

Chapter Thirty-one
Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans
The Illustration of Justification through Faith

“¹ What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? ² For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. ³ For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. ⁴ Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. ⁵ But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. ⁶ Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, ⁷ *Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.* ⁸ *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin*” (Romans 4:1-8).

As we have already discussed in previous lessons, justification is the result of the sacrifice of Christ manward. Justification is the judicial act of God whereby He removes the condemnation of sin upon the believer and imputes the righteousness of Christ to that believer. As we will see in God’s illustrations of justification, the imputation of His righteousness to the believer is the central aspect of justification.

In order for anyone to be saved, he must be restored to the righteousness Adam had prior to the fall. The condemnation of sin must be satisfied (propitiation) and righteousness must be restored (justification). In Romans 3:31, when Paul says the Law is established through faith, he is referring to the fact that the finished work of Christ in fulfilling all the Law for all of mankind has put fallen mankind back on their feet. Once the Law condemned, it had no more purpose. It could not save or redeem. Once Christ fulfilled the Law, its demands could be established in the believer’s life through the enabling grace of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

William Newell in his book **Romans Verse By Verse** makes this comment on Romans 3:31:

“In the wilderness a man was found gathering sticks to make a fire on the Sabbath day. Now, the Law had said, ‘Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day.’ How, then, was this Law to be “established”? By letting the Law-breaker off? No! By securing his promise to keep the Law in the future? No! By finding someone who has kept this commandment always, perfectly, and letting his obedience be reckoned to the Law-breaker? No, in no wise! How then was the Law established? You know very well. All Israel were commanded by Jehovah to stone the man to death (Numbers 15:33). Thus and thus only was the commandment of Jehovah established by the execution of the penalty.”

Christ crucified was the only way to establish the Law and pay the penalty of mankind’s sin. Mankind’s unrighteousness and unfaithfulness to God’s commands demanded that justice prevail. Christ went to the Cross to pay our sin penalty. Once that was done, He could provide the repenting sinner His righteousness as a gift of salvation offered by grace and received through faith in the finished work of Calvary.

Although both Abraham and David lived prior to the incarnation and prior to the finished work of the Cross, they were both saved by faith the same way anyone is saved today. They looked forward in faith to the coming of Messiah. We look backward in faith to the Cross. They were justified through faith (not works) the same way we are.

Abraham as an illustration of the imputation of righteousness (justification; 4:1-4)

The subject of Romans 4:1-4 is what Abraham discovered regarding God’s requirements to be justified. Paul is referring to what happened in Genesis 15:1-6.

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward. ² And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus? ³ And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. ⁴ And, behold, the word of the LORD *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. ⁵ And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. ⁶ And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:1-6).

The promise of God to Abraham was typically fulfilled in the birth of Isaac. However, Jesus Christ was the “seed” the LORD was referring too (this is emphasized when the LORD replaced the offering of Isaac with the Ram, Genesis 22:1-14). The “seed” that would come through Abraham was the Messiah. The composite of those born from that “Seed” goes way beyond the nation of Israel to all those “born again” through faith in Jesus Christ.

⁶ Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. ⁷ Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. ⁸ And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed. ⁹ So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. ¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. ¹¹ But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, *it is* evident: for, The just shall live by faith. ¹² And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. ¹³ Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree: ¹⁴ That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. ¹⁵ Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though *it be* but a man’s covenant, yet *if it be* confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. ¹⁶ Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Galatians 3:6-16).

Paul has already stated the imputation of the righteousness of God (justification) has been testified too by both the “law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Romans 3:21-22). Abraham is used (along with David) to illustrate this point. Abraham probably believed Isaac was going to be the Redeemer (just as Eve probably thought Cain was, Genesis 4:1, which literally translated states Eve believed she had given birth to Jehovah).

What had Abraham discovered” (Romans 4:1-2)? Abraham discovered justification (imputation of God righteousness) by grace through faith. Abraham discovered the truth of Ephesians 2:4-9 (and Titus 3:5).

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, ⁵ Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) ⁶ And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: ⁷ That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:4-9).

Abraham’s faith was accounted for righteousness (Romans 4:3).

The word “counted” is from the Greek word *logizomai* (log-id'-zom-ah-ee). It refers to a thing availing for or equivalent to something as having the like force and weight. The idea is that Abraham’s faith in the coming Redeemer was given equivalence before God of being righteous.

This act of giving righteousness in exchange for a simple act of faith is a gift of grace, not a reward for works (Romans 4:4).

Justification (the imputation of God's righteousness) is totally of grace and totally apart from any religious ritual, religious ceremony or good deeds. If a person works for something, that which is received in compensation for that work is deserved. We have already established what man deserves and what he does not deserve (Romans 6:23).

“¹⁹ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.²¹ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;²² Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:19-23).

Because all men are sinners, we have come short of deserving God's favor. We are guilty of sin and deserve condemnation. God's grace reaches out to us and offers us the gift of the imputation of His righteousness. The only way to receive this gift of justification is to completely abandon any trust in any religious ritual or good deeds to earn God's favor (repent of “dead works,” Hebrews 6:1) and trust absolutely in the finished work of Christ. In order to receive justification as a free gift of God's grace, one must *stop* trying to earn it or buy it. If a person continues trying to earn justification through religious works it only manifests he does not have faith.

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1. Discuss how the imputation of God's righteousness to the believer relates to the doctrine of justification. _____

2. Discuss what Paul means in Romans 3:31 when he states the Law is established through faith. Be thorough. _____

3. Abraham and David lived prior to the coming of Christ. Discuss how they could be saved just like we are saved today. _____

4. What is the subject of Romans 4:1-4? _____

5. Read Genesis 15:1-6 and Galatians 3:6-16. Compare these two portions of Scripture and discuss what Abraham believed that was counted to him for righteousness. _____

6. How does Romans 4:1-8 relate to what Paul has already stated in Romans 3:21-22? _____

7. What did Abraham discover (Romans 4:1) that every person must discover? _____

8. Discuss the meaning of the word "counted" (Greek: *logizomai*; log-id'-zom-ahee) in Romans 4:3 and what is involved. _____

9. Fully discuss Romans 4:4 and why justification must be an act of God's grace received through absolute faith in the finished work of Christ totally apart from any religious ritual, ceremony or good deeds. _____

- 10 Can anyone expecting God to allow him/her into heaven as a reward for obedience considered him/herself to be saved? Discuss your answer and why you think it is Scriptural. _____
