

ABRAHAM'S EXAMPLE

TEXT: ROMANS 4:1-8

INTRODUCTION:

1. Romans 3:21 says, "But now (referring to the dispensation of grace) the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets."
2. "The law and the prophets" (3:21) refers to the testimony of the Old Testament. The New Testament doctrine of justification by faith is in perfect harmony with the teachings of the Old Testament (cf. Romans 4:1-8).
3. The New Testament doctrine of justification by faith is in exact agreement with the Old Testament, and here in Romans chapter 4 Abraham is mentioned as an example of an Old Testament believer who was justified by faith (4:1-5).
4. David is also mentioned, pointing out that Old Testament believers were saved the same way we are saved (4:6-8).
5. It is significant that these two men are used to illustrate this doctrine. The history of Israel began with Abraham, and David was their great king.
6. That is why the New Testament begins by saying, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).
7. Jews are taught by their rabbis to stay away from the Christian Bible, and those who do read it are surprised when they see that the New Testament begins by stating that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the son of David, and the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1).
8. Here in Romans chapter 4, the apostle Paul argues that justification (righteousness) is by faith, not by works (4:1-4), and not by circumcision (4:9-12), and not by keeping the law (4:13-16).

I. THE NECESSITY OF FAITH (4:1, 2).

1. "What shall we say then?" (4:1; cf. 3:5; 6:1; 7:7; 9:14, 30).
2. Romans 4:2 says that if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to "glory" (boast) about, but not before God (cf. 3:27).
3. Abraham was a great man, and had a great deal of which to glory, but he could not boast of being saved by his good works.
4. Genesis 13:2 says, "And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." Abraham had much to boast about, but not his salvation (Romans 4:3). Abraham "found" justification by his faith (4:1b).

II. THE OBJECT OF FAITH (4:2, 3).

1. "Abraham believed God" (4:3).
2. Paul says, "For what saith the scripture?" (Romans 4:3). The Scripture he is referring to is Genesis 15:6 -- "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."
3. Galatians 3:6 says, "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."
4. James 2:23 says, "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness."
5. The object of Abraham's faith was God. Abraham believed God.
6. Often today we hear people talk about "people of faith." These so-called "people of faith" are often very religious and sincere, but they have the wrong object of faith.
7. The Bible is clear (John 3:16).
8. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).
9. Faith is trusting God. Faith is believing God. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (4:3).
10. Faith is man's response to God's promise.
11. Faith is the condition, not the ground of salvation. The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).
12. There was only one condition. "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31).
13. Romans 3:22 says the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, is unto "all and upon all them that believe."
14. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "God is the One Whom we trust, and it is His free grace that warrants and elicits our confidence. All through this chapter (Romans 4) the emphasis rests on God as the Object of the believer's faith" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*).

III. THE PRINCIPLE OF FAITH (4:4, 5).

1. The man who works for a boss expects to get paid, but the man who tries to earn his salvation from God will be disappointed. "Worketh" and "faith" are two different principles (4:4).
2. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).
3. God's way of salvation: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth..." (4:5).

4. *Trusting Him whate'er befall,
Trusting Jesus, that is all.* -- Ira Sankey.
5. Our favorite Gospel tract is "God's Simple Plan of Salvation." Sadly many refuse God's simple plan. Many misunderstand God's simple plan, and they try and mix in works, but this is contrary to Scripture (cf. 4:4, 5; 11:6; etc.).
5. Griffith Thomas said, "How marvelously simple, sufficient, and satisfying is this principle of faith."
6. Romans 4:5 says that God "justifies the ungodly" that believe on Him. This means they were ungodly when they first believed. It doesn't mean they continued being ungodly (cf. 6:1, 2).
7. "Ungodly" means "impious, wicked, no fear of God." *Thayer's Lexicon* says the word means, "destitute of reverential awe towards God."
8. James Denney wrote, "The whole Pauline gospel could be summed up in this one word — God who justifies the ungodly."
9. Denney went on to say that justification is a miracle. "It is a thing that only God can achieve, and that calls into act and manifestation all the resources of the Divine nature. It is achieved through an unparalleled revelation of the judgment and the mercy of God. The miracle of the Gospel is that God comes to the ungodly, with a mercy which is righteous altogether, and enables them through faith, in spite of what they are, to enter into a new relation to Himself, in which goodness becomes possible for them. There can be no spiritual life at all for a sinful man unless he can get an *initial assurance* of an unchanging love of God deeper than sin, and he gets this at the Cross. He gets it by believing in Jesus, and it is justification by faith" (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*).
10. "Counted" (4:5) means "reckoned" or "imputed" (cf. Scofield margin). It is a bookkeeping term which meant to make an entry in the account book or to put to one's account.
11. In God's system of bookkeeping, when a person is saved, sin is transferred from his account, and righteousness is transferred to his account.
12. *"And the record's clear today, for He washed my sins away,
When the old account was settled long ago"* -- Frank. M. Graham.
13. Christ's righteousness is put to our account ("reckoned" -- 4:4, 9, 10, or "imputed" -- 4:8, 22, 23, 24) through faith.
14. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted (reckoned, imputed) unto him for righteousness" (4:3).
15. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted (reckoned, imputed) for righteousness" (4:5).
16. In Philemon 18, Paul wrote to Philemon, "If he (Onesimus) hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account."

IV. THE OUTCOME OF FAITH (4:6-8).

1. After first using Abraham as an example, Paul refers to David, another Old Testament believer who was justified by faith (4:6-8).
2. Psalm 32:2 says, "Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."
3. David wrote Psalm 32 after his sin with Bath-sheba.
4. The "blessedness" includes the blessedness of sins forgiven, of righteousness imputed, and sins covered (Romans 4:6-8). God covers them forever.
5. This chapter deals with righteousness (4:3) and forgiveness (4:7, 8). Righteousness is much more than forgiveness. When a person is saved, he is not merely a pardoned criminal, but a saint who has received Christ's imputed righteousness.

CONCLUSION:

Kenneth Wuest said that Paul "calls attention to the fact that when the employer gives the workman his pay, that is not counted as a favor, but as a legal obligation which the employer is bound to discharge. It is a debt which he owes his employee. The latter, out of courtesy, thanks his employer, but he is not legally obligated to do so. He earned the wages and he deserved them. If the sinner earned salvation by good works, God would be indebted to man and obligated to give it to him. It would not be a favor which God would do for man. And man would not need to thank God nor glorify Him for it" (*Wuest's Word Studies*).