

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

INTRODUCTION

A. Outline of Romans

1. Introduction (1:1-17)
2. The need for God's righteousness (1:18-3:20)
3. The provision of righteousness from God (3:21-4:25)
 - a. A description of justification (3:21-26)
 - b. Introductory comments on justification by faith in Christ alone (3:27-31)
 - c. A defense of justification by faith from the Old Testament (4:1-25)
 - 1) Abraham and David were justified by faith (1-8)
 - 2)

B. Comments on Romans 4:1-8

1. William Barclay, *The Rabbis were so in love with their theory of works that they insisted that it was because of his works that Abraham was chosen, although it meant that they had to argue that he knew the law by anticipation, since it had not yet come.*
2. John Witmer, *The Apostle Paul had presented his case that God declares people righteous on the principle of faith instead of works. If his position is true, he should be able to illustrate it from the past. This he did with Abraham, the patriarch of Israel, and David as well.*
3. Grant Osborne, *The message of the chapter is that God at all times (the old covenant as well as the new) centered his salvation on faith commitment to him.*
4. William Barclay, *Paul has just been seeking to prove that what makes us right with God is not the performance of the works that the law lays down, but the simple trust of complete submission which takes God at his word and believes that he still loves us even when we have done nothing to deserve that love. The immediate reaction of the Jews was: 'This is something entirely new and a contradiction of all that we have been taught to believe. This doctrine is completely incredible.' Paul's answer is: 'Far from being new, this doctrine is as old as the Jewish faith. Far from being a heretical novelty, it is the very basis of Jewish religion.' That is what he is going on to prove.*

ROMANS 4:1-8, ABRAHAM AND DAVID WERE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

A. Abraham was unable to boast before God concerning his justification (1-2)

1. Question: What did Abraham gain by the works of the flesh? (1), ***What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?***
 - a. *What then shall we say*
 - 1) This is the first of six times Paul uses this question to introduce an important point.
 - a) Romans 6:1, *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*
 - b) Romans 7:7, *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."*
 - c) Romans 8:31, *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*
 - d) Romans 9:14, *What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!*
 - e) Romans 9:30, *What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith;*
 - 2) *was gained*
 - a) It means to procure, obtain as in mercy or found to be the case.
 - b) Douglas Moo, *Paul asks his readers to contemplate with him what Abraham has found to be the case with respect to the matters he is discussing.*
 - c) The important point Paul is introducing here is that justification is not by works but by faith.

- b. *by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh*
 - 1) This is directed to the Jewish reader as a reminder of the importance of Abraham in their heritage.
 - 2) Paul will note Abraham's added role as the father of all who are justified by faith, Jews and Gentiles, note Romans 4:16, *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,*
 - 3) Note Romans 3:29-30, *Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.*
2. Response: Abraham could not boast to God concerning his works of the flesh (2), ***For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.***
- a. Paul declares that Abraham could boast if he had been justified by his works.
 - 1) He uses a first-class conditional clause, assuming truth for the sake of argument, that boasting in oneself can only come by works.
 - 2) Douglas Moo paraphrases this sentence, *What shall we say about Abraham? For if we say he was justified by works, he has reason to boast, and my claim in 3:27–28 that all boasting is excluded is called into question.*
 - 3) Note Romans 3:27, *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.*
 - b. Paul had declared that justification is only by faith in God's grace.
 - 1) Therefore, Abraham could not boast in himself in God's presence.
 - 2) *But not before God* is Paul's rejection of justification by works which he raised in the conditional clause.
 - 3) Douglas Moo, . . . *all boasting in this context, whether before God or people, must be ruled out.*
 - 4) Grant Osborne's paraphrase, *If Abraham could not achieve righteousness on the basis of merit, what makes us think we can?*
- B. Abraham who lived before he law was justified as a gift of God's grace through faith (3-5)
- 1. Question: What does Scripture say concerning the righteousness of Abraham? (3a), ***For what does the Scripture say?***
 - a. Many rabbis taught that Abraham was justified by his obedience not by his faith.
 - b. Paul asks what the Scripture says concerning Abraham's justification.
 - c. It is always good to trust what Scripture says and not trust only in what others say or what one thinks.
 - 1) 2 Timothy 3:16, *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*
 - 2) James 2:23, *and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God.*
 - 2. Response: Abraham was declared righteous by believing God (3b), ***Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.***
 - a. Paul takes the reader to a specific verse, Genesis 15:6, *And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*
 - b. Abraham believed God.
 - 1) His trust was in God's nature.
 - 2) His trust was in God's promises
 - a) God would give him a son, Genesis 17:16, *I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.*
 - b) God would make of him a great nation and a blessing to the all the world, Genesis 12:1-4, *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.*
 - c) God would give land to him and his descendants, Genesis 12:7, *Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*

- c. The role of God concerning faith.
 - 1) God *counted* Abraham's faith as righteousness.
 - a) *Counted* is an accounting term which means *credited*.
 - b) John Stott, *There are, however, two different ways in which money can be credited to our account, namely as wages (which are earned) or as a gift (which is free and unearned), and the two are necessarily incompatible.*
 - c) Robert Wilkin, *Thus, when Abraham believed God's promise, his debit account of sin was wiped clean and God credited his human account with divine righteousness.*
 - d) Linking Genesis 15:6 to Genesis 22 (sacrifice of Isaac) is rightly described by Grant Osborne as a *meritorious achievement in keeping with observing the law. Paul, however, rightly saw it not as a work but as trusting in God, not as something earned and deserved but as something undeserved and given to us on the basis of God's grace and mercy.*
 - 2) A proper understanding of righteousness.
 - a) The righteousness described is justification not sanctification.
 - b) Faith credits one for justification (right standing with God) which enables one to pursue sanctification (right behavior).
 - d. The role of faith in justification.
 - 1) Tom Constable, *Trust in God's promise is what constitutes faith and results in justification. The promises of God vary. These promises constitute the content of faith. The object of faith does not vary, however. It is always the person of God.*
 - 2) Today, our faith is in God's promise that Jesus Christ is our substitutionary atonement and that all of God's demands concerning sin are satisfied in Christ, Romans 3:24-25, *and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. . .*
 - 3) Tom Constable, *Note that God credited Abraham's faith to him as righteousness. Faith itself is not righteousness. Faith is not meritorious in itself. It is only the vehicle by which God's righteousness reaches us. However, it is the only vehicle by which it reaches us.*
3. Illustration: Paul declares that the one who works receives wages not a gift but the one who believes in God Who justifies the ungodly, is counted righteous through his faith (4-5), ***Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,***
- a. Works has no part in justification.
 - 1) Work results in wages earned.
 - 2) John Stott's paraphrase of verse 4, *Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.*
 - 3) Grant Osborne, *If Abraham was justified by faith, not works, then salvation is a free gift from God rather than an obligation on his part.*
 - b. God justifies sinners not because it is earned but given freely.
 - 1) The one who does not work refers to one who does not depend on works for right standing before God.
 - 2) The one whose faith is counted as righteousness is the one according to Douglas Moo, *renounces any claim on God that his good works might exert.*
 - 3) Romans 11:6, *But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*
 - 4) Warren Wiersbe, . . . *God justifies the ungodly—because there are no godly for Him to justify! He put our sins on Christ's account that He might put Christ's righteousness on our account.*
 - c. There is a place for works in the life of a Christian.
 - 1) After justification, Christians are called to work.
 - 2) Ephesians 2:10, *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*
 - 3) Grant Osborne, *Works do not save us, but true salvation will result in good works and in working out the effects of our salvation.*

- C. A psalm of David affirms that mankind is justified through faith (6-8), *just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”*
1. Paul notes a Psalm of David as affirmation that justification is by faith not by works.
 - a. Psalm 32:1-2b, *Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity. . .*
 - b. Paul examined the position of Abraham who came before the law. Now, he quotes David who lived under the Mosaic Law.
 2. Comments on Psalm 32:1-2
 - a. This psalm was written by David after he greatly sinned and shows that when a believer sins his sin does not cancel his justification.
 - b. *count*
 - 1) The use of the word *count* in Psalm 32:2, ties together Romans 6:3 and 4, which use the same word to describe the work of God in crediting righteousness to one’s account.
 - 2) John Witmer, *And instead of his sin credited to his account, God credits righteousness to him.*
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *God does keep a record of our works, so that He might reward us when Jesus comes; but He is not keeping a record of our sins.*
 - 4) Douglas Moo, *This is an act that has nothing to do with moral transformation, but “changes” people only in the sense that their relationship to God is changed—they are “acquitted” rather than condemned.*
 - c. Comments on the importance of this verse.
 - 1) William Newell, *God’s forgiveness is the going forth of God’s infinite tenderness toward the object of His mercy. It is God folding the sinner, as the returning prodigal was folded, to His bosom. Such a one is blessed indeed!*
 - 2) Grant Osborne, *The total depravity of humankind erects an insurmountable barrier between us and God. We are helpless in our sin, for we cannot be good enough to enable ourselves to climb over the barrier or remove it. Christ’s atoning work has “covered” our sins, so it is righteousness rather than sin that is put to our account.*
 - 3) William Barclay, *It is the supreme discovery of the Christian life that we do not need to torture ourselves with a losing battle to earn God’s love but rather need to accept in perfect trust the love which God offers to us.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Christians may only boast in God since justification is not by works but through faith in God.
- B. Abraham and David show that righteousness is apart from works even in the Old Testament.
- C. God’s amazing grace is revealed in the fact that He does not credit a believer’s account with his sins but with the righteousness of Jesus Christ.