

Justifying the Ungodly

Romans, Part XX

Romans 4:1-8

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I. Reviewing Justification

When God justifies the ungodly, He no longer _____

— that is, credits or reckons or counts — their sins against them but instead *imputes* Christ's righteousness to them.

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). Paul concludes chapter 4:

²³Now it was not written for [Abraham's] sake alone that [righteousness] was imputed to him, ²⁴but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

II. Delving Deeper

Paul demonstrates that the Gospel is *"witnessed by the Law and the Prophets"* (3:21) by developing each section of 3:27-31 in light of the Old Testament:

²⁷Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. ²⁹Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

- 4:1-8 Justification by faith alone apart from works (cf. 3:27-28)
- 4:9-12 Justification by faith alone for Jew and Gentile alike (cf. 3:29-30)
- 4:13-22 Justification by faith alone establishes the law (cf. 3:31)
- 4:23-25 Justification by faith alone for us

III. Justifying the Ungodly

A. Abraham's Story (cf. Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-6; Josh 24:3)

While Abram was an idolater, God rescued him and chose him as His own:

¹Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. ²I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Abram responded in faith to God's call. At age 75, he set out for the land of Canaan. Yet ten years later, Abram still had no child of his own.

¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." ²But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" ⁴And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." ⁵Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

An Outline of Romans

- I. Introduction
 - A. Opening Greeting (1:1-7)
 - B. Travel Plans (1:8-15)
 - C. Theme (1:16-17)
- II. Credenda: "The Righteous by Faith" Shall Live
 - A. God's Wrath vs. Unrighteousness (1:18-3:20)
 - B. The Revelation of God's Righteousness (3:21-4:25)
 - C. The Triumph of God's Righteousness (5-8)
 - D. The Universality of God's Righteousness (9-11)
- III. Agenda: The Righteous "Shall Live by Faith"
 - A. Transformed not Conformed (12-13)
 - B. Patient not Proud (14-15:13)
- IV. Conclusion
 - A. Paul, Minister to the Gentiles (15:14-21)
 - B. Travel Plans (15:22-33)
 - C. Closing Greetings and Benediction (16)

B. Abraham's Faith

¹What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." ⁴Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. ⁵But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, ⁶just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ⁷"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; ⁸Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

Paul insists that Abraham too was born under sin. Hence, he could not be *justified by works*; he could only be set right with God by trusting in God's mercy. And this is precisely what the Scripture says, "*Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.*" Abraham believed God's promise; he didn't merit God's promise.

C. David's Corroboration

The life and story of David corroborate this truth. David's psalm reveals that God *imputes righteousness apart from works*. This is why David declares blessed the one *whose lawless deeds are forgiven, whose sins are covered, and to whom the Lord shall not impute sin*. David knew first-hand how much he needed the forgiving grace of God to be justified.

IV. Double Imputation

Paul repeatedly uses the word imputation (*logizōmai*) throughout this chapter:

- 3 – Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.
- 4 – Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.
- 5 – But to him who does not work... his faith is accounted for righteousness.
- 6 – the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works
- 8 – Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.

So what does it mean? Well remember that "*justification*" is legal terminology; it is a legal declaration in a court of law. The accused stands before the judge and the role of the judge is to "*justify the righteous and condemn the wicked*" (Dt 25:1). The judge does not *make* the person righteous or wicked; he declares them, judges them, to be so. His duty is to recognize that which is the case. So what does God's justice demand if our sin is imputed to us, if we appear before His judgment seat in our sin? Wrath. Judgment. Condemnation. But though we are ungodly, if we turn to Jesus in faith, then God *justifies* us rather than *condemns* us.

At the heart of the Gospel is a *double imputation*. My sin is imputed to Jesus and His righteousness is imputed to me. In this way, God neither compromises His holiness nor His just wrath. Justification involves two parts: I am forgiven of my sin and I have Christ's righteousness _____ (credited) to my account. Hence, when God looks upon me, He sees one who has perfectly obeyed His law and who has a just claim upon His favor. He justifies me; not because I am personally righteous but because the righteousness of Jesus is credited to me. Thus God is both _____ and the justifier of the _____.

V. Conclusion