

Justification Explained

(Romans 4:1-17)

Introduction to Romans Chapter 4

Romans Chapter 4 deals directly with faith, grace, and justification and their relationship to the Law of God.

The role of the law in justification is that it brings the knowledge of sin. A person is not justified through the works of the law. For justification takes place in the case of the believer "by grace through faith." By Grace a gift of eternal life is freely offered to the entire world and it is through faith that gift is received. God made the first move in the plan of redemption and for that plan to be effective in me, I must choose to receive that gift through faith. (God's grace is resistible by the nature of the free will given by God to man.) See also Ephesians 2:8 and Romans 4:16. Justification by Faith is Demonstrated in the life of Abraham.

Abraham was justified by Faith and not by Works (v. 1-8)

Romans 4:3—...Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Why is Paul talking about Abraham? Paul is addressing a question of the Jews. The Jews Relate Deeply to Abraham. Abraham is referenced as "our father" in verses 1, 12, and 17. Abraham was our Father as pertaining to flesh, the Father of circumcision, Father of our faith, and Father of nations (This was the promise of God to Him).

The Jews were holding to their relationship to Abraham ("abraham's children according to the flesh") as their guarantee to eternal life. The Jews placed great confidence in Abraham the Father of their nation and it is the Jewish questions, Paul is addressing the questions:

- What about Abraham our Father?
- What about the covenant of circumcision given to Abraham, doesn't that make us righteous?

Romans chapter 4 deals with "Abraham's Righteousness." Abraham is an example of justification by grace through faith. Paul uses Abraham's life as recorded in SCRIPTURE to explain the doctrine of righteousness by faith. In both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, Paul is bringing out the truth that he is not teaching a Gospel that is in competition with the Scriptures (Old Testament), but rather a Gospel that is a continuation of God's Eternal Purpose.

1. In chapter 3, Paul affirms that faith does not void the Law but rather establishes it.
2. In chapter 4, the promise given to Abraham was not through the Law (circumcision) but through the righteousness of faith.

Before the Torah was Given, Abraham was counted as righteous (v. 1—4)

Genesis 15:6 — And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Before the Torah was given to Moses and long before Moses was even born, Abraham was justified by faith the same way the Christians are today. God gave Abraham a promise; he believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness (4:4).

God justifies the ungodly (v. 5)

Those who are not born-again are sinners and ungodly. The repentant sinner is declared righteous by God through the blood of Jesus. The ungodly do nothing to earn their salvation. They are justified "by grace alone through faith alone".

NOTE: God requiring faith does not cancel God's grace. A justification conditional by works is in competition with the grace of God which is His goodness extended only for the reason that God is good. The condition to justification is a response of faith. Faith is absolutely required and our justification is still to the glory of God as it He Who has given to us the gift of faith with which we may respond to His grace. Justification is by grace and is conditional: by grace through faith.

David's Testimony (v. 6–8)

Paul brings testimony from David to support the message of justification by faith. David was esteemed by the Jews as their great king. This quotation from the Psalms confirms that men are only justified by faith and not works (Psalms 32:1-2).

David was thanking God that His sin was forgiven and the sin was not put to his account. If sin was not imputed to him and his sin was forgiven this means he was restored to a right relationship with God.

Abraham was justified by Grace and not Circumcision (v. 9–17)

The Jews looked to circumcision and the Law as their source of righteousness. Abraham was justified before he received the covenant of circumcision. He was counted as righteous in chapter 15 and he was 86 in chapter 16 when Ishmael was born. Genesis 17:24 records Abraham was circumcised when he was 99 years old. It is quite clear that he was justified before he was circumcised. This passage is telling the Jews that Abraham was counted as righteous before he received the covenant of circumcision.

Circumcision did not justify Abraham. Circumcision was given as a sign of the promise. It was given as a seal of the righteousness of faith. It is a symbol of the cutting away of the flesh. There is no power of righteousness in a physical action. This is merely a sign of the work of God in much the same way that baptism is a sign of a completed work.

The Law gives knowledge of sin (v. 15). For where there is no law there is no transgression refers to the fact that if there were no law then there would be no law to break. This also must have reference to the moral law as well as Moses Law. Abraham was justified by faith through grace (v. 16). He did not earn justification; it was given to him without merit because of his faith.