

Justification by Faith Alone

Romans 4:1 - 12

¹What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ²If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." ⁴Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." ⁹Is 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. ¹⁰Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹And 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. ¹²And 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.

One of Romans' great themes is explored in today's lesson. Paul used Abraham as an example of "justification by faith." Hebrews 11 chronicles the stories of others who exercised faith in God. Paul made it clear in Romans that Abraham was not justified by works or good deeds. Abraham was justified by faith (4:3). Paul argued that Abraham's faith and belief in God's words were credited to Him as righteousness. Imagine a deposit in a bank account. Faith leads to a deposit of righteousness into our salvation account.

David Jeremiah has written that *"the book of Romans is perhaps the most tightly organized and carefully argued treatise on salvation in the entire Bible. Paul carefully builds the biblical case for the complete and total sufficiency of Christ for personal salvation."* Justification is the first dimension of salvation. In the act of justification, God declares us not guilty of our sins. God can do this because He views us through Christ who is innocent. God also appropriates the work of Christ at the cross into our account or onto our ledger.

No matter how much we may try, we can never become righteous or justified on our own. No amount of good deeds, hard work, religious devotion or happy living can make us acceptable and righteous in God's eyes. We are incapable of producing the necessary transformation that removes our guilt and sin and replaces such things with innocence and righteousness.

John MacArthur has powerfully and truthfully written this observation. *“If there is any doctrine that the chief enemy of man and of God desires to undercut and distort, it is the doctrine of salvation. If Satan can cause confusion and error in regard to that doctrine, he has succeeded in keeping men in their sin and under divine judgment and condemnation.”* There is no doctrine any more important than the doctrine of salvation. EVERYTHING else hangs upon a good and clear understanding of salvation. Man cannot pull himself up to a good or right standing beside God.

Paul identified two ways that God responds to our sins when we come to saving faith in Christ and experience His justification. Look carefully at 4:7,8 -

1. God forgives sin
2. God no longer counts or holds our sins against us.

And indeed when these realities are present, our lives are blessed.

God extends the offer of justification to all who will come to Christ. There are no limitations based upon race, background, sins, age, income or intelligence. God bids all to come to Christ and experience justification. Again, let God be true and every man a liar. Paul makes clear that Abraham was not justified by works. But he was justified by his faith. There can be no boasting. Salvation comes from beyond ourselves.

We are not to place our faith “in faith itself.” We place our faith in the completed work of Christ at the cross and the sufficiency of Christ alone. Salvation is never a matter of simply believing something. It is about accepting and receiving God’s redemptive grace through the atoning work of His Son on the cross.

Applications ...

1. Step one is accepting Christ into your life as Savior and Lord.
2. Explain justification by faith to someone you know. Come to an understanding of this doctrine.
3. Pray for God to open a door for you to share the good news of Christ with someone in your life...at the office, in your neighborhood or elsewhere.
4. Give thanks for what Christ has done. Every time you see the letter “J” today, give thanks for your justification.