

Romans 4:1—8

Justification Apart from the Law

Beginning with 3:21 Paul argues that our righteousness is made available outside the realm of the Mosaic Law. The “But now” in verse 31 draws a line between the “then” of the Gospel of the Kingdom and the “now” of the Gospel of the Grace of God. This righteousness was actually put into place with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ but was made manifest (revealed) to us only after Paul’s conversion. This righteousness is available to all those who believe whether Jew or Gentile. As we continue into Romans 4 Paul gives examples of God’s righteousness being imputed apart from the Law.

Verse 1 Justification before the Law was given

Our justification and imputation of God’s righteousness is done outside of the constraints of the Mosaic Law. The Law defined sin and actually brought sin to life in effect making our sin more sinful (Romans 7:8—13) but it was powerless to help us live a righteous life.

Paul turns to the Jews and poses the question: “What did Abraham find out about justification?” Abraham is an example of one who was justified before the Law was even given. Abraham is also the father of the Jewish people and is held in high esteem even today. If we can show that Abraham’s righteousness was imputed without the Law then it should be easier to convince the Jews that they too can be declared righteous with the constraints of the Law.

Verses 2—3

Paul first logically points out that if Abraham’s actions resulted in God declaring him righteous then he would have much to boast about. If God rewarded Abraham for his works, it would have been given out of debt instead of grace. We know that our salvation and the salvation of every person before and after us will be justified only by God’s grace and never through our works. We are unable to do any work that pleased God. It is only after God has imputed His righteousness that we are able to please God and it is only because it is God who is enabling us to do God-honoring works. If we try to do God-pleasing things apart from God we are doing them through our own power and by our old nature. There is nothing in our old nature that is able to please God. All He wants us to do is surrender ourselves and let Him take control.

Verses 4—5

Instead of Abraham being justified through his own works, he was justified by believing God.

Galatians 3:6 Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

From this verse we see that Abraham did not believe in order to be justified but that he simply believed God. It was God who then justified him because of his believing.

It’s interesting to see how Paul quotes the Old Testament Scripture whenever possible to back up what he says. We see this in Galatians 3 when Paul shows that salvation is by grace and not Law. However, when Paul writes about Mystery truths, there is no Old Testament Scripture that can be used since it was never revealed (Ephesians 3:3—9).

Since Abraham did no works for his justification it follows that it was God who gave him the faith so he could believe. By nature, Abraham was a completely depraved sinner with no conscience desire to follow God lacking the nature to please God even if he desired to. It could only have been a work of God upon Abraham that would cause him to believe and subsequently be declared righteous. If it were a work of Abraham then God would have been held in debt to Abraham and would be liable to impute His righteousness upon him.

Verse 5 makes it clear that our justification is not some of God's work mixed with our work. It is either one or the other. Works produces debt; Grace leads to righteousness. Of course righteousness is completely God's work. He is the sole provider of justification to the ungodly. By definition, the ungodly are completely devoid of any godly thought or action, incapable of reaching out to God and lacking any desire to do so. God deals with the elect unbeliever giving him the faith to believe. Those who are not elect are not given faith and therefore do not believe. However, they are still responsible to believe because Christ died for all mankind making it possible for all to respond to the message of the Gospel. Those who think this is unfair need to realize that we all deserve eternal punishment but by God's grace, mercy and love He pulled a few off the pathway to hell and declared us righteousness so we could enjoy eternity with Him.

To put it another way, there are three possible ways God could have imputed righteousness:

1. Allow man to make the decision apart from God. This would involve a work of man thus making salvation possible through works. It would also give absolutely no security in salvation since it was obtained by works it could be lost by lack of works. God would impute righteousness when man did works that pleased Him and take it away when man's works were lacking.
2. Have God elect all to be saved. This is universalism. The Bible never speaks of everyone eventually becoming saved. (Although Israel is promised that all will be saved (Romans 11:26), however, this is after 2/3rds of Israel have been cut off (Zechariah 13:8) making all of remaining Israel saved.)
3. Have God elect a few who will believe because He gave them the faith to do so. This leaves it all up to God and does not bind Him to be controlled by what any person will do. We just need to trust that what He does is best even though we don't understand it.

Verses 4—5 Justification while the Law is in effect

Paul turns from Abraham to David to give an example of justification while the Law is in effect. As with Abraham who was declared righteous before the Law was given, David was declared righteous without doing the works of the Law.

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