

THREE FACTS ABOUT JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Romans 4:1-25

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In Rm 1:16-17, Paul says that his letter of Romans is all about the gospel (Rm 1:16-17).
2. In 1:18-3:20, Paul begins to explain the gospel by laying out the bad news – man’s desperate need for salvation from sin. He concludes his argument by saying that...
 - i. All are sinners (3:9-18).
 - ii. All are subject to judgment (3:19).
 - iii. All are helpless to save themselves (3:20).
3. In 3:21-31, Paul gets to the good news. Man is justified, or finds right standing with God, by faith alone. That is, man does not earn right standing with God by keeping the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Justification by faith.
4. Remember, the doctrine of justification means that when God saves us by faith in Christ, He declares us legally righteous in His sight. When you believe in Jesus, God justifies you. He acquits you. He declares you innocent, or not guilty. He gives you right standing with Him here and now, and promises no condemnation on the day of judgment. Justification means that in the immediate sense God no longer treats you like an enemy but like His beloved child, and in the future it means that on the day of judgment God will not punish you for your sins, but will welcome you into an eternal dwelling in heaven. And Paul has argued that justification, or right standing with God, is by faith and not by works.
5. **Romans 3:28** For we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.
6. In Romans 4, Paul elaborates on the doctrine of justification by faith.

II. THREE FACTS ABOUT JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

1. Justification by faith is not new.

- i. **Romans 4:1-8** What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 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 credited to him for righteousness. 4 Now to the one who works, pay is not credited as a gift, but as something owed. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness. 6 Likewise, David also speaks of the blessing of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 7 Blessed are those whose lawless acts are forgiven and whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the person the Lord will never charge with sin.

- ii. After hearing about justification by faith alone, Paul anticipates that the Jews will react by saying, “This is a completely new idea and contradicts everything in the Old Testament.” So, he argues for the veracity of justification by faith by showing that it goes all the way back to Abraham and David.
- iii. **Romans 4:1-3** 1 What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 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 credited to him for righteousness.
- iv. First, Paul looks to Abraham, the father of the Jews, to prove justification by faith. He asks a question and then gives the answer.
- v. Question (v. 1): “What did our forefather Abraham discover about how to get right with God?”
- vi. The answer comes in two parts.
 - 1. Wrong answer (v. 2): “Abraham was justified by works.”
 - a. The Jews believed that Abraham was justified by works. They believed that Abraham was the only righteous man of his generation, and that’s why God chose him. They believed that Abraham began to serve God at the age of three, and his righteousness was made complete by his circumcision and his obedience of the law. They believed that Abraham had a thorough knowledge of God’s law, even though

he lived 600 years before Moses, and he obeyed it. This is why he had a right relationship with God, according to the Jews.

- b. But Paul argues that if Abraham was given right standing with God because of his good works, then he can boast. He can brag about how good and righteous he is. He can say, “I deserve heaven.” But in the previous passage, Paul has already argued for that all are sinful, all are subject to judgment, all are helpless to save themselves – so there is no room for boasting (Rm 3:27).
 - c. This is why, right after saying, “If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about,” he adds, “but not before God.” Abraham was not justified by works; he was a sinner just like the rest of humanity. How, then, was he justified?
2. Right answer: **Romans 3:3** “For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness.”
- a. Paul is quoting Gen 15:6. This is what the Bible says about Abraham. God told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son, and their descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen 15:4-5). Abraham believed God – he believed that God’s would come true – and as a result, he was justified – he was given right standing with God.
3. In the next two verses (Rm 4:4-5) Paul explains justification by faith further.
4. **Romans 4:4-5** 4 Now to the one who works, pay is not credited as a gift, but as something owed. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness.
- a. Paul is contrasting two ways of getting right with God: works and faith. The way of works is relying upon

your works for salvation. The way of faith is relying upon Christ for salvation.

b. In vs. 4-5 Paul says that if you rely upon works, then you will get what you earn. You will get what you deserve. Unfortunately, Paul has already established that what you deserve is wrath and judgment. However, if you don't rely upon works but rely upon Christ, then you will be justified.

c. How can you tell what whether you are on the path of works or faith? A good diagnostic question is this: "Why should God let you into heaven?" If your answer is about what you have done to earn heaven, then you are on the path of works, and you will not be acquitted. But if your answer is about your trust in what Christ has done for you, then you will be justified.

vii. Now that Paul has proven that Abraham was justified by faith, he then turns his attention to David, the greatest king of the Jews.

1. **Romans 4:6-8** Likewise, David also speaks of the blessing of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 7 Blessed are those whose lawless acts are forgiven and whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the person the Lord will never charge with sin.

2. Paul is quoting from Ps 32:1-2, where David said, "Blessed – intensely happy – is the person, not who earned right standing with God, but who has a right standing with God simply because God forgave them. In other words, justification – right standing with God – is not by works. It is by grace – a free gift.

viii. So the first point that Paul is making in Romans 4 is that justification by faith is not new. This has always been the way that people get right with God. People have never been good enough to earn justification; it has always been a free gift received by faith.

2. Because justification is by faith, it is available to Jews and Gentiles.

- i. **Romans 4:9-12** 9 Is this blessing only for the circumcised, then? Or is it also for the uncircumcised? For we say, Faith was credited to Abraham for righteousness., 10 In what way, then, was it credited—while he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? It was not while he was circumcised, but uncircumcised. 11 And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith, while still uncircumcised. This was to make him the father of all who believe but are not circumcised, so that righteousness may be credited to them also. 12 And he became the father of the circumcised, who are not only circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had while he was still uncircumcised.
- ii. Paul addresses a question that plagued the first century church: Do you have to become Jewish to be justified? In other words, justification may be by faith alone, but don't you still have to adopt the Jewish faith? Don't you still need to be circumcised and follow the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament?
- iii. **Romans 4:9-10** 9 Is this blessing only for the circumcised, then? Or is it also for the uncircumcised? For we say, Faith was credited to Abraham for righteousness. 10 In what way, then, was it credited—while he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? It was not while he was circumcised, but uncircumcised.
- iv. To convert to Judaism you had to be circumcised. Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, so justification has nothing to do with circumcision or adopting the Jewish faith. Abraham was justified – declared right with God – in Gen 15:6. At least fourteen years passed before God commanded him to be circumcised.
- v. **Romans 4:11-12** 11 And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith, while still uncircumcised. This was to make him the father of all who believe but are not circumcised, so that righteousness may be credited to them also. 12 And he became the father of the circumcised, who are not only circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had while he was still uncircumcised.

- vi. Circumcision was not what justified Abraham; it was merely an outward sign to show that he had already been justified before his circumcision.
- vii. Then Paul makes an important point. “This was to make him the father of all who believe but are not circumcised.”
- viii. Since Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, then nobody has to get circumcised to be justified. In other words, you don’t have to convert to Judaism to get right with God. It’s not about following the ceremonial law of Moses; it’s about faith in Jesus Christ. Everyone can get right with God the same way that Abraham did.
- ix. What does this mean for the Jews? Look at what Paul says in **verse 12**. “And he became the father of the circumcised, who are not only circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had while he was still uncircumcised.”
- x. If you are already a Jew, then you can be justified too, but not because you are circumcised; not because you follow the law, but in the same way that Gentiles are circumcised – by faith alone.
- xi. In other words, everyone – Jew and Gentile – is justified in the same way. It’s not by works, or through Judaism, but through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

3. Because justification is by faith, all who believe are the children of Abraham.

- i. **Romans 4:13-18** 13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. 14 If those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made empty and the promise nullified, 15 because the law produces wrath. And where there is no law, there is no transgression. 16 This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to the one who is of the law but also to the one who is of Abraham’s faith. He is the father of us all. 17 As it is written: I have made you the father of many nations—, in the presence of the God in whom he believed, the one who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not

exist. 18 He believed, hoping against hope, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what had been spoken: So will your descendants be.

- ii. In this passage Paul addresses a question that is highly controversial among Christians today. Who are the people of God? The Jews, or Christians? Or does God have two people, with two plans?
- iii. Dispensationalism is a popular type of theology that teaches a distinction between the church and Israel (ethnic Jews). God promised to give Abraham and his descendants a land and a kingdom. When Jesus came, His purpose was to fulfill all of God's promises to Israel, but Israel rejected Him. So, God put His plan for Israel (ethnic Jews) on hold, and initiated a parenthetical plan to save Gentiles (the church age). At any moment, Jesus is going to rapture the church out of the world, and then God will resume His plan with Israel. After a seven-year tribulation in which 2/3 of the Jews will be killed by the anti-Christ, Jesus will come back and fulfill all of God's promises to Israel. He will set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem where He will reign for 1,000 years. There will be a rebuilt temple and a resuming of the sacrificial system. So, dispensationalism teaches that God has two peoples with two plans – Israel and the church. Is that biblical? They think it is, but I disagree. Dispensationalism -- the idea that God has two peoples with two plans – is a very new idea. It was invented by John Darby in England in 1830. Before that, for 1,800 years – going all the way back to the church fathers – Christians have always believed that God has one people and one plan – the church – made up of both Jews and Gentiles.
- iv. Abraham touches on this in Romans 4.
- v. **Romans 4:13** For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.
- vi. God promised Abraham and his descendants a land of their own. But the New Testament expands that promise to the world – not merely the land of Canaan. I believe this promise will be fulfilled

when Jesus comes back and creates a new heavens and new earth where God's people will dwell with Him forever. So the promises is not merely the land of Canaan, but eternal life.

- vii. This promise was not given to Abraham because he kept the law, but because of his faith.
- viii. **Romans 4:14-15** If those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made empty and the promise nullified, 15 because the law produces wrath. And where there is no law, there is no transgression.
- ix. Who are the heirs to the promise made to Abraham? If it is those who keep the law, then it's not by faith, and that means the promise is nullified; nobody gets the promise. Why not? Because the law produces wrath. Everyone has broken the law and deserves God's wrath.
- x. But the last line of verse 15 is important. "And where there is no law, there is no transgression." If the promise isn't based on law but on faith, then you aren't disqualified by breaking the law.
- xi. **Romans 4:16** 16 This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to the one who is of the law but also to the one who is of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all.
- xii. If the promise is to those who have faith, then the heirs of Abraham are not ethnic Jews, but all those who have faith in Jesus.
- xiii. Who are the descendants of Abraham? This is the key question. Who are the heirs to the promise made to Abraham? Who are the true Jews? Who is the true Israel? Is it ethnic Jews, or is the church – believers in Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles?
- xiv. Vs 16 says that the promise is "not only to the one who is of the law" – i.e., Jews, "but also to the one who is of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all."
- xv. That phrase, "He is the father of us all," is used twice in this chapter – vs. 11 and 16. It means that Abraham's heirs are not ethnic Jews, but Jews and Gentiles who have faith in Jesus.

- xvi. **Romans 4:17-18** 17 As it is written: I have made you the father of many nations— in the presence of the God in whom he believed, the one who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist. 18 He believed, hoping against hope, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what had been spoken: So will your descendants be.
- xvii. Abraham’s true descendants are all those who have faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality.
- xviii. This is what God meant when he promised to make Abraham the father of many nations (Gen 17:5). It didn’t just mean that Abraham would produce the Israelites, Ishmaelites (descendants of Ishmael), Edomites (descendants of Esau), and Midianites (descendants of Midian, son of Abraham’s concubine Keturah). It meant that Abraham would be the father of all who are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles.
- xix. Because justification is by faith, then Abraham’s descendants – the true Jews, the true Israel – are not ethnic Jews, but everyone who approaches God by faith in Jesus Christ.
- xx. This truth is found throughout the New Testament.
 1. **Romans 2:28-29** 28 For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh. 29 On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—by the Spirit, not the letter. That person’s praise is not from people but from God.
 - a. Being a true Jew has nothing to do with ethnicity or with Judaism. It’s about the circumcision of the heart – the inner transformation that happens to a believer in Jesus Christ.
 2. **Galatians 3:7** You know, then, that those who have faith, these are Abraham’s sons.
 - a. Abraham’s descendants are those who have faith in Jesus.
 3. **Galatians 3:16** Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say “and to seeds,” as though

referring to many, but referring to one, and to your seed, who is Christ.

- a. In Gen 12:7 God promised to give the land to Abraham's seed. Paul helps us to understand what that meant. It was not promised to Abraham's seeds – every physical descendant, but to his seed – one descendant. Who? Jesus. All the promises to Abraham were ultimately made to Jesus.

4. **Galatians 3:28-29** 28 There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.

- a. There is no more distinction between Jew and Gentile. We are all one in Christ.
- b. All of God's promises to Abraham were made to Jesus. If you put your faith in Christ, then you are also Abraham's seed, and heirs to the promise.

5. **Ephesians 3:6** The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

- a. There are not two peoples; there is only one body – the church. It is made up of Jews and Gentiles who put their faith in Christ.
- b. The church is the true Israel. The true Jews are Christians.
- c. When the Bible says that God will bless those who bless Israel, and curse those who are hostile to Israel, it's not talking about the nation of Israel; it's not talking about ethnic Jews; it's talking about Christians – Jews and Gentiles.

xxi. Dispensationalists call this classic teaching “replacement theology.” That is a pejorative that means that we believe that God has broken his promises to Israel and has replaced Israel with the church. That's not true. The promises to Abraham were

ultimately made to Christ, and to those who belong to Christ – both Jews and Gentiles.

- xxii. So what is God's plan for the Jews? Has God given up on the Jews? Absolutely not. God's plan for the Jews is the same as it is for the Gentiles. He sent Jesus Christ to die and rise again so that everyone – both Jews and Gentiles – can be justified by faith. Everyone can be acquitted and made right with God and become a child of God through faith in Jesus.
- xxiii. Because justification is by faith, then getting right with God, being a child of God, being an heir to the promises of Abraham, has nothing to do with your ethnicity or your ability to keep the Jewish law. It's about faith in Christ alone.
- xxiv. In the rest of Romans 4 Paul goes on to describe why Abraham is a good example of faith.
- xxv. **Romans 4:19-22** 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body to be already dead (since he was about a hundred years old) and also the deadness of Sarah's womb. 20 He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 because he was fully convinced that what God had promised, he was also able to do. 22 Therefore, it was credited to him for righteousness.
- xxvi. When Abraham was 75 years old, God called him to leave his hometown and go "to the land I will show you." So he went, not knowing where. When Abraham was 99 years old, and his wife Sarah was 89, God promised to give them a son who would be Abraham's heir. So he believed, not knowing how. Then, when Isaac was still a boy, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. So Abraham obeyed, not knowing why. Three examples of faith from the life of Abraham. And his faith was credited to him for righteousness. God gave him right standing, right status, not because he obeyed a bunch of rules, but by faith.
- xxvii. Then Paul applies this to us.
- xxviii. **Romans 4:23-25** 23 Now "it was credited to him" was not written for Abraham alone, 24 but also for us. It will be credited to us who

- believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.
- xxix. What God gave to Abraham, justification by faith, He offers to you and me.
 - xxx. There are two paths to get right with God – the path of works, or law, and the path of faith. You can either rely upon works, or you can rely upon Christ. If you rely upon works, then you will be given what you deserve, and that is the wrath of God, because you are a serial lawbreaker. But if you rely upon what Christ has done for you – the path of faith – then God will acquit you. He will give you right standing with Him today as His beloved child, and the promise of no condemnation on the day of judgment (Rm 8:1).

III. CONCLUSION

1. Romans is all about the gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ.
 - i. The bad news is that all are sinners, all are subject to judgment, and all are helpless to save themselves.
 - ii. The good news that is all can be justified by faith. Everyone can be made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ.
2. In Romans 4 Paul expands his teaching on justification by faith with three points.
 - i. Justification by faith is not new. It goes back to Abraham and David.
 - ii. Because justification is by faith, you don't have to become Jewish. It's available to Jews and Gentiles.
 - iii. Because justification is by faith, the true children of Abraham are not ethnic Jews, but those who have the faith of Abraham – those who put their faith in Jesus Christ.