

# **Justification by Grace Through Faith**

## **A Study on Romans 4:7-16**

by Dr. Jack L. Arnold

The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8 that salvation is by grace through faith. It is all of God, and is received or appropriated only by believing in Jesus Christ. The patriarch Abraham is the prime example of one who was justified (declared righteous) by grace through faith. In Romans 15:4 God tells us why he gives us such examples: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

In Romans 4:1-8 Paul has told us about God sovereignly giving a promise to Abraham that he would have a seed (son), and from his loins would come a great nation that would inherit the land of Canaan forever. Abraham believed this promise and God counted his faith for righteousness, putting it to his account and giving him a perfect standing before God. In grace God gave the promise to Abraham, and Abraham responded by simply believing God.

In this lesson we will draw out from the text the declaration, “Therefore it (the promise) is of faith, that it might be of grace” (4:16). If salvation is totally of God’s grace, the only consistent response by man is to receive this gift of salvation by faith. Faith is not a work, it is an attitude of believing God. It is an act that is performed without really doing anything.

### **ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED BY GRACE**

Before God called Abraham to salvation, he was an uncircumcised heathen, an idol worshiper, deep in sin, living in Ur of the Chaldees. There was absolutely nothing in Abraham to commend him to God. Until he was 70 years old, he had no knowledge of the true God. He was devoid of works or faith that could attract God’s grace.

One day God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees to bring him salvation and to give him unbelievable promises — his seed would live in the land forever, they would be a nation forever, and through his line would come the Messiah, etc. One thing stands out with unmistakable clearness: the call which Abraham received from God was pure, sovereign, amazing grace. It pleased God in his sovereign grace to appear to Abraham and call him out for his own eternal purpose. It was grace, and grace alone, that moved God to act.

Donald Grey Barnhouse said,

“The race lay in its total blindness, and God stooped from heaven to appear to Abraham. If an angel had asked the Lord why He was choosing Abraham He could well have answered, ‘Because it pleases Me to choose Abraham.’ If the angel had continued, saying, ‘But there is no good in Abraham,’ God could have well answered, ‘There is no good in any creature; but I choose to set my love upon him.’ And if the angel had then asked, ‘But will You not dirty Your Being by folding this Devil worshipper to Your breast?’ God could have well answered, ‘I will go down and give My only Son to die for Abraham, and the blood of My Son will cleanse Abraham of his filth, so that I shall not be sullied when I draw him to Myself.’ And if the angel had once more asked, ‘But does not Abraham deserve judgment as much as any other man of Ur of the Chaldees?’ God could have well replied, ‘All of them deserve the same from Me, but I propose to give My beloved Son to take the stroke of that judgment, so that I may look upon Abraham as righteous.’ And if the angel had finally said, ‘But will not Abraham have to make some steps in righteousness before it is possible to count him as righteous?’ God could have well replied, ‘Never, for it is while he is yet ungodly that I shall account him righteous and it is the power of the new life that I shall plant in him which shall cause his steps to move toward Me, slowly at first and then more firmly as time goes on.’”

#### ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED THROUGH FAITH — Romans 4:9-16

Natural man reacts violently to the teaching that salvation is by grace through faith because it is contrary to human nature. Man naturally thinks in terms of the merit system, and feels he should somehow work for his salvation or do something to gain favor with God. This was especially true of the Jews who trusted in circumcision and the keeping of the Mosaic Law for salvation. Abraham shoots holes through the reasoning of the Jews. Salvation can only be by grace through faith in God.

#### *Circumcision Cannot Justify — 4:7-12*

“Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.” The blessed teaching that a person can be justified by believing God’s promise is for both the Jew and the Gentile. Abraham proves this point, for God declared him righteous simply on the basis of faith.

“How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision?” Abraham was declared righteous before God in his uncircumcised state. It was fourteen years after his salvation that he was circumcised. This is evidence that he could not have been saved by the good work of circumcision.

“And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised.” Abraham’s circumcision was merely an outward sign or symbol of the fact that he had been declared righteous by believing in God’s promise. The symbol is important, for through it God separated a people to be the nation of Israel. But the symbol did not save. Only God saves through faith!

Abraham was not circumcised to be saved. He was saved by faith and then circumcised for a wholly different purpose, as Paul has shown: that he might be father of a race of circumcised men. Circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant with Abraham, but it did not secure salvation. Many circumcised Jews perished eternally in the Old and New Testaments alike. Professing Christians today who trust the covenant sign of baptism for salvation fall into this same trap. The symbol cannot save, only Jesus Christ can save!

“That he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.” Abraham, being justified in his uncircumcised state, is the representative of all who believe God for justification, the father of all true believers in Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles. He is the father of the physical seed of Israel, and he is the father of the spiritual seed of all who believe in Jesus Christ. Why? He was saved before there was a nation of Israel, circumcision, or the Mosaic Law.

“And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.” Being of the physical seed of Abraham did not automatically guarantee the Jew the promises made to Abraham. Only those Jews who believed God and his promise as did Abraham were inheritors of the promise — this is the spiritual seed within the Jewish nation. Those who are circumcised in the heart shall be those who inherit the promise. Only the spiritual seed among the Gentiles can inherit the promise. “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3).

#### *Law Cannot Justify — 4:13-16*

“For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” The promise to Abraham included the fact that he would be heir of the whole world (kingdom) through Christ. “Now to

Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not. And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16).

The Jew could not appeal to the Mosaic Law for justification, for Abraham was justified 430 years before the Law ever came into existence. Justification has always been by grace through faith!

“For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.” If justification is by keeping the law, then there is no need for faith. This would automatically cancel God’s grace. It would destroy the whole Abrahamic Covenant.

“Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.” A major purpose for the giving of the Mosaic Law was to show the Israelites that they were sinners, transgressors of God’s law who were in line for God’s wrath. The Law was to point the Jew to Christ, who alone could bring salvation.

“Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace.” To receive God’s promise of salvation in Jesus Christ is the only thing consistent with God’s grace.

“To the end the promise might be sure (valid) to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.” All who receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour from sin, whether Jews or Gentiles, are declared righteous before God. All who receive Jesus Christ are children of Abraham (spiritual seed), and Abraham becomes the father of all who believe. Gentiles who trust Christ are spiritual seed of Abraham and inheritors of the promise made to Abraham. “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29).

## CONCLUSION

Abraham is an example and pattern of how all men must be justified. The way God saved Abraham is the way he will save anyone. If you are not willing to be saved as Abraham was saved, then you cannot be saved. How was he saved? By grace through faith.

If you are clinging to anything but God’s grace as manifested in the death of Jesus Christ for salvation from sin, then you are in your sins and face eternal judgment. But if you will place your faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, you will become a spiritual child of Abraham, and become an inheritor of eternal life and the kingdom of God that is to come.