



In verses 3:21-31 the argument has been justification by faith with a focus on the righteousness of God.

Chapter 4 is the answer to the questions:

Has God always saved this way?

Have men always been justified by faith?

Did God save differently in the Old Testament than He does now in the New Testament?

Romans 4 is written to say

“God has always saved the same way, by faith or believing what God says.”

RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT WORKS

If God announces the gift of righteousness apart from works, why do you keep mourning over your bad works, your failures?

DO you not see that it is because you still have hopes in these works of yours that you are depressed and discouraged by their failure?

If we truly saw and believed that God is reckoning righteous the ungodly who believe on Him, we would hate our struggles to be “better”; for we would see that our dreams of good works have not at all commended us to God, and that our bad works do not at all hinder you from believing on Him, —that justifies the ungodly!

Newell

Therefore, we should have this double attitude:

First, we know that Christ is in Heaven before God for us, and that we stand in the value before God of His finished work; that God sees us nowhere else but in the dead, buried, and Risen Christ, and that His favor is toward us in Christ, and is limitless and eternal.

Then, **second**, toward the work of the Holy Spirit in us, our attitude is, a desire to be guided into the truth, to be submissive to it, and to be child trained by God my Father if disobedient; to learn to pray in the Spirit, to walk by the Spirit, and to be filled with a love for the Scriptures and for the saints and for all men.

Yet none of these things justifies me! I had justification from God as a sinner, not as a saint! My saintliness does not increase it, nor, praise God, do my failures decrease it!

Newell

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

Who was Abraham?

1. The patriarch of the Jewish race.
2. Called a friend of God. James 2:23
3. His seed was the source of all human blessings. Gen. 12:3

Why would Paul select him?

Because if he were to be justified by God, his good works would not suffice for justification. He was not an exception to justification by faith.

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh has found?

"Father" is propator, "**forefather.**" Only time this word used in the Bible. Jews talked about Abraham as their father. Jn.8:39-41

The Jews thought that Abraham is our father equals God as our father and **that was all a Jew needed for salvation.**

What did Abraham find?

"Found" signifies, "**attained by his own effort.**" (Vincent).

The phrase "*as according to the flesh,*" Vincent says, "The question is, **Was Abraham justified by anything which pertained to the flesh?**"

What shall we say that our forefather Abraham found in the way of natural human effort, as opposed to the way of grace and faith?

What, then, is the true inference from the history of Abraham?

- If justified by works, certainly the credit would be his.
- But this is never found before God.
- And with this the Scripture agrees; for it speaks not of his goodness before his call or acceptance, **but expressly of his faith in God's word as that which he exercised, and which was accounted as righteousness.**

(Genesis 15:6 (NASB) ⁶ Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.)

*² For **if** Abraham was justified **by** works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.*

The "if" is **ex**, "assuming that."

"By" is **ek**, "out of" a source of works.

Vincent explains,

“In speaking of the relation of works to justification, Paul never uses **dia**, 'by means of or through,' but **ek** 'out of'; **works** being regarded by the Jew as the meritorious source of salvation.”

If Abraham had been declared righteous before God on the works principle, he would indeed have had something to boast of!

³ For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

- In every question we have there is only one place for the right answer, Scripture.
- **But the Scripture record showed there was nothing of which he could boast before God.**
- For concerning Abraham more definitely and directly than of any other human being, **God's word was specific:**

ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT [HIS FAITH] WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Quotes from Newell

To discover that the greatest saints have no other standing than the weakest saints, is a lesson that is difficult for all of us!

So now for the Jew to find that great Abraham has nothing in the flesh, but must be justified by simple faith, like any sinner, is a great shock.

There was no honor, no “merit,” in Abraham’s believing the faithful God, who cannot lie. The honor was God’s.

When Abraham believed God, he did the one thing that a man can do without doing anything!

God made the statement, the promise; and God undertook to fulfill it.

Abraham believed in his heart that God told the truth.

There was no effort here.

Abraham’s faith was not an act, but an attitude. His heart was turned completely away from himself to God and His promise.

This left God free to fulfill that promise.

Faith was neither a meritorious act by Abraham, nor a change of character or nature, in Abraham: he simply believed God would accomplish what He had promised: *“In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).*

³ *For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS **CREDITED** TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

“credited“ “reckoned” is logizomai

a great word with Paul, used
41 times in the New Testament,
35 of which are in Paul’s epistles,
11 of these here in Chapter Four.

Where it is used as in verse 3, here, of God, it is always a court word, God acting as Judge and accounting or holding as righteous those who, as Abraham, believe in Him;
or the contrary, as is implied in *verse 8*; *“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord **will not reckon sin,**”*—implying that there are those to whom He will reckon sin and its guilt.

³ *For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

To what does the word "it" refer?

Alford is very clear on this. He says, "The whole question so much mooted between Protestants on the one hand, and Romanists, Arminians, on the other, as to whether this righteousness was reckoned.

- (1) Does it mean God's righteousness accredited to the sinner, or
- (2) that God made Abraham righteous on account of the merit of his faith? Faith, in this sense, is strictly and entirely a work, and as such would be the efficient cause of man's justification.

It was not the act of believing which was reckoned to him as a righteous act, or on account of which perfect righteousness was laid to his account, **but that the fact of his trusting God to perform His promise introduced him into the blessing promised."**

³ *For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND **IT** WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

The "**it**" therefore refers to the outstretched hand of faith of a sinner reaching out for salvation that God grasps in His own to lift him out of the mire of sin and place him upon the Rock, Christ Jesus.

In other words, it was the act of Abraham placing himself in such an attitude of trust in and acceptance of God's blessings that made it possible for God to bestow righteousness upon him.

*⁴ Now to the one who **works**, his wage is not credited as a **favor**, but as what is **due**. ⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,*

To the one now **working the **reward** not is accounted according to **grace** but according to **debt**.** Interlinear

"**Works** is **katergazomai**, "to do that from which something results."
The workman works in order to earn wages.

"**Reward**" is **misthos**, "dues paid for work, wages."

"**Grace**" is **charis**, the New Testament word for God's grace, but used here in its classical sense of a favor.

"**Debt**" is **opheilēma**, "that which is justly or legally due, a debt."

*⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the **ungodly**, his faith is credited as righteousness,*

—to him who “casts his deadly doing down”; who, seeing his guilt, and his entire inability to put it away, ceases wholly from all efforts to obtain God’s favor by his own doings, or self-denyings,—even by his prayers: Newell

Through the glad tidings we know God as justifying the ungodly, and we could never know Him in this character otherwise than by the glad tidings. Ironside

The word "**ungodly**" is asebēs. It describes the person who is destitute of reverential awe towards God, an impious person. Every sinner who has not trusted the Lord Jesus for salvation, falls into this category.

Not the godly or the good!

Wait a minute, God cannot declare a man godly if he is really ungodly.

1. Now God **did not say** “godly,” but He said righteous.
2. God can reckon to an ungodly man who dares cease trying to change himself, and relies on God just as he is, a sinner, —God can and does reckon to such a one the glorious benefit of Christ’s death and resurrection on behalf of sinners.
3. And of such a believing sinner, God declares his faith is counted as righteousness.

It cannot be overemphasized that the words, “*the ungodly*,” in verse 5, wholly shut out any other class from justification.

The burning question is, **have you and I been so really convinced of the fact of our sinnerhood and guilt, and of our utter helplessness, and lost state, as to be able to believe on a God who can and does “declare righteous the ungodly”**—those who believe, as ungodly, on Him? Newell

A child without Christ, is ungodly in the sense that “*you were by nature children of wrath*”, “*in sin conceived me.*” We all were born into a lost, guilty race.

“Through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.”

We are all ungodly!

And when we place our faith in the God who is in the business of declaring righteous the ungodly—who trust Him as they are—on the sole ground of the shed blood of Christ, —then we are justified—accounted righteous, by God.