

CLASS 4: JUSTIFIED BY FAITH! JESUS' ATONEMENT, THE ONLY WAY EVER (Romans 3:21 – Ch. 4)

III. Justification by faith alone, 3:21 - ch. 4

Major contrast from previous section, introduced by *nuni de*, “but now”

Having shown the need for a divine work of salvation, Paul devotes the heart of this epistle to showing how God himself provides salvation: his righteousness will stand for that of the sinner. How is this righteousness of God to be obtained? Only through faith; no deeds of the law can merit this salvation. Paul shows how God’s salvation has always been obtained by faith alone, especially using the OT examples of Abraham and David.

1. God’s righteousness by faith, 3:21-31

The great divide in Romans is between verses 20 and 21. Where man has failed, God has provided a way; through Christ’s atonement he will supply his own righteousness to those who rely on him, who have “faith in his blood.”

Since God himself brings salvation, there can be no boasting on our part. We can never live up to the law’s expectations; we are justified (declared righteous in God’s sight; cf. Prov 17:15; Isa 5:23) by faith. Faith does not deny the law; rather, it establishes the law in its perfection.

God’s righteousness revealed in the gospel

²¹But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it- ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

“But now” – the great divide!

Now – probably the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ

Produces righteousness:

- Imputed righteousness – Rom 4:3-6; 5:19
- Actual righteousness – Rom 6:13, 18; 8:4

Law and prophets speak of it (Rom 1:2; Gen 15:6; Hab 2:4; Ps 32:1-2)

“Through faith” – means of obtaining righteousness

“All who believe” – Jew and Gentile; “no distinction”

V. 23 – universal sin and judgments (ch. 1-3)

V. 24 – all who are justified (declared righteous by God) must be by grace, purchased by Christ (“redemption” – buy, set free by paying a price)

V. 25 – “propitiation” (*hiasterion*) – “expiation, satisfaction”

Heb 9:5 – “mercy seat,” “atonement cover (NIV)”

Jesus’ blood – the ground or basis of justification

Faith – the instrument or means of justification

“Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.”
(WCF 11:2)

God’s justice upheld

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God had overlooked former sins – OT saints

Animal sacrifices insufficient

Jesus’ atonement shows that God was just to justify the OT saints

So God can still be just when he “justifies” (declares to be righteous) sinners who simply have faith

Faith the only instrument of justification

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one. He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

We cannot boast because we have no good works

Boast only in the cross of Christ (Gal 6:14)

The “law of faith” = the principle of faith – we are justified apart from our works

V. 28, “justified by faith apart from works of the law” = Gal 2:16

(Note: Paul and Peter agreed on this)

Vv. 29-30 – since God is one, his way of salvation is one: “by faith” and “through faith”

V. 31, caution about dispensing with the law – law is upheld because Jesus perfectly obeyed it, and his righteousness is imputed to us, and because law’s penalty is carried out in the atonement

2. Abraham and David justified by faith, ch. 4

Paul shows that this truth is proved by the OT. Abraham received God’s justification because of his faith (vv. 3 and 22, quoting Gen 15:6). Abraham was not justified because he submitted to the law of circumcision; he exercised this faith and was declared justified before he was circumcised. In this passage, Paul concentrates on the time in Abraham’s life when he believed God’s promise made to him and Sarah, when he was about 100 years old (Gen 17). Incidentally, Rom. 4 adds light to the story told in Genesis, showing that Abraham did after all believe God’s promise.

Likewise David, who sinned and broke God’s law, still rejoiced to know that he was justified by faith. Paul proves this by reference to Psalm 32 (Rom 4:6-8). He obviously was not saved by his works, but through faith.

The way of salvation through faith was just the same in the OT as it is in the NT.

Abraham justified by faith

^{4:1} What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather 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 counted to him as righteousness."

Was Abraham justified by works? No. Nothing to boast about.

No such statement in OT

Abraham sinned (Gen 12:13; 16:4; 17:17-18; 20:2; 25:6)

Quotation from Gen 15:6

Abraham justified by faith – Gen 15:6 found 4 times in the Bible:

1. When he left Ur (Gen 11:31) and then Haran (Gen 12:4; 75 years old) – stated in Gal 3:6-8 (referring to Gen 12:3)
2. When he saw the stars (Gen 15:6)
3. When he received the promise of Isaac and was circumcised (Rom 4:3; about 100 years old, v. 19; cf. Gen 17:17, 24; 21:5)
4. When he offered up Isaac (Gen 22:1-19) – stated in Jas 2:23

General principle of faith over works

⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

Sermon series by Jonathan Edwards, "Justification by Faith," used this text; started the first Great Awakening

Notice lack of works: not "to the one who works"; "to the one who does not work"; "but trusts"; "the ungodly"; "his faith"

David justified by faith

⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: ⁷ "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

Quotation from Ps 32:1-2, after David's sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah the Hittite

"Counts" = "imputes"

"Imputes righteousness apart from works"

Does not impute "sins," "sin"

Abraham justified by faith prior to his circumcision

⁹ *Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.* ¹⁰ *How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.* ¹¹ *He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.*

If also applies to Gentiles, then must be available without circumcision

Abraham used as an example

Circumcised when he was 99 years old (v. 19; Gen 17:24)

But justified previously, when he was about 85 years old (v. 3; Gen 15:6; 16:16)

Justified in conjunction with his faith, not with his circumcision

Circumcision a sign of his faith (Deut 30:6; Jer 4:4) and a seal of God's acceptance of him as righteous in God's sight (Greek *sphragis*; cf. 1 Cor 9:2)

Gentile and Jewish believers' faith similar to Abraham's, the father of Jew and Gentile

The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, ¹² *and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.*

Gentiles by nature not a part of Abraham's family (Eph 2:11-12)

Now they are a part of Abraham's family by faith (v. 11; Gal 3:9, 14, 26-29)

Abraham the father of Jewish believers (v. 12)

The Law inadequate apart from faith

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring- not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"- in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Promise – “to be heir of the world” (Gen 17:5-6; 22:17)

“The Law” in this passage is the commandment for circumcision, standing for the entire ceremonial law as well

Total obedience to this law would render faith in God’s redemption unnecessary (v. 14)

The Law brings wrath, judgment for disobedience (v. 15)

Only hope for us all – justification by faith (v. 16)

Abraham, the father of the faithful

Stated in Scripture (v. 17; Gen 17:5)

God “gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that do not exist”

Used to support the Gentiles’ being justified by faith

Illustrated by Abraham himself, the conception and birth of Isaac (following)

The nature of saving faith seen in Abraham

¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

Abraham an excellent example of saving faith

Paul uses the same story as the giving of circumcision, when Abraham 99 years old (Gen 17)

18, “hope against hope” – an impossible dream

19, “his own body now dead” (99 years old; Gen 25:1-2, 5-6 may be earlier, or may be revived vitality)

“Barrenness of Sarah’s womb” – 89 years old

Strong faith

- “Upon hope he believed” (18)
- “Being not weak in faith” (19)
- “Did not doubt, hesitate” (20)
- “Was strengthened in faith” (20)
- “Being fully persuaded” (21)
- “His faith” (22)

Does this contradict dialog in Gen 17?

- Abraham’s subsequent obedience – Gen 17:22-27
- Fathering Isaac – Gen 21:1-5

Abraham’s faith applied to us

²³ But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

“It was counted” = “it was reckoned” = “it was imputed”

V. 24, written in Gen 15:6 for our benefit

Our faith defined – “believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord”

Bringing life from death, just like Isaac

V. 25, “on account of” is better than “for” (*dia* plus accusative), as in NKJV

“Delivered up ‘on account of’ our sins” – our sins caused Jesus’ death

“Raised ‘on account of’ our justification” – our justification enabled Jesus’ resurrection; God accepted his sacrifice in our behalf