

Covenant Life College
Paul's Letter to the Romans
Session 5 – Robin Boisvert

Romans, Chapter 4

I. Introduction

A. In the latter part of Chapter 3, Paul proclaimed the truth of justification through faith alone. The basis/ground of this justification is the cross, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

B. In Chapter 4, Paul expands upon themes introduced in 3.27-33. If justification were by works of the law, boasting would be appropriate. But if "... one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law (3.28)," then boasting is excluded.

C. Chapter 4 clarifies the means through which justification comes to us by using Abraham as an example. This is not a novelty invented by Paul. The Law and the Prophets testify to it. (Cf. 3.21)

II. Abraham was not justified by works (4.1-8).

- A. Why choose Abraham?
- It was commonly believed among the Jews of the 1st Century that Abraham, so highly revered as to be a model to be emulated, came about his righteousness as a result of works of obedience. It was even argued that he kept the law perfectly. Paul wanted to show that this understanding of Abraham was not consistent with the O.T. record. "Through Paul's interpretation of Genesis 15.6, Abraham is wrested from the Jews as an exemplar of torah-obedience and made into an exemplar of faith." – Douglas Moo
 - He was the primary patriarch of the Jewish people; the one to whom the covenant promises came (Genesis 12).
 - He is uniquely referred to as the friend of God (2 Chronicles 20.7).
 - Jesus used him to describe the comfort and security of heaven (Luke 16.22).
- B. "What does the Scripture say?" (4.3)
- This must be our first question.
- C. "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness." (4.3)
- This verse is either quoted or alluded to seven times in this chapter.
 - How were the saints of the Old Covenant saved?
- D. Note the contrast between wages that are paid to the one who works and trusting the one "who justifies the ungodly" (4.4-5).
- E. Another witness—David (4.6-8; cf. Psalm 32)

III. Abraham was not justified by circumcision (Romans 4.9-12; cf. Genesis 17).

- A. We are not justified by following any ceremonial act, however scriptural it may be.
- B. Neither are we justified by belonging to any racial or ethnic group or by merely associating with any religious group. In the New Testament “uncircumcision” normally refers to Gentiles, while the “circumcision” refers to the Jews. It is appropriate to be grateful for one’s heritage, but it is not something to pride oneself in, and certainly not to trust in for salvation.

IV. Abraham was not justified by law (4.13-22)

- A. The law came 430 years after Abraham (Galatians 3.17).
- B. Abraham’s faith was in response to a promise, not a command (Genesis 15.1-5).
- C. The purpose of the law is to show us our utter inability to keep it and to show us our need for God’s grace. It reveals sin.

V. Abraham was justified by (through) faith (4.16-25).

- A. Faith is the instrument through which we obtain justification.

“Faith in Abraham’s case was the alone and unsupported [means] of his being accounted righteous, for note, although in other cases Abraham’s faith produced good works, and although in every case where faith is genuine it produces good works, yet the particular instance of faith recorded in this chapter (Genesis 15) was unattended by any works. For God brought him out under the star-lit heavens, and bade him look up. “So shall thy seed be,” said the sacred voice. And Abraham did what? He believed the promise. That was all. It was before he had offered sacrifice, before he had said a word or performed a single action of any kind that the word went immediately and instantly forth, “He believed in the Lord and He counted it to him for righteousness.” Charles Spurgeon

- B. Abraham had faith. It was not a blind leap, however. It was a response to God’s clear promise.
- C. God gives life to the dead (4.19).
- D. God calls into existence the things that do not exist (4.17).
- E. The promise is not just for Abraham, but for all who believe (4.23-24).
- F. “... raised for our justification.” “He was raised in order to assure us that in the sight of God we are indeed without sin... Christ’s resurrection had as its *purpose* to bring to light the fact that all those who acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior have entered into a state of righteousness in the eyes of God.”¹

¹ William Hendriksen, *Romans, Chapters 1-8*, NTC, Baker, p. 161.