

DEVOTIONAL

WHEN IN ROME IV // JUSTIFIED
AUGUST 8, 2021

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discussion Starter: Since today's lesson focuses on Abraham, do a quick review of who Abraham of the Old Testament was. A summary can be found at www.gotquestions.org "Who was Abraham in the Bible?"

Key Text: "What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For 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 counted to him as righteousness.'" (Romans 4:1-3)

What is Justification?

In his book *Key Words of the Christian Life*, Warren Wiersbe tells the story of a man in England who put his Rolls-Royce on the ferryboat and went across to the Continent on vacation. While driving around Europe, something happened to the motor of his car, so he called the Rolls-Royce dealership back in England and asked what to do. The Rolls-Royce company flew a mechanic over to where the driver was staying that same day, fixed the car, and flew back to England, leaving the man to continue his vacation. The man wondered, of course, how much this would cost him. When he arrived back to England, he sent an email to the Rolls-Royce company asking how much he owed them. He received a reply from the Rolls-Royce office that said: "Dear Sir: There is no record anywhere in our files that anything ever went wrong with a Rolls-Royce."

This is an illustration of justification! Satan may accuse us, our friends may accuse us, and we may even accuse ourselves, but God checks the file and says, "There is no record anywhere in this file that My child did anything wrong." That's justification—the gracious act of God in declaring righteous one who trusts in Jesus Christ. God sees the believing sinner as justified: "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned! Justification can be thought of in terms of A-B-C-D:

Act – Justification is an act of God, a legal declaration by which God forgives the sinner of all sins and accepts and counts the believing sinner as righteous (Romans 3:21-26).

Basis – The sole basis for God's act of justification is the obedience and death of His Son, our representative, Jesus Christ. In justification, God puts the sin of the sinner onto Jesus and Jesus' righteousness onto the believing sinner's account (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Confession – Sinners are justified not because of any good they have done, are doing, or will do, but through faith alone when they confess their trust in Christ (Romans 4:4-5).

Demonstrated – Justification is demonstrated or proven to be genuine through good works (Galatians 5:6). We are not justified by our good works, but justification produces the fruit and evidence of justifying faith—that is, good works (Galatians 5:6).

Discuss: What fruit or good works would you expect from a saved, justified person?

At the end of Romans Chapter 3, Paul asserted that we are justified by God apart from the law. Justification occurs through faith in Christ and His payment on the cross for our sin. If we are judged by our own goodness, we all—whether Jew or Gentile—will be found guilty of sin and receive God’s just punishment.

Now in Chapter 4, Paul begins to answer a question his Jewish readers were likely thinking: “*What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?*” (v.1). In other words: “We Jewish people are descendants of ‘Father Abraham’, but if there’s no advantage to God’s special relationship to Abraham and Israel, then what’s the point of it?” (Abraham was the most esteemed man among the Jewish people.) In 4:1-2, Paul makes two arguments to show that Abraham’s salvation was by faith and that his example points to faith in Christ as the way to a right relationship with God.

Argument #1: Hypothetically, even if Abraham could have been justified by his works, he still could not boast to God—no one boasts before Almighty God.

The idea that Abraham could be justified by his works is imaginary—no one can be justified by works. But, Paul argues, even if (hypothetically) he could, Abraham may be able to brag in front of us, but he could not brag in front of God. God is God, and no one can arrogantly boast of anything in front of God: “*For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God*” (v.2). God, who is holy, sinless, and perfect, would not be impressed with a human being’s good works. Under no circumstances could the creation (Abraham) assume glory over the Creator (God). Again, Paul makes the point that we human beings simply cannot be justified before God based on our own efforts.

Discuss: What are some characteristics about God that prevent us from being able to brag to Him about anything regarding who we are or what we’ve done?

Discuss: Do you think Paul makes a strong argument here (v.1-2)? Why or why not?

Argument #2: According to Old Testament Scripture, God credited righteousness to Abraham when he believed and for believing—not for his works.

“*For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’*” (v.3). Paul quotes Genesis 15:6—the Jews’ own Scriptures—which declares that it was Abraham’s faith in God, not his own works, that allowed Abraham to be justified before God.

Discuss: Why would Paul’s use of Abraham in his argument be so persuasive to a Jew?

Discuss: How would you respond to someone who believes salvation comes by a combination of belief in Christ and good works?

For Further Study:

“How Did People Get Saved in the Old Testament?” article at www.CARM.org

“What is the Biblical Understanding of Faith / Works?” article at www.gotquestions.org