

September 17, 2006 AM

**JUSTIFICATION: LIFE FROM THE DEAD  
GENESIS 15.6 AND ROMANS 4.1-25**

Summary: *To be an heir or son of Abraham and therefore justified with him—that is, to have your sins forgiven and receive the status of “righteous”—you must participate in Abraham’s faith. What did Abraham believe? He believed that God would raise the dead. God has accomplished this resurrection in Jesus the Messiah. Therefore, in order to participate in Abraham’s faith, you must believe in Jesus.*

**THE FLOW OF ROMANS FROM 1.1–3.31**

**1.1-17** - Paul has never been to Rome up to this point. But he has finished his mission in the in the eastern Mediterranean and wants to use Rome as a base of operations for that mission to the West, particularly Spain (cf. Rom 15.24). So he is writing this letter to introduce himself as well as to settle some other issues specifically related to Jew-Gentile relationships in the church.

Jesus Christ (or “Messiah” in Hebrew) is the fulfillment of all the Law and the Prophets. This Jesus was great David’s greater son. God the Father declared him to be his Son with power by raising him from the dead (cf. 1.1-4).

God’s faithfulness in fulfilling his promises in Christ becomes the major or controlling theme of the entire letter to the Romans. The gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation unto all who believe, is the declaration of God’s faithfulness in Christ.

God’s righteousness (1.17) = God’s faithfulness to his covenant. That is, God did what was right by keeping his promises.

**1.18-32** - Man (Adam) has turned from worshiping God to worshiping idols. This is sin and sin produces death.

**2.1-16** - Jew and Gentile “good people” are also sinners and, thus, objects of God’s wrath. Death is the end result again.

**2.17–3.8** - God’s chosen people, the ones whom God had chosen to be a priest to the world, to bring life to the dead world, are found also to be a part of the problem. The Jews also stand under the condemnation of God.

But does the unfaithfulness of the Jews render God’s faithfulness null and void? By no means! God will be faithful to his promises. (cf. 3.1ff.)

**3.9-20** - Paul’s conclusion is that all stand under condemnation. The sin brought into the world and the death through that sin has indeed passed unto all men. Sin destroys humanity.

**3.21-31** - How does God answer the problem of sin and set his creation project back on track? The answer to sin is *the faithfulness of God demonstrated in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ*. Cf. 3.21-22: “But now the covenant faithfulness (i.e., “righteousness”) of God has been revealed apart from the Law being witnessed by means of the Law and the prophets, the covenant faithfulness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ unto all who believe; for there is no distinction.” [my translation]

Paul’s concern: Jew and Gentile are in the same condition: All fell short of God’s glory; the life, maturity, dominion, the lordship.

God will deal with sin and bring life. God is both just/righteous and the justifier based upon the faithfulness of Jesus.

Question: Does the fulfillment of God’s plan in Jesus leave the Jews and Gentiles as two distinct people groups? This is Paul’s concern beginning in 3.27 and going through chapter 4.

The Law is not God’s final answer. God’s purpose from the beginning was to have one big family, not two. And this is what brings us to Paul’s use of Abraham and Genesis 15.

Paul’s purpose is to show that God’s intention was always to create a new humanity that would be one family. He does this by giving an exposition of Gen 15 and shows how God has fulfilled his promise to Abraham.

**1. HOW WAS ABRAHAM JUSTIFIED?: BY FAITH APART FROM WORKS OF THE LAW (1-8)**

Translation: “What shall we say then? Have we found Abraham to be our father according to the flesh?” (cf. 6.1, 7.7, 9.14, 9.30). Paul is dealing here with the distinction between circumcision—the Jews—and uncircumcision—the Gentiles.

Paul is asking whether or not the connection with Abraham is merely ethnic and through circumcision. Is it possible to be a child of

Abraham without being a Jew; i.e., circumcised?

Abraham was not justified on the basis of works; i.e. of the Law. “Works of the Law” are not “good works” in general but refer to the works of *Torah*, the Law of God, given at Mt. Sinai.

Distortions of the Law: (1) seeking to use it in some sense to put God in debt to them, and (2) by refusing to see that the Law was not God’s final word to the world (i.e., God did not intend to keep Jews and Gentiles separate forever).

Abraham was not justified—accounted righteous—on the basis of works of Law (which he did not yet have, even in its first stages; i.e., circumcision). Abraham had done no works of the Law (Paul will make this quite clear in a moment). Rather he believed him who justifies the ungodly, and his faith is accounted unto him as righteousness.

Psalm 32 quote: David says that their *lawless* deeds are forgiven, their *sins* are covered, and the Lord does not put the sin to their account. Paul’s understanding of justification: Justification = the forgiveness of sins.

Sin brings death, forgiveness of sins means “life from the dead.” When your sins are forgiven—when you are released from sin’s penalty: death—that means you are brought back to life.

When your sins are forgiven you are given a righteous status as well. You are declared to be God’s true son, which is essentially what it means to be declared “in the right” with God.

## **2. WHEN WAS ABRAHAM JUSTIFIED?: WHILE IN UNCIRCUMCISION (9-12)**

Paul’s logic runs him right into asking this question about upon does this “blessedness” (this “life”) come in relationship to circumcision or uncircumcision.

Was his faith accounted as righteousness in circumcision or uncircumcision? Clearly in uncircumcision. (His circumcision doesn’t happen until at least 14 years later, recorded in Gen 17.) The question deals with whether or not this being a true son of God is an exclusively a Jewish privilege.

Circumcision cuts humanity in half. God was making a new covenant to separate the seed of Abraham from the rest of the world. Circumcision was instituted as a sign and seal of the righteousness/justification of faith received in uncircumcision. Abraham is declared to a true son *while in uncircumcision*, while a Gentile!

Because of this Abraham is the father of all who believe—all the faithful—whether they be Gentiles (uncircumcision) or Jews (circumcision). All of those who walk in the faith of Abraham are Abraham’s sons and therefore sons of God.

What is working underneath this text is this: Abraham is given the promise and justified while in uncircumcision. The circumcision that comes later is for a special purpose. That purpose is to serve the world. Israel’s purpose—or her representative King—will be to be cut off from the world through death.

## **3. WHAT WAS ABRAHAM’S FAITH?: THAT GOD COULD RAISE THE DEAD (13-25)**

To have the faith of Abraham is to believe what Abraham believed: God would raise the dead and make a new creation.

Why can the promise not come through the Law? vv. 14-15: the Law works wrath. The purpose of the Law—which separated Israel off from the rest of the nations—was to provide a place for sin to be judged; for sin to be put to death.

4.16-17 explain that it is this way *so that* Gentiles as well as Jews may be God’s new humanity, one big family, not two. Note how Paul says this: “not to those of the Law only but also those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”

Once sin is dealt with, then life can come to the world on the other side of death. Abraham believed that God would bring that life. That was the promise that Abraham believed; or rather he believed God who raises the dead and calls into being the things that are not as though they are. This happened in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In his death sin was handled; in resurrection he was justified (and we in him).

**Application: (1)** The gospel call is to believe in the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

**Application: (2)** We know that our sins are forgiven and that we have a righteous status—the status as true sons—when we believe with Abraham the promise of our death and resurrection with Christ given to us in baptism.