

THE BLESSING OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Walking in the Footsteps of Faith

Romans Series
PBC 2025

Text: Romans 4:1-12

I want to start by asking how you would respond to two questions:

1. Do you think of what Paul has been talking about in this section of Romans, “Justification by Faith Alone,” primarily as a doctrine to be believed or as a blessing to be savored and treasured? (Which way would your answer lean if you are honest with yourself?)
2. Do you know someone in your family or circle of friends who has or is considering converting to RCC or Eastern Orthodoxy?

This is an issue facing evangelical believers like us today. A surprising number of evangelicals are converting to Roman Catholicism or Greek Orthodoxy.

An article in CT by Andrew Voigt in August of 2024 had some shocking statistics: 65% of all converts to Eastern Orthodoxy in the US come from Evangelical churches. RCC dioceses are experiencing explosive growth in some cities – between 30% and 50%, with some reaching as high as 70%. And many of these converts are coming from Evangelical churches. (Source: *Some Evangelicals are leaving Protestantism for other Traditions*. Andrew Voigt, CT, August 23, 2024)

Reason – EOxy and RCC represent the most ancient faith tradition; closest to the Apostolic tradition; reflected for centuries in the earliest creeds; and preserved in the Church. On the other hand, the Protestant Reformation is new, divergent, and reductionistic (faith alone).

How did the Reformers answer this – Sola Scriptura! *Which taught that Justification is by grace alone, through faith alone, in the finished work of Christ alone.*

But the Reformer's understanding of justification by faith alone is rejected by many apologists for the RCC and Eastern Orthodoxy as an incomplete, unreliable, and unworthy way to answer the question of how a man is saved. And because justification by faith is often just a theological doctrine in our church's statement of faith and not something we treasure as a source of great joy and rich blessing, many are turning away to embrace another gospel, which, as Paul warned the Galatians, is not a gospel at all (Galatians 1:6-9). ***Who is right? Where do we go for a definitive answer?***

This is not a new problem – Paul faced a similar issue in his day.

So, how do we approach this argument? Paul gave us the pattern with the words he put before his Jewish opponent, ***“What do the Scriptures say?”***

And in Romans 4:1-12, Paul uses the inspired word of God from the Old Testament to demonstrate four important reasons why you and I must receive, believe, and treasure the truth revealed in the Gospel that we are justified by grace alone (it is a gift), through faith alone (not by works), in the finished work of Christ alone.

I. Justification is not earned through on Human Merit or Good Behavior (4:1-5)

*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.”***

*⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work **but believes in him who justifies the ungodly**, his faith is counted as righteousness,*

- Abraham found justification (credited to him in v. 3).
- Justification is the theme of 4:1-12 (repeated 8x in vv. 2,3,5,6,9,11).

And when Paul referred to the Old Testament account of Abraham found in Genesis 11:27 – 25:18; 15:6, we discover three important, undeniable, and indisputable facts about Abraham's justification.

A. Works and Human Merit lead to sinful Boasting in the eyes of men, not to Justification in the sight of God. (v. 2)

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

B. Only a righteousness that is credited to us from God can justify us before God. (v. 3-4)

For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.

C. Whole-hearted, single-focused, fully trusting faith is the only means to obtain the kind of righteousness that justifies us. (v. 5)

And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

II. Justification is not granted because of Religious Association or Belonging (4:9-11a)

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.¹⁰ How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

First question (back in 4:3): How did Abraham obtain the righteousness that justified him in God's sight?

Second question (here in 4:9): Is this blessing limited to Abraham's physical descendants—the Jews (circumcised)? Or is it also available to Gentiles (uncircumcised)?

Paul's response challenged another deeply held Jewish belief – that circumcision was necessary for salvation. It was considered the first good deed a Jew did (or had done for him) and symbolized his inclusion in God's chosen people. Additionally, it committed him to a

lifetime of performing works of the Law in an effort to earn righteousness that would make him acceptable to God.

And Paul demolished this deeply held belief by asking when Abraham was physically circumcised (4:10). Was it before or after God considered him righteous because of his belief (Gen 15:6)?

Circumcision served as a validation that God accepted Abraham's faith as genuine, and based on that faith, credited Abraham's account with His own righteousness. ***This sign was given 12-15 years after Abraham's belief was credited to him as righteousness*** before God.

And because the righteousness Abraham received was based on His faith and not circumcision, it is available to everyone regardless of their ethnic background!

III. Justification is based on Credited Righteousness obtained through genuine personal Belief in Christ (4:11b-12)

The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, ¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Paul emphasizes to his Jewish opponent that God based justification on faith rather than circumcision, making Abraham the father of all who believe and walk in the same faith Abraham had before he was circumcised—both Gentiles and Jews.

A. How would a pagan Gentile idolater follow the footsteps of Abraham's faith?

- He would do what Abraham did when God revealed the truth about Himself to Abraham! He turned from the idols of Ur that had been his gods for 75 years. He worshipped and served the true and living God of Heaven. And he waited patiently for God to send the son He promised.

B. How would a self-righteous, circumcised Jew follow the footsteps of Abraham's faith?

- He would do what Paul did on the road to Damascus – he would count (reckon) everything (whatever he had gained by his law-keeping) as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . . that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith! (Phil 3:7-9).

This brings us to the final point in this text – Justification by faith is not just a doctrinal belief; it is a rich blessing to experience/savor and an eternal treasure to cherish.

IV. Justification obtained is a Rich Blessing to be enjoyed and an Eternal Treasure to be prized above all earthly pleasure (4:6-8)

*. . . just as David also speaks of the **blessing** of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: ⁷ “**Blessed** are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸ **blessed** is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”*

A. Full and complete righteousness credited to me apart from works.

B. Forgiveness granted to me – my lawless deeds forgiven!

C. Freedom from the weight of guilt and the shame of sin is applied to me – my sins are covered!

D. Relationship with God is established and restored to me – blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute sin!

Conclusion: **How should this doctrine affect us? How should it show up in our daily lives as we walk in the footsteps of Abraham's faith?**

1. We should walk humbly before God because of His gracious mercy on us (He justifies us . . . even though we were not “good” people).
2. We should live joyfully because of His great blessing on us (He approves us . . . even though we were not “approved” people).
3. We should live harmoniously and graciously in the light of our common standing before God and with others (He unifies us . . . there are no “favorite” people)

And what this produces in the life of someone who has received and is enjoying these blessings is deep, unquenchable joy amid life’s darkest and hardest times as we follow in the footsteps of men like Abraham and David (and a whole host of others in Hebrews 12).

No matter what was going on around us
No matter what was happening to us

These “justified by faith” heroes in Hebrews 11 found unquenchable joy that strengthened their resolve to keep living by faith rather than by sight, to continue obeying God, and to trust Him for future joys and lasting treasures that are yet to be seen or experienced.

- When “justified by faith” people sin, they want God to restore their joy.
- When they suffer, they trust God to sustain this joy.
- When they worship, they proclaim this joy.
- When they live, they display this joy.
- When they die, they validate this joy.