

The Epistle of Paul to the *Romans*

Justification: The Provision of God's Righteousness (3:21 - 5:21)

Having proven the universality of man's sin and his need for righteousness ^{Romans 1:18 - 3:20}, Paul's next discussed God's gracious provision of righteousness by faith alone ^{Romans 3:21 - 5:21}.

The Source of Righteousness (3:21-31)

3:21-24 But now a righteousness of God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

By writing "but now", Paul signified his change in emphasis from the 'bad news': man's utter depravity, to the 'good news': God's offer of "grace" for man's sin. These verses present the principle discussed in detail in this section of Paul's epistle to the Romans ^{Romans 3:21 - 5:21}:

a "righteousness from God" ^{Isaiah 46:13} to cover man's sin "through faith in Jesus Christ".

Obedience to the law does not produce salvation righteousness ^{Galatians 2:15-16}; the law inspires man toward faith in Jesus by convicting him of sin ^{Romans 3:20}. Paul was clear – "there is no

difference" between Jew and Gentile: everyone falls short of the divine standard ^{Romans 3:9}.

However, God's forgiveness is "freely" given "by [God's] grace" through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Salvation righteousness: (1) is a gift from God ^{Romans 5:17} through Jesus ^{2 Corinthians 5:21},

(2) fulfills the precept and penalty of God's law ^{Hebrews 9:27-28, 1 Peter 2:24}, (4) is available to everyone ^{Galatians 3:26-28, Colossians 3:11} and (5) is "everlasting" ^{Psalms 119:142, Isaiah 51:8b, Daniel 9:24}.

Being "justified" (*dikaioō*) means to be declared righteous, which includes a pardon from the guilt and penalty of sin, leading to the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus ^{1 Corinthians 1:30}; all essential to be accepted by God. Paul refers to justification about thirty times in Romans.

The act of "redemption" (*apolytrōsis*) was a concept in the ancient slave market, indicating the payment of a required ransom to obtain the release of a prisoner or slave ^{1 Timothy 2:5-6}.

3:25-26 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Jesus was publically "presented" on Calvary by God ^{1 John 4:10} as a sacrifice once for all ^{Hebrews 7:26-28}. Through God's patience and goodness, He temporarily holds back His judgement in order to give each person every opportunity to come to repentance ^{Psalms 78:38-39, 2 Peter 3:9}. Paul pointed out that the only way He could remain pure and "just", while forgiving the sins of mankind, was to punish the only true "lamb without blemish or defect" ^{Exodus 12:5, 1 Peter 1:18-19}, His only son: Jesus ^{John 1:29-34}.

The phrase "sacrifice of atonement" is translated from one Greek word (*hilastērion*) which means the atonement cover ^{Exodus 25:10-22}/the place where sins are forgiven/the mercy seat.

3:27-31 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. Paul understood about the sin of prideful boasting in self-righteousness ^{Philippians 3:2-9}. Man's strength and knowledge can accomplish nothing of eternal value ^{1 Corinthians 13:1-3} without the help/presence of God ^{John 15:5}. Salvation cannot be earned, because it is a precious gift from a benevolent God in response to all (both Jews and Gentiles) who have a genuine faith ^{Ephesians 2:8-9}. However, the moral law is still applicable ^{Matthew 5:17-20}. Obedience to the law (works) cannot precede salvation, because it can only be accomplished to any degree by the power of the Holy Spirit ^{Judges 15:14-15, Acts 1:7-8, Romans 15:17-19}, which only comes on a person at salvation ^{Acts 2:38}. Subsequently, works flow out of salvation ^{Ephesians 2:10}.

The Example of Righteousness (4:1-25)

4:1-3 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Paul chose Abraham as the example to prove justification is by faith alone ^{Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-19}. Abraham's faith came from his sincere belief in God, resulting in his righteousness ^{Genesis 15:6}.

The complete meaning of the word "believed" (*pisteuō*) was 'to put one's faith/trust in, with an implication that actions based on that trust will follow'. Faith is not a meritorious work, but is a gift from God ^{1 Corinthians 12:7-11, Ephesians 2:8}. When the gift of faith is accepted and embraced, it simply becomes the channel through which justification is received ^{Matthew 21:22}.

The word "credited" (*logizomai*) was used in financial and legal matters to mean taking something that belongs to someone (Jesus) and credit it to someone else's account (you/me). It is a one-sided transaction - Abraham did nothing to earn the righteousness of Jesus, God simply "credited" it to him, in response to Abraham's belief/faith/trust in Him ^{Acts 7:2-4}.

4:4-5 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. Paul used these verses to widen the application of his argument above ^{v.1-3} from Abraham to all people. If works were the basis of salvation, then God would have an "obligation" (wages) to grant salvation; however, salvation is a sovereign gift of

God's grace ^{Ephesians 2:8-9}. Man must not try to earn God's favor, but simply rest in His grace. Every person is "wicked" (*asebēs*: ungodly) ^{Jeremiah 17:9}, prior to being justified by God's grace. The first step on the path to justification is to give up any claim of being 'good' ^{Matthew 19:16-17}. As Jesus said: "I [did not] come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" ^{Luke 5:29-32}.

4:6-8 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against them."

Paul chose to use David's words ^{Psalms 32:1-2} of comfort/forgiveness, written shortly after his sins of adultery (with Bathsheba) and murder (of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband) ^{2 Samuel 11}. David was totally unworthy of God's love, but he knew the blessing of imputed righteousness. God is always ready to forgive the sins of anyone and everyone who comes to Him with a sincere repentant heart ^{Psalms 32:3-5, Proverbs 28:13, Ezekiel 18:27-28, 1 John 1:9}. As the LORD said: "I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!" ^{Ezekiel 18:32}.

4:9-12 Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?

We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. Paul anticipated the reaction of the Jews: Why did God give a command for circumcision if Abraham would be justified by faith alone? Paul addressed this issue, as well as other disputes through history concerning whether other kinds of religious ceremonies (e.g., baptism) are necessary for salvation.

To prove his point, Paul emphasized the timing of Abraham's salvation and his circumcision. God credited Abram with righteousness (salvation) prior to his having any children ^{Genesis 15:2,6}. Later, "Abram was eighty-six years old" when Ishmael was born ^{Genesis 16:16}; however, Abraham was ninety-nine (and Ishmael was thirteen) when he was (and all males in his household were) circumcised ^{Genesis 17:23-26}. Therefore, circumcision could not be the basis of his righteousness.

4:13-15 It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Paul continued emphasizing faith, not law. Mankind's fallen nature makes it impossible for them to gain "righteousness" by observing the law (works) ^{v.1-3}; however, "through the law [mankind] becomes conscious

of sin" Romans 3:20. All who refuse to accept God's gift John 3:36 by putting their faith in Jesus remain under the law Romans 2:12 and, as a result, "bring wrath" upon themselves Ephesians 5:6.

4:16-17 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that were not as though they were. Several times, Paul mentioned "the promise" v.13,16,20, which includes (1) "all peoples on earth will be blessed through [Abraham]" Genesis 12:3,18:18, (2) "Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham" Galatians 3:8, (3) "the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed ... who is Christ" Galatians 3:16, and (4) "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:29

Abraham has two types of offspring: (1) physical offspring: Jewish descendants of Abraham, who have no guarantee of salvation Luke 3:7-9 and (2) spiritual offspring: Jews and Gentiles who have placed their faith/trust in Jesus Galatians 3:7, and who are "guaranteed" grace Romans 1:16.

In this chapter, Paul confirmed that justification comes through faith, not works v.1-8, and that it is by grace, not by the keeping of the law v.9-17. Now Paul concludes by indicating that justification/salvation is the result of God's divine power, and not human effort v.18-25.

4:18-25 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Paul began with a negative statement from a human perspective: "against all hope", but Abraham knew the difference between what man can do and what God can do Mark 10:27, so he maintained "hope" in what God promised Genesis 15:4-5. It was easy for doubts to weaken "his faith", because of Abraham's and Sarah's ages. However, Abraham held tightly to his faith in the promise and "gave glory to God" Hebrews 11:17-19, resulting in God granting Abraham "righteousness" Genesis 15:6. Since all Scripture has a universal application 2 Timothy 3:16-17, this principle of justification by faith is applied not only to Abraham, but to all people John 3:16-17.

The last verse v.25 is a paraphrase from the Septuagint (Greek translation of OT) Isaiah 53:12.