

# **“GOD COUNTS FAITH AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”**

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## **Scripture Texts: Romans 4:1-8**

### **Introduction.**

Justification by faith is absolutely one of the most fundamentally important truths of the Bible and our faith. So it shouldn't surprise us that Satan would cause this to be one of the most misunderstood truths, one that confuses Christians to this day. Many Christians don't get it, let alone love it as a most glorious truth that is cause for constant worship and praise.

One evidence of this is how many people think the Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves. One survey of a thousand people revealed 75% believe that.

Modern man is hostile to the concept of justification by faith alone. We want to get our salvation the old fashion way, by earning it. That is the way every other religion on earth does it. That is the clear work of Satan, robbing God of His glory.

Related to this, many think heaven is for good people, for those who seek to have good character, who seek to be moral and upright most of the time. The implication is heaven is some of our doing.

This kind of thinking has been around for a very long time, going all the way back to the Jews who believed keeping the law was the path to their salvation. It was deeply engrained in their ethnic identity as the people of God. It is why they looked down their noses at Gentiles, pagans, as those with no hope of salvation because they didn't have the law.

Paul has his work cut out for him. He is fighting against thousands of years of deeply ingrained thinking and tradition. He is fighting against an entire culture and race. Everything Paul is teaching and arguing is in the OT, in the Law and the Prophets, but over time it was lost.

Paul is being a good Gospel lawyer, building his case; making a careful argument. He is doing something our culture is averse to. Our culture is averse to well-reasoned argument, we don't have the patience for it. We want sound bites, we want talking heads that boil things down to the least common denominator, and not take longer than 60 seconds.

Paul led by the Holy Spirit is using reason and logic to argue we are justified by faith. How can guilty sinners escape the wrath and judgment of God? How can the ungodly be justified and reconciled to God? Paul reasons this out here in verses 1-8. Watch the brilliance of his argument as he brings into the courtroom two expert witnesses, two of the greatest heroes of the Jewish faith, Abraham and David.

#### **4:1-5, Abraham counted righteous by faith.**

Paul calls to the stand the highest, supreme authority, their forefather Abraham.

Abraham was the great hero of the faith, the first believer, the model. To the Jews he was their father, they were children of Abraham, righteous by heritage. Abraham was a good man, he kept the law, right? He obeyed God.

Was Abraham a good man? What did Paul say about all men in Romans 3? There is none who is righteous, no not one. There is no one who does good, no not one. There is none who fears God. By the works of the law no one is able to be justified in the sight of a holy, righteous God.

If Abraham was justified by works, he could boast in his own merit, but notice it says, not before God. He can't boast before God, his works don't justify him with God. Think about it, if there was any man who could be justified by his own obedience, Abraham was superior. He took his only begotten son up on the mountain to sacrifice him. Can't he boast? Not before God. Man is not the standard, God is the standard.

Who will boast before God? Will you? What did Paul say, every mouth is stopped. If the Jew's holy patriarch had no grounds for boasting, how dare they boast.

#### ***What does Scripture say?***

Notice what Paul appeals to, the Word of God. He grounds his appeal, his argument in Scripture, the ultimate authority.

What does Scripture say? What do you ground your beliefs in, what principles guide you in your marriage, in your parenting, in your financial decisions? How many of you follow the whims of culture, modern fashion, political correctness, or the wisdom of Google and social media?

How indoctrinated are we with the ways of the world and don't realize it? How many of us have been influenced by the times to change our views on marriage, divorce, children, spanking, sex, abortion, homosexuality, living together. How have we become more worldly and less "Wordly"? Have we tested everything by the counsel of God's Word? This is your standard. Hold yourself up to that light. These are the very words of God, humble yourself before them.

Put the full weight of your confidence and hope on the Word of God.

What does Scripture say? Paul quotes from Genesis 15 where God entered into a covenant with Abraham and made a stunning promise to him.

**Genesis 15:5-6** God brought Abraham outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” 6 And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

God said to Abraham, look up at the night sky and number the stars. Abraham wasn't looking at the same sky we look at. Our sky is nothing like his. Our sky is dimmed by so much light pollution we don't see a tenth of what Abraham saw. For him the Milky Way really looked like milk spilled across the heavens. Abraham couldn't begin to count them.

This is a man with no children, and God tells him his seed will outnumber the stars. Would you have believed God in that moment? Abraham was 85 when God said this. When Sarah heard this she laughed. Scripture said her womb was as good as dead. No one has children at that age, no one. How is this to be believed?

***What did Abraham do? He believed God.***

Before Abraham did anything, he believed.

Notice, Abraham didn't just have a generic faith, “yeah I believe there is a God, I believe Jesus died for sins.” Abraham believed the specific covenant promises of God. He believed God would do what He said He would do. Without fully realizing it, Abraham believed in Jesus Christ through whom all the promises of God are realized and fulfilled.

***What did God do? God counted his faith as righteousness.***

What does counted mean? Other translations have credited, reckoned, imputed.

What does imputed mean? This word appears five times just in our text, and a total of 11 times in chapter 4. We are going to hear it a lot, so we need to know what it means. I learned my lesson on propitiation, so let's talk definitions. The Greek word is *logizomai*.

It is a financial transaction term, a bookkeeping term. We are bankrupt, we are buried in an impossible debt. God credits to our account a huge sum that completely erases from the books all the debt of those who trust in the death, resurrection, vicarious atonement provided by Jesus. His own righteousness is deposited into our account.

It is also a legal term where God freely makes a decision to reckon or credit righteousness to Abraham. It refers to Abraham's status before God. One moment he was not righteous, the next moment he was righteous. It changed his status or standing before God. It did not instantly change Abraham's character, that would come gradually over time, just as it does for us; it didn't mean he stopped being a sinner.

We are declared righteous and therefore justified before God. Then the Holy Spirit sets to work sanctifying us and making us more holy over time.

There are three imputations in Scripture.

*First*, Adam sinned as our human representative and his sin and rebellion against God is imputed to us. We were in Adam when he sinned. We were in Adam when he rebelled against God. His sin is ours. We are conceived in sin, it is a hereditary disease, polluting the entire human race.

*Second*, God in His incredible mercy sent a second Adam, Christ, and caused all our original sin and all our individual sins to be imputed to Jesus on the cross. This is referred to as penal substitutionary atonement, where Christ becomes our representative. As we are in Adam, so we are in Christ.

**II Corinthians 5:21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

*Third*, God then imputes the righteousness of the new Adam to everyone who believes.

Adam's sin is yours.

All your sins are Christ's.

All Christ's righteousness is now yours.

Abraham dared to believe the promises of God and received righteousness solely on the basis of the promise of God, which he trusted by faith. We receive righteousness solely on the basis of the promise of God in the Gospel, which we trust by faith.

He regards us as righteous, not because there is any good or purity in us, but because there is in Christ. When God looks at us, it is Christ's righteousness He sees. God looks at us through Christ-colored glasses.

Who will boast in his own glory, who will dare to say he has done something which deserves a reward from God? Who will rob God of His glory? Who of us will say we are owed something by God when Abraham didn't say he was?

We can demand from our employer what is our due, what is owed to us. How many of you who receive a paycheck write a thank you note to your employer, thanking him or her for their kindness and grace in paying you? Of course not, you worked, you earned it, it is your due. Your wages are credited to your account not as grace but as earned obligation.

This principle is true in the spiritual world as well. If you can do the works of the law, if you can obey God commands, if you can produce godly character in yourself, then you can boldly approach God and request what is owed you. You don't have to say, "Lord, have mercy on me" but rather, "Lord, give me what is mine, open heavens doors to me, I have a right to go in."

I am ashamed now to admit it, but I had that very conversation with God back in high school as I was wrestling with faith and what it means to be a Christian and make a profession of faith, and what I had to do to get into heaven.

I argued with God over why He should reward me with heaven. I was a good kid, I didn't do bad things, I was better than most of those I knew in school. I was a rule follower. I didn't smoke, drink, cuss, rebel against my parents or those in authority. What folly to think that should be what mattered most to God. What a fool, so completely clueless what real sin was, how sinful I was, not by man's standard but by God's standard.

What mercy God didn't strike me dead for my pride, arrogance and self-centeredness, God hates the proud and He resists them. Oh the patience of God with me over these fifty years to humble me by His Word and Spirit.

I was trying to earn my way into heaven or buy my way, or to say that I had already earned my way, I had done enough. I didn't get it. All God wants from me is to believe, to have faith in His work.

There is nothing we can demand from God. God is never indebted to us. He never owes us anything. The righteousness God gives us is not a debt, not a payment, but purely a gift, freely given out of the goodness of God.

### ***Justifies the ungodly.***

God justifies the ungodly, the wicked, the lawless, rebellious unbeliever. This is shocking to the Jew. The law says the wicked will not be acquitted. It offends our sensitivities. How can a criminal just be declared not guilty?

There is only one way God can do this and remain just. Christ died for the ungodly. God can justify the ungodly because His Son died for the ungodly. This is the Gospel, this is the power of grace, without which no one would or could be saved. Believe in God who justifies the ungodly.

### **Implications and application.**

Who calls themselves ungodly? Who really thinks of themselves as ungodly? Do you think that way, do you believe that, is that how you think of yourself? That is how God thinks of us, that's His word for us.

Do you think that is a good way to think of yourself or a bad way? Let me assure you it is a good way, because it is your only hope. How else will you get right with God and be forgiven, acquitted, counted as righteous? When I know my sin, the depth of my sinfulness, my ungodliness, then I have hope.

Do you want to be right with God? Do you want peace that passes all understanding? Trust in the One who justifies the ungodly.

Only those who truly feel they are ungodly, unrighteous, will attain God's gift of righteousness. Jesus came to heal the sick, not the healthy,

**Luke 5:31-32** Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Don't respond to God's offer of salvation with Romans 4:4.

"Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited according to grace, but according to debt."  
Don't nullify grace and turn justification into a debt to be paid by God.

Respond to God's offer of salvation with Romans 4:5.

"But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." Trust the one who justifies the ungodly - and you will be saved.

Then you will be made right with God, and acquitted in His court, and forgiven for our sins, and declared righteous, having the righteousness of Christ imputed to you, and your sins imputed to him, and all this by faith alone. That's the heart of the Gospel.

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, this is too much for us to fully understand. You take the bankruptcy of our sin and pay it off with Christ's death on the cross, and then you credit to our account His righteousness, His perfect obedience. How can we respond but to ask you to receive our wonder, awe and adoration; receive our poor love; and receive the offering of our lives to you to do with as you please for your glory. You have bought us, we are yours, no more will we live for ourselves. Make us to be sin-hating and Christ-loving, and may His righteousness be reflected in all we say and do. In His name we ask this, Amen.