

43. The Book of Romans 3:31-4:5

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(2-21-24)

Find this weeks' Study Audio & Video [Here](#)

In our study in Romans, we are currently in the second major section of the book—a section that runs from 3:21-5:21. This section is dealing with one of the most important doctrines in the Christian faith—the doctrine of **'Justification.'** Paul is basically telling us how fallen sinners can be justified or made right with God—which means how can they have fellowship with Him now and be accepted by Him into heaven someday?

Romans 3:27–30 (NKJV)

²⁷ Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. ²⁹ Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰ since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

After Paul finished his statements in this section of Romans 3 starting with verse 21 and climaxing in verse 28,

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”

He anticipated that his Jewish readers would conclude that what Paul was saying is that the Law has absolutely no value and should be discarded as worthless to which he responds—

Romans 3:31 (NKJV)

³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

As far as salvation is concerned, the gospel does not replace the law—because the law was never a means of salvation in the first place. The purpose of the Law was to present God's perfect standard for salvation—a standard that was impossible for sinners to live up too.

- *So then why give the Law to man if we couldn't keep it for salvation?*

Because the Law was intended not to make us righteous but to show us our sinfulness.

Once the Law did its job (condemned us as hopelessly lost guilty sinners)—it drove us to Jesus for justification by faith (salvation).

But also, those who have put their faith in Jesus for justification have established the law in that they prove that the law was necessary for salvation (it is God's perfect standard of righteousness)—it's just that we couldn't keep it perfectly for it to save us.

However, Jesus lived a perfect life with regard to the Law and when we put our faith in Him for salvation—we were placed 'in Christ.' That means we have fulfilled the law for righteousness by virtue of entering into Christ

Who Himself lived a perfect, sinless life—and then died to pay our debt allowing God to have a legal basis to declare us justified (and accepted) by our faith in Christ.

Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV)

⁶ ...He made us accepted in the Beloved *One*.

Matthew 5:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

1 Timothy 1:7–11 (NKJV)

⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm. ⁸ But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, ¹⁰ for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.

Romans 3:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

Galatians 3:24–25 (NKJV)

²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

ROMANS - CHAPTER 4

The unsaved Jews in Rome would immediately have asked, “*How does this doctrine of justification by faith relate to our history? Paul, you say that this doctrine is witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets—well, what about Abraham?*”

Let me stop here to say this—the Jews were very proud of their family tree, their heritage. And even though Paul is writing to the believers in Rome—he directs a good portion of this epistle to the unsaved Jewish community living there.

In verses 21-31 of Chapter 3, Paul introduces them to the doctrine of justification by faith. Now, in Chapter 4 he is going to illustrate justification by faith through the life of their greatest patriarch—Abraham!

- Abraham was one of their heroes in the Jewish faith as recorded in their Scriptures (Tanakh—our Old Testament).
- He was the father of not only of the Jewish nation of Israel.
- Verse 17 of Romans 4 tells us Abraham was also the spiritual father of the Gentile nations as well.
- The rabbis taught that Abraham was chosen by God and blessed by God because he perfectly kept the Law of God—even before it was given to Moses!

How? —well the rabbis taught he kept it intuitively!

- The Jews believed that Abraham was sinless before God—that he was an absolutely righteous man which is why God chose him to be the father of the Jewish nation.

In 3 different places in the Bible, he is referred to as—*“the friend of God.”*

No wonder the Jews were very proud to be known as the children of Abraham!

Romans 4:1 (NKJV)

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?

What Paul is really asking them in this verse is—*“What did Abraham our father discover as far as his own human ability was concerned? Did he find that he could be saved through his works and human effort?”*

Romans 4:2–3 (NKJV)

² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”*

You see, Jewish pride concerning Abraham was based on the belief that he was justified (made right with God) by his works—but Paul is arguing that if Abraham *was* justified by his works, then he *would* have something to boast about!

In fact, many of Jewish rabbis taught that Abraham was such a righteous man—that he had the right to boast in his accomplishments—and that God’s promise to Isaac, in Genesis 26:4-5, was proof of it:

Genesis 26:4–5 (NKJV)

⁴ And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; ⁵ because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”

So, they interpreted this to mean that Abraham was blessed by God because of all the good things that he did!

There is a set of writings that the Jews esteem called the ‘Mishnah’ which many Jewish scholars believe dates back to the time of Ezra (450 BC). The Mishnah is a collection of the opinions (oral traditions) of the rabbis on the Law—a commentary that they put together to help them interpret and understand their Scriptures.

In the Mishnah, the rabbis interpreted Genesis 26:4-5 like this: *“We find that Abraham our father performed the whole law before it was given. For as it is written, ‘He obeyed My voice, kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My law.’”*

In other words, the rabbis taught that Abraham was justified because he *did* all these good things—and as such, he had *earned* the favor of God by his works and obedience. So, that was the Jewish position with regard to Abraham—which Paul is addressing in this section of his epistle to the Romans.

Again, they believed Abraham was justified because of what he *did*—but wait a minute pastor, doesn’t James say that Abraham *was* justified because of what he did in offering up Isaac?

James 2:14, 21–24 (NKJV)

¹⁴ What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?...
²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ²² Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? ²³ And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*” And he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

Let’s be clear as to what James is saying here—

- We know in Genesis 15:6 (which James quotes) that God made Abraham a promise (concerning the Messiah)—Abraham believed God’s promise and because of his faith he was declared righteous by God. Which by the way is how all of us are declared righteous by God—we believe in God’s promise of eternal life through Jesus (The Gospel)—and He declares us righteous (saved).
- But then 35 years later in Genesis Chapter 22 God told Abraham to offer his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah (Listen for the rest of the story).
- All James is saying is that Abraham’s *faith* coupled with his *works* (obeying God by offering up Isaac) made his faith ‘*perfect*’ (mature).
- Or to put it another way, that Abraham’s faith was perfected (‘brought to fulfillment’ or ‘shown to be genuine’) by his works—not that the salvation of Abraham was a combination of his *faith* plus his *works* (they were separated by 35 years!).
- Again, all James is saying is that Abraham’s actions in obeying God *demonstrated* that his faith was real because it obeyed God and wasn’t merely head knowledge or an empty profession of faith (mere words).

John 10:27-28 (NLT)

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me.

James 2:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ ...Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

One pastor said,

“You know you’re truly born again when you find yourself obeying God. We’re not saved by obedience—but our obedience proves we’re saved, for true faith works.”

So, to say it once again—the rabbis’ believed Abraham was justified because of what he *did*—and Paul is going to destroy that misconception by taking them back to the place in Genesis where God originally pronounced Abraham righteous—Genesis 15:6.

In fact, all of Romans 4 is an exposition of Genesis 15:6—

Romans 4:2–3 (NKJV)

² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? ***“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”***

Not only that but in that moment Abraham became the model for all of us of justification by faith apart from works.

This righteousness, Paul points out, was not a *reward* for Abraham’s obedience, it doesn’t say God declared Abraham righteous because he was faithful in going to church, or keeping the commandments, or even because he was circumcised (that didn’t happen for another 14 years— Genesis 17:24).

It says that when Abraham placed his faith in God and His promise, that God—‘*accounted it to him for righteousness.*’ The word ‘**accounted**’ (logizomai) means to reckon, to credit, to impute to someone’s account and was a first century bookkeeper’s term.

It’s used 41 times in the N.T. and Paul uses it 35 of those 41 times in his writings—in fact, he uses it 11 times in Romans 4 alone. So, the moment Abraham placed his faith in God a transaction took place—God took the sin of Abraham and transferred it to Christ’s account (which He paid for on Calvary’s Cross)—and took the righteousness of Christ from His account and transferred it to Abraham’s account.

All because Abraham believed God—

“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” (verse 3)

But as we said Sunday, it begs the question—“*What exactly did Abraham believe that caused God to declare him righteous?*”

We just studied this Sunday in our study in Galatians—which has never happened before where our Sunday study and our Wednesday study overlapped.

I will touch on what Abraham believed that caused God to declare him righteous again—but let’s wait till we get there in Romans 4 because Paul answers this very question.

Romans 4:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God.

One pastor comments on this—

“If Abraham was justified by works, then he would have reason for boasting. He could pat himself on the back for earning a righteous standing before God—but this is utterly impossible. No one will ever be able to boast before God (Eph. 2:9). There is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that Abraham had any grounds for boasting in that he was justified by his works.”

Romans 4:3 (NKJV)

³ For what does the Scripture say? ***“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”***

Notice Paul says that Abraham didn’t just believe *in* God, he *believed God* (which is exactly how it’s translated in Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23).

Many people believe there is a God, in other words they believe in the existence of God—but that belief alone is not enough to save them—

James 2:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!

Yes, of course, Abraham believed *in* God—but that’s not the point that Paul wants to make. It was deeper than that—he believed something God had promised him way back in Genesis 12 and later reaffirmed in Genesis 15—

Genesis 12:1–3 (NKJV)

¹ Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. ² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Then this promise was reaffirmed to Abraham in Genesis 15. In Genesis 14 Abraham had defeated the 5 kings that held his nephew Lot and his family captive. As he returns from the battle, he was concerned they would regroup and return to fight him again.

It is within that context that God appeared to Abraham in a vision and assured him that He was “*his shield and his exceeding great reward*.” But the thing that Abraham wanted most was a son. An heir that he could pass down all of the blessings God had given him. God had promised him a son, but as yet that promise had not been fulfilled—and he is lamenting that to the LORD.

Genesis 15:5–6 (NKJV)

⁵ Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” ⁶ And he believed in the Lord [*in the promise the Lord had given to him*], and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

The Hebrew word translated **believed** means “*to say amen*.” In other words, God gave Abraham a promise, and Abraham responded with “*Amen!*”—which was a declaration of faith on Abraham’s part.

This is the first time the word “**believe**” is used in the Bible (Genesis 15:6)—which Paul quotes in Galatians 3—

Galatians 3:6–7, 9 (NKJV)

⁶ just as Abraham “*believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness*.” ⁷ Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham... ⁹ So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

- “*But what exactly did Abraham believe?*”—we’re coming to that!

For right now it’s just important that we understand that Paul, in this section, is using Abraham as an illustration of justification by faith alone.

Romans 4:3–4 (NKJV)

³ For what does the Scripture say? “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness*.” ⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

When a man works, he *earns* money—in other words, his employer owes that man a debt. The employer doesn't hand him his check at the end of the week saying, "*Here's a gift.*" But if the man couldn't work for some reason and his boss went to his house and handed him a check without him working for it—then it would be a gift.

God will not be our debtor—no matter how often you go to church, read the Bible, pray, witness, serve the poor in the local food pantry—or anything else you do in the way of good deeds and religious works.

None of it will obligate God to you in any way including and especially when it comes to Him declaring a person righteous (saved)—it is only by God's grace (a gift)!—

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NKJV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,* ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Titus 3:5 (NKJV)

⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 4:4–5 (NKJV)

⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. ⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

When Paul talks about how God will justify the 'ungodly' by faith—he is still talking about Abraham. You need to understand that Abraham (Abram) was an idol worshipping Gentile when God called him to leave the Ur of the Chaldees (modern Iraq) and go to the Land of Promise (Canaan).

Paul's point is that—far from being a righteous man, who was so good by the life he lived and the things he did in obeying God (as the rabbi's taught) that on the basis of his righteousness—God declared him righteous.

"O no" Paul tells his readers, "*Abraham was ungodly when God declared him righteous—not according to his works but according to his faith.*"

Pastor and author Warren Wiersbe—

"Romans 4:5 makes a startling statement: God justifies *the ungodly*! The Law said, "*I will not justify the wicked*" (Exodus 23:7). The Old Testament judge was commanded to "*justify the righteous and condemn the wicked*" (Deuteronomy 25:1). When Solomon dedicated the temple, he asked God to "*condemn the wicked and justify the righteous!*" (1 Kings 8:31–32) But God justifies the ungodly—because there are none godly for Him to justify! He put our sins on Christ's account that He might put Christ's righteousness on our account." (Which gave Him the legal basis for declaring a sinner righteous)

Abraham wasn't a perfect man—as you read the account of his life in the Book of Genesis, he had numerous lapses of faith and times of disobedience—yet God still justified him—how—by his faith!

You see the rabbi's had it backwards—God didn't justify Abraham because he did a lot of righteous things, he lived righteously because God justified him (saved him)—and that was the reason he lived a righteous life of obedience to God (Genesis 22).

Paul's point is—the only person that God can and will justify is an ungodly person—

Romans 5:6 (NKJV)

⁶ For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

This is what Jesus meant when He said: *"I haven't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."* (Luke 5:32)

- A person can't get *saved* until they first realize they're lost!
- A person will not see their need for a Savior until they see themselves as sinners!

The world is full of people that think they're good people—so 'good' that God will accept them into heaven someday (Proverbs 20:6).

Abraham did not work for his salvation, and he certainly wasn't good enough to earn his salvation (morally sinless and perfect)—he simply believed the promise of God that He would send a Messiah someday, who would be a descendant of Abraham.

That this Messiah/Savior would die to pay for our sins, and that all who would believe in Him would allow God to declare them righteous (Abraham knew The Gospel!).

It was Jesus Christ who did the work on the cross, and His righteousness was put on Abraham's account—even as it is put to our account when we believe in Jesus:

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Want to know more? Click [here](#).

Reach out to us [here](#).