

44. The Book of Romans 4:6-13

Paul's Epistle to the Romans
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(2-28-24)

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In our study in Romans, we are currently in the second major section of the book—a section that is dealing with the doctrine of **'Justification.'**

In this section Paul is basically telling us how fallen sinners can be justified or made right with God—or in other words, how can they have fellowship with Him now and be accepted by Him into heaven someday?

In verses 21-31 of Chapter 3, Paul introduces them to the doctrine of justification by faith.

And now, in Chapter 4 he is going to illustrate justification by faith through the life of their greatest patriarch—Abraham!

Romans 4:1–3 (NKJV)

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 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 accounted to him for righteousness.*"

As we said last time, Jewish pride concerning Abraham was based on the belief that he was justified (made right with God) by his works. The Jews believed that Abraham was sinless before God—that he kept the Law perfectly and intuitively even before it was given to Moses 500 years later.

The rabbis taught that this was why God chose him to be the father of the Jewish nation because he was an absolutely righteous man—he was worthy! But Paul is arguing that if Abraham *was* justified by his works he *would* have something to boast about—but that's not what the Jewish Scriptures have to say with regard to Abraham's righteousness.

So, to debunk the false teaching that Abraham was righteous because of what he did and how he lived—Paul takes them back to the place in Genesis where God originally pronounced Abraham righteous—Genesis 15:6.

It says that when Abraham placed his faith in God and His promise, that God—'*accounted it to him for righteousness.*' The word **'accounted'** was an accounting term that dealt with a transaction taking place.

In other words, the moment Abraham placed his faith in God a transaction took place—God took the sin of Abraham and transferred it to Christ's account (which He paid for on Calvary's Cross)—and took the righteousness of Christ from His account and transferred it to Abraham's account.

Romans 4:4–5 (NKJV)

⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. ⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

When Paul talks about how God will justify the ‘**ungodly**’ by faith—he is still talking about Abraham.

Paul is reminding his Jewish readers that Abraham (Abram) was an idol worshipping Gentile when God called him to leave the Ur of the Chaldees (modern Iraq) and go to the Land of Promise (Canaan).

Paul’s point is that—far from being a righteous man, who was so good by the life he lived and the things he did in obeying God (as the rabbi’s taught) that on the basis of his righteousness—God declared him righteous. “O no” Paul tells his readers, “Abraham was ungodly when God declared him righteous—not according to his works but according to his faith.”

Abraham wasn’t a perfect man—as you read the account of his life in the Book of Genesis, he had numerous lapses of faith and times of disobedience—yet God still justified him by his faith!

As we said last week, the rabbi’s had it backwards—God didn’t justify Abraham because he did a lot of righteous things, he lived righteously because God justified him (saved him).

Paul’s point is that Abraham was justified (declared righteous) by his faith in Genesis 15:6—35 years before he offered Isaac to the Lord in Genesis 22.

Paul now turns to David (another hero of the Jewish faith and a man who was born after the law of Moses was given) to show that David in Psalm 32 (written after his sin with Bathsheba)—is affirming the doctrine of justification:

Romans 4:6–8 (NKJV)

⁶ just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ⁷ “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; ⁸ Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”

Why would Paul now turn to David to make his point? I mean David was a deeply flawed individual—so why use him to illustrate the doctrine of justification by faith?

Because he *was* a flawed individual—and the only kind of people that need justification by faith are flawed and sinful people (everyone!). But Paul now turns to David to make his point in part because he knew how much his Jewish readers loved David—that he was at the heart of every institution that the Jews held dear.

One author put it this way:

*“David is their shepherd boy, the representative of all the toiling classes.
He is her musician, the sweet psalmist of Israel, the nation’s worship leader.
He is Israel’s greatest warrior, the conqueror of Goliath as the symbol of their greatest enemies.
He is her king, the great monarch ruling over the nation with great majesty.
He is her priest substituting a broken and contrite spirit for the blood of bulls and rams.
And he is her prophet speaking forth the Words of God to the nation.”*

David represented the heart and soul of the nation—he was Israel’s ‘golden boy.’

Paul has already shown that their greatest patriarch, Abraham, was justified by faith and now he wants to further demonstrate that their greatest king (out of his own mouth) preached justification by faith also. Look, as great as David was, he broke at least 3 of the 10 commandments—he coveted Bathsheba; he committed adultery; and he murdered Uriah her husband to cover his sin—all in one episode of his life!

The law made no provision for *premeditated* sin—and all 3 of David’s sins were premeditated.

David was guilty with no hope—there were no ‘loopholes’ he could take advantage of—no temporary insanity plea he could use—he was guilty and the punishment for these premeditated sins was death.

But when God sent Nathan the prophet to confront David over his sin—David responded, “*I have sinned against the Lord.*” To which Nathan said to him, “*The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.*” (2 Samuel 12:13) It was then that David wrote Psalm 32 praising God for His mercy in not imputing David’s sin to his account—which Paul quotes in Romans 4:7-8:

Romans 4:7–8 (AMP)

⁷ Blessed *and* happy *and* to be envied are those whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered up *and* completely buried. ⁸ Blessed *and* happy *and* to be envied is the person of whose sin the Lord will take no account *nor* reckon it against him.

The reason God can forgive us and not impute our sins to our account—

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

But God demonstrated through Abraham that people were saved pre-Moses through faith—and through David, God demonstrated that people were saved after Moses by faith.

Now at this point, Paul anticipates that his Jewish readers would be thinking—“*If you say we’re saved by faith, then why did God command us to be circumcised? What was the point of circumcision if it doesn’t guarantee our entrance into heaven?*”

They believed that when a male child was circumcised—that placed him into the covenant God made with Abraham and saved him.

They believed that men were made right with God through the physical act of circumcision—in other words, ‘*salvation through surgery!*’

Acts 15:1 (NKJV)

¹ And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Galatians 5:1–7 (NKJV)

¹ Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. ² Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. ³ And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. ⁴ You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵ For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

⁷ You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

Salvation through circumcision was so imbedded in their thinking and so ingrained in Jewish culture that Paul had no choice but to constantly come against it in his writings—

Romans 4:9–10 (NKJV)

⁹ Does this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.

Here Paul seizes on a historical fact that most of us would never have noticed—that Abraham was justified (Genesis 15:6)—14 years before he was ever circumcised (Genesis 17:24).

If the father of the nation of Israel could be justified while he was still uncircumcised, then the question arises, “*Why can’t other uncircumcised people be justified—like the Gentiles?*”

But it does beg the question—*what was the point in God giving the Jewish people the rite of circumcision?*

Paul tells us why in verse 11—It was given as both a sign and a seal—

Romans 4:11a (NKJV)

¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still uncircumcised*...

Circumcision was not the *cause* of Abraham’s justification—it was merely an outward **sign** in his flesh that he *had been* justified by faith. Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, just like water baptism is the sign of the New Covenant—and a wedding ring is the sign of the marriage covenant. (Explain)

In addition to being a sign, circumcision was a seal—“**a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised.**”

As one author put it—

“A sign points to the existence of that which it signifies. A seal authenticates, confirms, certifies, or guarantees the genuineness of that which is signified.

Circumcision confirmed to Abraham that he was regarded and treated by God as righteous through faith.

Circumcision was a seal of the righteousness of Abraham’s faith—a seal of the righteousness which he obtained on the basis of faith.

Because Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, he can be the father of other uncircumcised people—that is, of believing Gentiles. They can be justified the same way he was—by faith.”

Romans 4:11b (NKJV)

¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still uncircumcised*, **that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also.**

When Paul says that Abraham is ‘**the father**’ of believing Gentiles—he isn’t saying that he is literally and physically the father of Gentile believers. It’s simply Paul’s way of saying that Gentile believers are the spiritual children of Abraham because his faith, in a sense, has given birth to their faith.

Abraham didn’t give birth to Jews and Gentiles as his *physical* children (that would be their first birth through Adam)—but rather his faith was used by God to give birth to unbelieving Jews and Gentiles who became his *spiritual* children by their faith and members of the family of God (which spoke of their second birth—i.e., ‘*born-again in the Spirit*’).

The bottom line is that Paul is saying unequivocally that salvation is not the result of ‘*sacramentalism*.’

Many churchgoers today are basing their salvation from hell on infant baptism—just as the Jews were trusting in circumcision—

1 Peter 3:21 (NKJV)

²¹ There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

Deuteronomy 30:6 (NKJV)

⁶ And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Jeremiah 4:4 (NKJV)

⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench *it*, Because of the evil of your doings.”

Romans 4:11–12 (NKJV)

¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, ¹² **and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.***

God’s purpose was that Abraham would be the father of a new nation consisting of all who *believe* and are thereby justified by faith—this included both the **uncircumcised** (Gentiles) and the **circumcised** (Jews).

But because the Jews believed that circumcision saved them, Paul directs most of his comments to them by telling them that outward rituals like circumcision *won’t* save them—they must *‘walk in the footsteps’* of the faith that Abraham had in his heart—

Romans 2:28–29 (NKJV)

²⁸ **For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but *he is a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is not from men but from God.****

One pastor had this to say—

“Obviously, then, the rite of circumcision, which many Jews rely on for salvation, contributes in no way to one’s status before God. It gives them no special standing before Him because they must be declared righteous on the basis of faith in God. Just like the rite of water baptism doesn’t save those living under the New Covenant. It also is merely a sign of the new birth—don’t put your faith in a ritual.”

Romans 4:13 (NKJV)

¹³ **For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.**

This whole section revolves around the promise that God made to Abraham—it is the key to understanding the passage. God actually gave one promise to Abraham that contained several different elements—the promise is listed in 4 places in Genesis—

Genesis 12:3 (NKJV)

³ I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 15:5–6 (NKJV)

⁵ Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” ⁶ And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 17:4–8 (NKJV)

⁴ “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. ⁸ Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

Genesis 22:17–18 (NKJV)

¹⁷ blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸ In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

One commentator breaks down the promise God gave to Abraham identifying each part:

“**The promise to Abraham** was embodied in God’s covenant with Abraham, in which the patriarch was told that his descendants would be heirs of the world (Gen. 12:3; 15:6; 18:18; 22:18). In analyzing God’s promise to Abraham, four significant factors emerge.

First, the promise involved a land (see Gen. 15:18–21) in which Abraham would live but that would not be possessed until some five centuries later, when Joshua led the Israelites in their conquest of Canaan.

Second, the promise also involved a people, who would be so numerous that they could not be numbered, like the dust of the earth and the stars in the sky (Gen. 13:16; 15:5). Eventually, Abraham would become the “father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5; cf. Rom. 4:17).

Third, the promise involved a blessing of the entire world through Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 12:3).

Fourth, the promise would be fulfilled in the giving of a Redeemer, who would be a descendant of Abraham through whom the whole world would be blessed by the provision of salvation. That promise to Abraham was, in essence, a preaching to him of the gospel.

The promise that God gave to Abraham was that he would be the father of a great multitude (hence the name change from Abram—“*Exalted Father*” to Abraham—“*Father of a Multitude*”) This great multitude would be a new nation, the people of God. How would people be a part of this new nation? They would have to be born into it the same way Abraham was—not physically, but spiritually by faith.”

Romans 4:13 (NKJV)

¹³ For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.*

Paul wants his Jewish readers to know that Abraham was justified by believing God’s promise, not by keeping God’s law—for the law itself wouldn’t be given through Moses for another 430 years (Gal. 3:17).

Okay, but does this promise God gave to Abraham have any relevance to our lives today?

Galatians 3:6–9 (NKJV)

⁶ just as Abraham *“believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”*⁷ Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”*⁹ So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

Galatians 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3:26–29 (NKJV)

²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The promise God gave to Abraham was a unilateral, unconditional promise (covenant) that he received by faith. (Genesis 15:9-18)

The promise to Abraham was given purely through God’s grace—Abraham didn’t earn it or merit it.

This is the same unconditional promise God made with us through Jesus under the New Covenant.

Today, God justifies the ungodly because they believe His gracious promise (eternal life through His Son), not because they obey His Law—as we have said, the Law was not given to save us, but to show us our sin and our need to be saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

The expression **‘heir of the world’** means that he would be the father of believing Gentiles as well as of Jews (4:11, 12), that he would be the father of many nations (4:17, 18) and not just of the Jewish nation.

In its fullest sense the promise will be fulfilled when the Lord Jesus, Abraham’s Seed, returns to earth, establishes God’s Kingdom and reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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