

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

ROMANS 3:21-31

But now God has shown us a different way of being right in his sight—not by obeying the law (which no one can do completely) but by the way promised in the Scriptures long ago.

22 We are made right in God’s sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done.

23 For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard.

24 Yet now **God** in his gracious kindness **declares us not guilty**. He has done this through Christ **Jesus**, who **has freed us** by taking away our sins.

25 For **God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins** and to satisfy God’s anger against us. **We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us.** God was being entirely fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former times.

26 And he is entirely fair and just in this present time when he declares sinners to be right in his sight because they believe in Jesus.

27 Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? **No, because our acquittal is not based on our good deeds. It is based on our faith.**

28 So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

29 After all, God is not the God of the Jews only, is he? Isn’t he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is.

30 **THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD**, and there is **only one way of being accepted by him**. He makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.

31 Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, **ONLY WHEN WE HAVE FAITH DO WE TRULY FULFILL THE LAW.**

I consider myself to be very passionate about my relationship with Jesus Christ. One of the reasons for that passion is that God showed His love and grace to an atheist who showed nothing but contempt for Him. God brought me to a point in life where I fell to my knees in a state of utter despair and spoke those seven little words: “*God, if you’re there, please help me.*” Before long I found myself reading the Bible for the first time in my life and attending a Bible believing church where a number of people helped me better understand the scriptures. It took almost two years from that night on my knees, but I came to understand what it meant when the Bible says that salvation and eternal life come through faith in Jesus. I accepted Christ as my personal Savior and it remains the most important decision I ever made. The blessings have continued to come and although it hasn’t been an easy ride, peace and hope are present in abundance.

Considering that history, you may better understand my passion for this relationship. That

is why it breaks my heart to visit churches where you never hear the truth of this message taught. It also angers me that this message has been diluted and even changed in most churches today, to the point where the truth is no longer recognizable. The church teaches this fabricated, fictionalized message as if it were the truth, misleading many to believe they're okay with God when they're not. Romans 3:21-31 states the message of salvation as simply and as clearly as it can be presented. If you understand it, believe it, and make it a part of your own life, you will be saved and have eternal life in Heaven after you die. If you don't, your eternity will be spent in that place the Bible refers to as Hell. And if you're one of those that don't believe that, we can show you over and over again where the Bible verifies it. And if you don't believe the Bible to be the Word of God, we will gladly accept an invitation to compare your idea of truth with what the Bible considers to be truth. And we will be happy to discuss other religions and concepts of their gods as compared to the God of the Bible, and then of course the choice is still yours.

I'm reminded of a story I heard about a guy who was on a business trip. He was riding in a car with an associate and they passed by a liquor store. The man who was visiting the city said to his associate, *"That's a funny name for a liquor store."* The other man agreed and said, *"Yes, that is a funny name for a liquor store and there's a whole chain of them here in the city. In fact, there's a guy in my Sunday school class who owns them all."*

"That's interesting," the other man said, *"Does he attend often?"* *"Almost every Sunday,"* his friend replied, *"and often we meet together and he tries to help me in my spiritual growth."* The visitor then just couldn't help asking, *"I don't quite understand. If he attends church and Bible study regularly and coaches others in their Christian walk, what in the world is he doing owning a chain of liquor stores?"* *"Oh, that's just the business he's in,"* his friend replied, *"and right now he's going through a very difficult time personally. He's left his wife and is living with a twenty-two year old girl while waiting for a divorce. He's been living with her for about a year."*

His visitor then asked if this man had tried to reconcile with his wife in an attempt to save the marriage. *"Oh no,"* was the reply, *"he'll never go back to his wife. He truly believes this is the woman for him, so he has no intention of going back to his wife and children. You know, come to think of it, it's really hard for me to believe that a Christian would live like that."* To which his visitor replied, *"Did it ever enter your mind that maybe he's not a Christian?"* The reply came back, *"Oh no, I remember the day that he asked Jesus Christ into his life."*

Just asking Jesus Christ into your life isn't what it takes to be saved. In order to be saved a person must believe in their heart that they are a sinner in need of a Savior and that Jesus is the only one that can save them because He was the only one who could keep God's entire Law for a lifetime, and was willing to be the perfect sacrifice for the sin of all humankind by dying on the cross. And when one has that kind of faith, God sees them as joined to Christ and therefore righteous, which makes them keepers of God's Law as well, and it is in that relationship that their sin is forgiven and no longer seen by God. God sees them as sinless and perfect law keepers in the same way as Christ is seen by God.

People ask Christ into their lives all the time. They ask Christ to come into their lives in the emotional moments of an evangelistic crusade, because it seems the right thing to do to possibly get them out of the misery they're feeling. They may ask Jesus to come into their lives when they're going through a business reversal, a divorce, or a serious illness. People ask Jesus into their lives all the time when they think no one else can help them to get what they want. When, however, the crisis is over, they forget all about Jesus because all along they were only thinking of themselves.

It takes the kind of faith described above where we said that you believe you are a sinner in need of a Savior, to be truly saved. And when one is truly saved, the Holy Spirit sets up residence within a person and you can begin to see visible signs of a true conversion in the changed behavior and attitudes of that person. Romans 3:21-31 describes the process for a true conversion and could be written in contemporary language as follows: A person can be declared righteous by God without keeping the Law themselves, and this applies to all people, not just a select few. Paul tells us that because of Jesus' faithfulness in keeping the Law perfectly, God's promise to the Israelites, to deal once and for all with the sin of the world, would finally be accomplished. God has dealt with sin through the cross of Jesus. He has vindicated Jesus, declaring Him **righteous**, by raising Him from the dead. The faithfulness of Jesus, the obedience of Jesus, is the means by which the righteousness of God can be revealed, and by which God can declare us righteous as well. **Please remember, however, that the righteousness of God is not the same righteousness that's given to believers.** God's righteousness is at work in justifying those who believe in Jesus. This righteousness that is given to us as a gift does not depend on our being obedient to a bunch of rules. It comes by our having faith in what Jesus did on our behalf. In so doing, God sees us as obedient to the Law. Every good gift is based on what Jesus has done, not what any of us have done.

There are a few verses we need to read as being complimentary to Romans 3:21-31. The first would be Ephesians 2:4-10:

*But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much,
5 that even while we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when
he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's special favor that you
have been saved!)*

*6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ, and we are seated
with him in the heavenly realms—all because we are one with Christ
Jesus.*

*7 And so God can always point to us as examples of the incredible wealth
of his favor and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us
through Christ Jesus.*

*8 God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't
take credit for this; it is a gift from God.*

*9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of
us can boast about it.*

10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus,

so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

2 Corinthians 5:17:

What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!

Colossians 1:18-23:

Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. He is the first of all who will rise from the dead, so he is first in everything.

19 For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ,

20 and by him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of his blood on the cross.

21 This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions,

22 yet now he has brought you back as his friends. He has done this through his death on the cross in his own human body. As a result, he has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

23 But you must continue to believe this truth and stand in it firmly. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed by God to proclaim it.

If there is no evidence of a pattern of righteous living within a person, the chances are that the person never truly accepted Christ as Savior. If someone bails out of the faith, then you know they were never truly redeemed. Godly behavior and holy activity is the evidence of genuine salvation. In fact if you read 1 John, that's all that you can conclude. 1 John says that if you don't love your brother or sister, it doesn't matter what you say, you're not saved. In chapter 3, John goes on to say that if you go on continually living in sin, it doesn't matter what you claim, you're not saved. You are a child of the devil, not the child of God.

So beginning in Romans 3:21, Paul gives us the way to get right with God. Through our study of the first three chapters of Romans we've learned that people cannot get right with God as a result of their own efforts. This is particularly uncomfortable for religious people who like to think they can get right with God on their own terms by some kind of spiritual activity.

The Jews were like that. They believed they could get right with God by meticulous attention to keeping the Law. But the fact was that they could not obey the Law. People then ask what the Law of God is for if you can't keep it. The answer is very simple. The Law of God is to show us we can't keep it. We wouldn't know we were sinners if we didn't know we couldn't keep the standard. In other words when a person looks at the Law of God, they say, "I'm not able to do that." Thus they know they fall short of God's perfect standard and they are sinners in need of the help of a Savior. They know they

need to seek the help of someone who is capable of keeping the law and thus providing them with a righteousness they can't accomplish on their own.

Having affirmed that righteousness cannot be achieved by our own efforts, we also see that righteousness has been built on the revealed Word of God from the Old Testament. It has been witnessed to by the Law and the prophets as attested to in Romans 3:21. Paul is saying here that this is the same message that was revealed to the people through the Old Testament before the coming of Christ

Let's close chapter 3 with a reading from chapter 10, verses 9 and 10:

For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
10 For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.

That is what salvation is. It is the affirmation of the sovereignty of God in your life through the mediator, Jesus Christ.

ROMANS 4

We now come to the fourth chapter of Romans. Some have called the epistle of Romans the *Magna Carta* of the Christian faith; the great statement of Christian doctrine. All religious thinking and instruction must be measured by the book of Romans, which details God's truth in terms of His plan for redeeming (to free from the consequences of sin) the human race. If we were to give chapter 4 a title, it would certainly be appropriate to entitle it, *The Faith of Abraham*, because the whole chapter is really the story of Abraham. If you're asking yourself how the story of a guy who lived almost 4,000 years ago could affect your life today, just listen up.

Paul uses Abraham as an illustration that salvation is by faith, not works, and that will apply to all human beings throughout history, and yes that would include anyone who lived before Abraham as well. Christ paid the full price for salvation at the cross. Salvation is a paid for gift from God through Jesus. Basically that's the message Paul begins to deliver in Romans 3:21, which we've just studied, and it continues all the way into chapter 8.

Having taught salvation by grace through faith in Romans 3:21-31, Paul now begins to illustrate it, and he selects Abraham in order to do so. Abraham becomes the classic proof of salvation by grace through faith. Paul has told us how to be right with God, and he has said that a person is right with God, not by what the person does, but by what he or she believes. A person becomes right with God by believing in Jesus Christ, His perfect work, and His payment for all sin for all time on the cross. And yes, that includes yours and mine.

There is a very important reason for Paul using Abraham as the illustration here. Without using Abraham as the illustration, Paul's message would be unacceptable to the Jews. Let's look at some reasons why:

1) As an Old Testament figure, Abraham would confirm the eternal truth of righteousness by grace through faith. By using Abraham, Paul is saying this concept is not something new. The fact of the matter is that it is very old because it has always existed. In fact Abraham lived about 500 years prior to Moses and the formation of the Jewish nation. Abraham was born in 2166 B.C. and died in 1991 B.C. Moses was born in 1526 B.C. and led the Exodus from Egypt in 1446 B.C.-- Abraham preceded the formation of the nation of Israel. So if Paul can establish that a person was saved by grace through faith and not works way back before the establishment of Israel as a nation, he is then giving his audience a timeless truth.

2) Abraham was the supreme example of faith in the Old Testament as Paul confirms in Galatians 3:1-9:

Oh, foolish Galatians! What magician has cast an evil spell on you? For you used to see the meaning of Jesus Christ's death as clearly as though I had shown you a signboard with a picture of Christ dying on the cross.

*2 Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by keeping the law? Of course not, **for the Holy Spirit came upon you only after you believed the message you heard about Christ.***

3 Have you lost your senses? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?

4 You have suffered so much for the Good News. Surely it was not in vain, was it? Are you now going to just throw it all away?

5 I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law of Moses? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.

*6 **In the same way, "Abraham believed God, so God declared him righteous because of his faith."***

7 The real children of Abraham, then, are all those who put their faith in God.

*8 What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would accept the Gentiles, too, on the basis of their faith. God promised this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "**All nations will be blessed through you.**"*

*9 **And so it is: All who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.***

In a very real sense all who come to God by faith are children of Abraham, a man who set the standard for faith by believing God in an incredible way. Paul's teaching about Abraham was in conflict with the teaching of the rabbis of Paul's time who believed that

Abraham was made right with God, was saved, was forgiven of his sin, and chosen by God for salvation because of his perfect character. The Jews of Paul's time thought that Abraham had been the best man in the world and was therefore chosen by God to be the father of His people, the nation of Israel. They believed Abraham was a righteous man and that's why God chose him. This is also what the majority of the orthodox rabbis believe even today.

Now at this point we could raise the question, How could a man keep God's righteous standard when it hadn't yet been given? Remember that Abraham lived 500 years before God issued His Law. The rabbis would answer by speculating such things as: Abraham kept the Law of God by anticipation of what it would be, he kept it intuitively. But no matter what the reason, the rabbis believed God chose Abraham because of his self-righteousness.

So Paul selects Abraham in order to shatter this myth and wipe away the Jewish illusion that God chose Abraham because he was a righteous man. Abraham is not an example of a person who earned his righteousness because of his good works. He is a man who received salvation by grace through believing, in simple child-like trust. Abraham took God's Word at face value. He believed what God said, and by that act of faith, he received the gift of righteousness.

It was important to the Jews to believe that God chose a man because of his righteousness because they believed that by their own self-righteousness, God had chosen them too. But Paul wanted them to know as he wanted us to know that it is a losing battle to try to earn salvation. You don't need to torture yourself with the losing battle to gain acceptance with God based on your own good works.

3) A third reason that Paul chose Abraham was that through the first three chapters of Romans everything has been theological theory and truth. It was time to put some flesh and blood on that theological theory and truth. Paul goes from the abstract to the concrete. He gives it flesh and the flesh is Abraham. So for these three reasons Paul chooses Abraham as his example.

In verses 1-8 of Romans 4, we'll deal with the fact that Abraham was justified, or made right with God, by faith and not works. We need to remember as we look at these verses that in presenting this position, Paul is storming the fortress of Judaism. He's trying to break down the walls of their strongest arsenal. Because if Paul can prove that Abraham was not justified because of his good works, then no one can be justified by their good works, because the Jews said Abraham was the most righteous man of all. It would then logically follow that if the man they considered to be the most righteous of all time could not be justified by his works, then no one else could be justified by their works.

On the other hand, if it can be demonstrated that Abraham was justified by faith, then everyone must be justified by faith because Abraham is the standard. Before we begin looking at the text let's give the Jews a fair hearing on this issue to see what needs to be overcome for Paul to prove his point. The Jews believed what they believed because of

certain passages in the scripture of the Old Testament. One of which is Genesis 26:1-5, where God is speaking to Isaac, Abraham's son:

Now a severe famine struck the land, as had happened before in Abraham's time. So Isaac moved to Gerar, where Abimelech, king of the Philistines, lived.

2 The Lord appeared to him there and said, "Do not go to Egypt.

3 Do as I say, and stay here in this land. If you do, I will be with you and bless you. I will give all this land to you and your descendants, just as I solemnly promised Abraham, your father.

4 I will cause your descendants to become as numerous as the stars, and I will give them all these lands. And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

5 I will do this because Abraham listened to me and obeyed all my requirements, commands, regulations, and laws."

The Jews maintain that God blessed Abraham because he did all these things. But they don't get the order quite straight. They neglect to say that Abraham did such things because God had already saved him and made him righteous. You see the rabbis actually taught that Abraham as well as his son, Isaac, and grandson, Jacob never sinned. You'd have to read through the book of Genesis eliminating a whole lot of verses to come to that conclusion.

The rabbis taught that because Abraham was perfect, because he was righteous, because he was not a sinner, God chose him and made him the head of the Jewish nation. They also declared that Abraham was the standard for everyone else to follow. If anyone wants to be righteous, to be right with God, to have their sin forgiven, to be saved and brought into the kingdom, then you have to attain to the level that Abraham had attained. You need to climb to the top of the ladder. You have to become righteous based on your own good works. You have to keep the Law.

And as a point of clarification, some of you might be a little confused by the term Law. What exactly does Law mean? There are a number of different aspects to the Law that we'd be happy to discuss with anyone who is interested after the service. But for our purposes here, it will suffice to consider the Law to be the Ten commandments.

The rabbis loved this theory about Abraham being perfect in God's eyes, and I have little doubt that their primary reason for loving it was that it fed their pride. Because, you see, they could claim that they received their positions as rabbis by being righteous and obeying God's laws just as Abraham had done.

In order to show the Jews the truth, Paul had to disprove this theory about Abraham and show them that it was Abraham's faith alone that made him righteous.

We'll pick up here in chapter 4 right where we left off in chapter 3. Let's begin by reading the first three verses, Romans 4:1-3:

*Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What were his experiences concerning this question of being saved by faith?
 2 Was it because of his good deeds that God accepted him? If so, he would have had something to boast about. But from God's point of view Abraham had no basis at all for pride.
 3 For the Scriptures tell us, "**Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous.**"*

Abraham, who lived 500 years before God gave the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, was saved by what? He was saved by faith. Abraham believed God. It's always been the same method of salvation right from the beginning, going all the way back to the father of the Jewish nation, Abraham. Abraham was the first human that God chose to begin the work of reconciling people to Himself. You'll remember as we closed out chapter 3 of Romans, we saw that in order for anyone to be made right with God, God had to take the first step. We also saw that all the Law did was show people their sin.

The ceremonies and sacrifices of the Old Testament could not reconcile people with God. Those ceremonies and sacrifices could not forgive sin and make people right with God. People in the Old Testament were right with God when they believed and trusted God. When they did so, they were saved by God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Then, in obedience to God, they carried out the ceremonies and sacrifices which represented their forgiveness. So the people of the Old Testament times, prior to the coming of Christ, learned and recognized the need for a sacrifice for sin and for a righteousness beyond their abilities. So the Gospel that Jesus taught when He arrived on the scene, contrary to what the Jews might think, is not something different than what the Old Testament taught. The Old Testament was simply a concept and the Gospel was the reality. There's no difference in the basic message. People are saved by faith and trust in the work of God. Let's look again at Galatians 3:6-9:

*In the same way, "**Abraham believed God, so God declared him righteous because of his faith.**"*

7 The real children of Abraham, then, are all those who put their faith in God.

8 What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would accept the Gentiles, too, on the basis of their faith. God promised this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "All nations (all people)¹ will be blessed through you."

9 And so it is: All who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.

You might be wondering how it was that Abraham exercised this faith in God. We can find one occasion in Hebrews 11:8:

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home

¹ Parentheses added.

and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going.

That's what I call faith. Abraham lived in a city called Ur, in the land of the Chaldeans, a thousand miles from the land to which God wanted him to go. Abraham's family, possessions, reputation, business, his entire life was centered there. God called Abraham to go and Abraham went. This demonstrated great faith. God said, *"I want you to go somewhere else and I'm not going to tell you where. I want you to abandon everything and leave."* So Abraham abandoned his present security for a future hope. That's faith. Why was Abraham willing to do that? Because he believed God. He believed God would fulfill His promise, that God would take him to a good place and bless his life. He believed God and that's all that God asks.

Let's now look at verses 4 and 5 of Romans chapter 4:

When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive.

5 But people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their work.

Faith is believing that all God says is true. When you believe by faith, you are made righteous. Now there is a false faith and a true faith. Let's turn for a moment to John 8:30-32:

Then many who heard him say these things believed in him.

31 Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you keep obeying my teachings.

32 And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

A faith that is not real is a temporary faith, whereas true faith continues in obedience to the Word of God. Faith is false if it does not bear fruit and continue in the Word. It is a total commitment that's made when you hear the truth of the Gospel message. You internalize it in your mind and heart and that motivates you to act in obedience. It's essential to understand that the faith we're talking about is a faith in what Jesus accomplished on the cross, not just a belief in God. Since Jesus' death on the cross, the truth of His sacrifice is available to us and our faith must be in what He did on that cross.

People need to be aware of this reality. So many people in the world seek righteousness and salvation through their own efforts. If you're one of them, please stop. If you think for one moment that you please God and gain His favor by what you do on your own, you are making a big mistake. People throughout history have sought to be right with God and wondered how. That's why we have so many different religions throughout the world and why people are just naturally religious creatures of some sort. This is because they are naturally aware of their sinfulness and worry about some sort of judgment. The world gladly offers them a multitude of wrong answers.

People seek the answer but they don't always want the answer they get. The Jews asked, "What shall we do?" When they heard the answer they turned around and walked away.

Most of the people who heard John the Baptist weren't interested when he gave them the answer. Many who asked Jesus, "What should we do?" turned and walked away when they heard the answer. So we learn a basic truth about people. They seek to be right with God, but they don't always respond when they hear what it requires. People are either walking toward Jesus or away from Him. There's no standing still or middle ground. Which direction are you heading? If you feel you're heading toward him but need some further information before making that commitment, we'd be happy to sit down with you over a cup of coffee, either after the service or any other time you might want to get together, and answer your questions. If you feel you're heading away from Jesus, perhaps you've heard something here this morning that may give you cause to stop and turn toward Him. We're here to help you as well. And anyone who feels they're ready to make the commitment can stand up right now and walk through the steps with us.

Next time we'll continue to look at how God's truth of justification by faith was evidenced even in the Old Testament through the life of Abraham.