works of the Law" justified them before God
2. Paul answers the question by showing that God credited righteousness to Abraham BEFORE he was circumcised (10): "**How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;**"
3. In fact, circumcision was given simply as a SIGN of Abraham's righteousness, not as a mean to righteousness (11): "**and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised**"
4. God designed this specifically so that Abraham could serve as the spiritual father to both Jew and Gentile, the circumcised as well as the uncircumcised, as long as they have the same faith as Abraham (11b-12): "**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.**"

5. So, the point of this proof is simple: justification cannot be based upon any religious work because it wasn't for Abraham.

C. Proof #3: God's promise to Abraham could not be guaranteed if it were based upon works (4:13-17)

1. If only those who have the Law (e.g. Jews and their works of the Law) inherit the promise made to Abraham, then the promise has already been nullified (14): **"For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;"**
  - a. The reason is that the Law results in wrath so it cannot ensure receiving the inheritance (15): **"for the Law brings about wrath,"**
  - b. The second phrase, **"but where there is no law, there also is no violation"**, needs some explanation:
    - 1) A more literal rendering is **"for where there is no law, there is no transgression"**
    - 2) This verse is not saying that there is no "sin" without the Law, but no "transgression" or violation (Greek parabasis; to act in a way that directly violates a recognized law)
    - 3) This second phrase explains WHY the Law brings wrath
      - Without the Law there can be no violation of the Law
      - However, God gave the Law to the Jews
      - They violate that Law so there is wrath
      - **See Romans 7:7-11**
2. However, since God's promise is based on faith, it can be guaranteed for **ALL** those who share Abraham's faith (16-17):
  - a. This is because faith makes it a gift of God's grace (not something one must work for or earn; 16): **"For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace,"**
  - b. This ensures that the promise is available to ALL those who have faith, not just the Jews but the gentiles as well (16b): **"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,"**
3. The point of this proof is also pretty simple: if God had based justification on our abilities there is no way He could guarantee that promise. The only way He could guarantee the promise was to base it on His grace and make it available only through faith.

D. Proof #4: Abraham's faith is an example for all those who believe in God (4:18-25)

1. Abraham's faith was unwavering, in spite of his circumstances (18-21): **"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."**
  - a. He remained strong in faith in spite of the fact that he and Sarah were too old to have a child (19)
  - b. Instead, he **"grew strong in faith"** by choosing to hold on to the promise of God (20)
  - c. He was **"fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform"** (21)
  - d. That is the heart and soul of faith—believing that God can and will do exactly what He promises!

2. Abraham's faith was recorded in God's Word for our benefit (22-24): **"Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. 23 Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, 24 but for our sake also,"**
3. And, just like Abraham, righteousness will be credited to those who also believe the New Promise (24-25): **"to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification."**
4. The point of this proof is that God didn't record the events of Abraham's life just to serve as recognition for Abraham. Rather, He included the events as proof to ALL MEN that justification comes not by works, but by faith in Jesus Christ

Conclusion
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1. When Paul began his three-part treatise on justification he began by declaring that justification is by faith alone
2. This ran contrary to what most Jews believed; they believed that righteousness came through their heritage as a Jew and/or performing the rites and rituals of the OT Law
3. To counter that claim, and bolster his assertion that justification comes purely by faith, he points back to the OT and cites the example of Abraham
4. He gave us four proofs that Abraham was credited with righteousness not by works but by his faith
  - a. The text actually states it: "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness"
  - b. Abraham's faith, and declaration of righteousness by God, came prior to any religious rights or practices
  - c. God could only guarantee the promise to Abraham if he based it on faith rather than works
  - d. Finally, Abraham's faith was recorded as a witness and example to us today
5. Just as the basis of Abraham's faith was the promise God made to him, the basis of our faith are the new promises God has made to us in Jesus Christ
6. And, just like Abraham, God will recon righteousness to all those who express faith in Him, the One who raised Jesus from the dead.