

Post Modern Culture has done an effective job of convincing man that he is fine just as he is. It has deadened the conviction that we are wickedly rebellious against our loving Creator. In place of that conviction is the incoherent teaching that what is right for you is good and may not be right for someone else. This teaching also denies the need for the demanding justice of a holy God. Together, these rob our culture of the fear of God and encourage depravity without remorse. It is the death knell of past cultures and it is ringing in our nation today.

The first three chapters of Romans have addressed this problem in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, a culture mirrors our own. Paul has shown us the wickedness of worshiping creation, making pleasure a god, and not giving God the honor due Him as our Creator and life sustainer. He has also addressed the self-righteous religious spirit that thinks man could ever live up to God's glorious own standard. If we are to be made right with God, it must be by faith and not by works. That is because the law only justifies those who keep the entire law, and no one can do that (Galatians 5:3). So do we need to rip the Old Testament out of our Bibles? No! It is the law that makes us aware of how sinful we are. Nature and our consciences serve the same purpose of revealing our sinful nature (2:15). The law also points to the salvation that is by faith. As Paul said in our last chapter, *<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it.*" Romans 3:21 (ESV)

In our passage for today, Paul points out that Abraham and David were great examples of the point he is making. They were both made righteous by faith apart from keeping the law. *<sup>1</sup> What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?* Romans 4:1 (ESV) What did the physical forefather of the Jews gain? What did he accomplish in an eternal sense? At the end of each of our lives we will be faced with the question of what did our life gain? Do we have anything that remains? Wealth vanishes. Earthly accomplishment is soon forgotten. What have you gained (James 4:14)?

Paul asks this of Abraham because he is the start of Judaism. The covenants that made them a special people were made between God and him. So if he is the ultimate Jew, then what did he gain? How did he obtain that relationship? How was that relationship established?

*<sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.* Romans 4:2 (ESV) If Abraham was able to live a perfect life and never sinned, then he could boast about it. If that is what made him special, he could tell us,

**Commented [notes1]: Galatians 5:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

**Commented [notes2]: Romans 2:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

**Commented [notes3]: James 4:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

"Look at me! Live just like me. Do what I did and you might make it to heaven like I did." In fact, that is what many Jewish commentators suggest. Of course he couldn't boast before God, because God is perfect and holy, and anything short of that is offensive to Him (Galatians 3:9-10). So even if we did everything just as God would expect, we simply did what we were supposed to do with what God gave us (1Corinthians 4:7). Just doing what you are supposed to do is nothing to brag about. It's expected (1Corinthians 9:16).

Paul has already shown us in the last chapter that boasting is not possible because salvation is by faith (3:27). Not even the father of the Hebrews could boast to God or anyone else of living a perfect life. That is not how he received the promises (Jeremiah 9:23-24). That whole notion of standing before God and saying, "Look what a good job I did!" sounds absurd to those whose eyes have been opened by grace. But there are actually many who think they will do just that. Everyone who thinks they will be saved by their works must have that mindset. And that is the basis of almost every other world religion. Either you'll work off your bad karma by being good enough, or your good deeds will outweigh the bad on the final scale of justice. It's a dishonest look into our own heart and mind (Ephesians 2:9).

If even Abraham was not made righteous by his deeds, then how did he enter that relationship with God? <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Romans 4:3 (ESV) Paul is once again making his case by pointing to the Scriptures. If you don't believe they are inspired by God, I don't know why you would come to church. Why read the Bible? Why try to learn from it? But if it is inspired then what does it teach about how we gain anything in life? How did Abraham become the friend of God (James 2:23)?

Paul searched the Scriptures to find out. He had been trying to please God by keeping the Law until he met Jesus. Then he went back over those Scriptures that he tried so hard to live and discovered this truth that he is sharing with the Romans. The Scripture never says that Abraham obeyed the law and was therefore righteous. On the contrary, it teaches us that it was believing God that was counted as righteousness.

Paul is quoting Genesis 15:6. God was speaking to Abraham about being the father of a great multitude. God told him he would have a son in spite of Sarah's barren womb. He asked Abraham to look up at the stars and try to number them. His descendants were to be as many as those stars he could see (Genesis 15:5). Remember there was no night time light pollution then. He was almost 90 years old and his wife was almost 80, but he believed.

That is when God entered into a covenant with Abraham that promised that God would pay the price for those who could not live up to the covenant. Abraham had lied to a king and to a Pharaoh about his relationship with his wife (Genesis 12:12, 26:7), but

**Commented [notes4]: Galatians 3:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

<sup>10</sup> For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

**Commented [notes5]: 1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

**Commented [notes6]: 1 Corinthians 9:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

**Commented [notes7]: Romans 3:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> 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.

**Commented [notes8]: Jeremiah 9:23-24 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,

<sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

**Commented [notes9]: Ephesians 2:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

**Commented [notes10]: James 2:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> 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.

**Commented [notes11]: Genesis 15:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

**Commented [notes12]: Genesis 15:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

**Commented [notes13]: Genesis 12:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife." Then they will kill me, but they will let you live.

**Commented [notes14]: Genesis 26:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance.

God counted Abraham righteous simply because Abraham believed the vision God gave to him. What does it tell us about what is required to enter a relationship with God today? Did God change the way He operates after Jesus came? No! The sinner who believes is still, in the same way, made righteous by faith alone. This became one of the great truths of the Reformation, Sola Fide! It means that salvation is by faith plus nothing.

This belief is more than acknowledging something to be true. James tells us that demons believe and shudder (James 2:19). This belief is to place your trust in, to entrust yourself to, that which you have faith in. We should also note that Abraham then tried to bring it to pass in his own power with Hagar (Genesis 16:2).

Here is Paul's conclusion to the Scripture regarding Abraham. *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 believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,* Romans 4:4-5 (ESV) If Abraham was perfect and did everything God required, then God owes him salvation. If that were the case, then there would be no need to state that Abraham believed and was therefore counted as righteous (John 6:29). Abraham wasn't perfect as we have already pointed out. But He did believe that God justifies the ungodly. It is that faith which is counted as righteousness.

It was Jesus' sacrifice of Himself for Abraham that made this possible, though Abraham did not know the details of how this would happen. It was later that Abraham told his son Isaac that God would provide Himself the sacrifice on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:8). The sins of Abraham and all mankind had to be dealt with in a just manner. **Only the One who had no sin could take the sins of the world upon Him and receive the punishment those sins deserve, which is death.** He did it for everyone who comes to Him and by faith believes, entrusting them self to God to make them right with Him.

If you have done that, you are right with God. Like Abraham, you are not yet perfected, but God has accepted the substitute of Jesus to bear the wrath your sins and mine deserve (4:23-25). You have entrusted your soul to God and His work to save you and not on your own good deeds. Now your heart's desire is to live in a way that is pleasing to Him, because of the great sacrifice He made for you. That is why there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Don't let Satan beat you up and discourage you. **If you fail, confess it, get back up, be determined to let the Spirit keep you from doing it again. Know you are forgiven** (1John 1:9).

This should be the freedom and joy every believer walks in every day (Philippians 4:4). We are right with God. We don't need to fear death (1Corinthan 15:55). We know heaven is waiting for us! We know Jesus will welcome us. That should be one of the greatest reasons for our joy every day (12:12).

**Commented [notes15]: James 2:19 (ESV)**  
<sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

**Commented [notes16]: Genesis 16:2 (ESV)**  
<sup>2</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

**Commented [notes17]: John 6:29 (ESV)**  
<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

**Commented [notes18]: Genesis 22:8 (ESV)**  
<sup>8</sup> Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

**Commented [notes19]: Romans 4:23-25 (ESV)**  
<sup>23</sup> But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,  
<sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,  
<sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

**Commented [notes20]: Romans 8:1 (ESV)**  
<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**Commented [notes21]: 1 John 1:9 (ESV)**  
<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

**Commented [notes22]: Philippians 4:4 (ESV)**  
<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

**Commented [notes23]: 1 Corinthians 15:55 (ESV)**  
<sup>55</sup> "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

**Commented [notes24]: Romans 12:12 (ESV)**  
<sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Paul has made his case with the Scripture concerning Abraham. Whenever we want to make a point from the Word, it is always helpful to make it from two different passages to be sure we are interpreting the Word correctly (2Corinthians 13:1). If two passages are pointing to the same conclusion, you know you are basing your theology on solid footing. That is why Paul now takes us to David's account of justification.

*<sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; <sup>8</sup> blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."* Romans 4:6-8 (ESV) If salvation were by works, there would be no blessedness that comes from being forgiven for there would be nothing to be forgiven of. This passage from Psalm 32 would make no sense if salvation came by works. The psalm goes on to say how miserable David was while living in sin. He said it his bones ached, his strength dried up, and the heavy hand of God was constantly pressuring Him (Psalm 32:3-4). That is what it is like for the believer to live in sin. But as soon as he confessed his sin to God he found the blessedness of forgiveness. The Lord would no longer count David's sin against him. Though David did not know about the future sacrifice of Jesus, his sin was borne on the cross by Jesus, the Son of David (2Corinthians 5:19).

Paul is telling us that we all sin (3:23), so there is only one way to be right with God. There is only one way to be righteous. If Israel's forefather and their greatest king with a heart after God were both sinners that were saved by believing faith that entrusted their salvation to God, then that is the way of salvation for all Jews. What about the rest of the world?

*<sup>9</sup> Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. <sup>10</sup> 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.* Romans 4:9-10 (ESV) The one outward sign of the covenant the Jewish people had with God was circumcision. Paul is reminding people that Abraham was counted as righteous before he entered the covenant of circumcision. He wasn't really Jewish yet. He was just a man like everyone else in the world. Because God doesn't show favoritism (2:11), any individual in the world throughout time can come to God in the same way that Abraham did. Salvation, through entrusting yourself to God and confessing your sin to Him, is for all.

Once again Paul has used the Scriptures and simple logic to point out a truth that had been distorted by the interpretations of man. The same thing happens today to those who are willing to accept the Scriptures and reason. Is a person in an unreached area able to be saved without the knowledge of Jesus? Was Abraham able to believe and be counted righteous without the knowledge of Jesus? In either case, the sacrifice of Jesus makes it possible. Believing God, entrusting yourself to Him, obtains grace through faith.

**Commented [notes25]: 2 Corinthians 13:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

**Commented [notes26]: Psalm 32:3-4 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

<sup>4</sup> For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

**Commented [notes27]: 2 Corinthians 5:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

**Commented [notes28]: Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

**Commented [notes29]: Romans 2:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> For God shows no partiality.

Would Abraham or any other unreached person be better off knowing what Jesus did for them? Absolutely! Still, knowing the details of how salvation was made possible is not necessary for saving belief in God.

*11 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. 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,* Romans 4:11 (ESV) The outward sign was simply testifying to what had happened in the heart. The heart was changed and then the sign was added as a testimony to that change (Deuteronomy 30:6). The Christian of today has the heart change and then **the increasingly sanctified life is a testimony of the inner change.** That is the sign of our circumcision of the heart.

What Paul has just said is that God intentionally had the sign come after the inner change so the world would know it wasn't the other way around. You don't obey the law and then your heart is changed. Your heart is changed first and then the Spirit transforms your life (8:29). The indwelling Holy Spirit is the seal that we have saving faith, just as circumcision was a seal of the covenant.

*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.* Romans 4:12 (ESV) In other words, Abraham is the father of the people of faith, not just those who have the mark of circumcision. Any male can be circumcised. Most males in western culture are simply for health reasons. It has nothing to do with faith. So if Jews are still trusting in the fact that they have the sign of the covenant without walking in the faith of Abraham, they need to think again (1Peter 2:21). Christians who think they are born again but do not walk in the relationship with God that Abraham had need to check that they are truly Spirit filled. Are we relying on works?

It is most definitely applicable to people that call themselves Christians today. If they go to church, read their Bible, said a prayer, but are not walking in the relationship with God that Abraham had, they don't even have the sign of the new covenant, the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). Just as Jews can have an outward sign of the covenant without a heart change, so called Christians can mimic gifts of the Spirit without a heart change. But no one can mimic the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)!

However, if you are living by faith, trusting in God for your salvation through Jesus' sacrifice for you, you have spiritual life. You have a circumcised heart. The indwelling Holy Spirit is transforming you from glory to glory (2Corinthians 3:18) You know you will never be good enough for Jesus and that you have nothing to boast of. When Christians speak of all their good deeds, it makes me wonder where their faith is placed.

**Commented [notes30]: Deuteronomy 30:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

**Commented [notes31]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

**Commented [notes32]: 1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

**Commented [notes33]: Ephesians 1:13-14 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

**Commented [notes34]: Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

**Commented [notes35]: 2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Where is your faith placed? Have you entrusted yourself to God? Do you believe Him? Do you believe His Word? If so, you are counted as righteous as Abraham is, and you are as blessed as David by being forgiven!

#### Questions

- 1 What was the misunderstanding Paul is trying to correct?
- 2 What did Abraham gain? You?
- 3 How did he gain it?
- 4 What does it mean to believe?
- 5 Is it different today?
- 6 Was Abraham then perfect?
- 7 Why use a second reference?
- 8 How was David forgiven?
- 9 Why does this apply to Gentiles?
- 10 Why is the time of the quote important?