

Part 17

Abraham the model believer (3:6-9)

Paul's second confirmation

- **The same way as Abraham**

- **Abraham - model case of how to be accepted by God**

1. Justified only by faith**2. Justification 'covering righteousness'**

- **'Credited'**
- **As a gift**
- **Character follows and takes time**

- **Justification is not by godliness**

- **Justification is not by nationality**

We come now to Paul's second argument. He is wanting to convince us that we are 'justified' before God only by faith in Jesus Christ. We will not find it helpful to put ourselves under the regulations of the law of Moses. He laid down his basic teaching in 2:15–16, and insisted it does not lead to loose living or to any kind of wickedness. ^{■1} It is confirmed, says Paul, firstly by the experience of the Holy Spirit, especially when they have known what it is to be dramatically brought to salvation in a time of great spiritual power. ^{■2} But now Paul has a second way in which he wants to confirm his teaching. The model of how we are justified is Abraham. Christians are all 'children of Abraham'. We are justified – declared righteous – in the sight of God in the same way in which Abraham was justified before God.

Abraham was not the first person to be accepted by God. There were believers before Abraham: probably Adam, and certainly Abel, Noah and Enoch, and others. But in the case of Abraham, the promised Saviour is said to be 'the seed of Abraham', through whom worldwide blessing will come. Also it is in the case of Abraham that we first have a statement concerning justification. Adam, Noah and Enoch all had faith. But the first person of whom it is said that he 'believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness' is Abraham. So Abraham became the model case of acceptance by God. 'In the same way, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness'. ^{■1}

1. Paul supports his teaching of justification only by faith in Christ. This is the most basic way of thinking about salvation. Justification is to be considered **before** new birth, because 'justification' deals with whether we are **accepted** by God. God gives us new birth because He accepts us. His acceptance comes before His giving us anything. Abraham was justified only by his faith in the promise of God.

2. Justification is God's giving us a 'covering' righteousness. Our developing a godly life will take time, and never in this life will we be perfectly righteous before God with our own righteousness. But this 'righteousness' God gives us when we first trust Jesus is not achieved by us at all. It is 'reckoned' or 'credited' as being ours. Imagine you have an account in a bank. Then one day the bank makes a mistake and accidentally puts some money in your account which is not yours at all! It is 'credited' to you although you did nothing to put the money in the account. It is 'reckoned' as yours. It is in your account. Sooner or later the bank will realize its mistake and will take the money back out of your account! But when God 'credits' us with the righteousness of Jesus Christ no mistake has been made and God will never take it back. Christ's righteousness is a gift to you; it is yours forever. Our character will catch up with it partly in this life. Then in the final glory we shall lose any sinful tendencies whatsoever. One day we shall have our own righteousness – in the final glory. But in this life our righteousness is never perfect and we shall have to hide ourselves in the righteousness of Christ. He will be our covering. He will be to us the Lord our righteousness.

Abraham was not specially godly when he was justified. He had been a pagan moon-worshipper in Ur. Our first salvation – our 'justification' before God – is not by godliness.

Also, Abraham was not a Jew. Salvation is not by nationality. Abraham was not circumcised at the time he believed the promise. Salvation is not by circumcision. Nor was Abraham baptised. Justification can take place

^{■1} 2:17-21

^{■2} 3:1-5

^{■1} 3:6

- **Justification is by believing the promise of God**

3. True Children of God

4. Covering righteousness has always been available

5. Scripture is God speaking

- **A promise for all nations**

without baptism – as the case of Abraham proves. What did Abraham have that should result in his being justified, ‘accepted as righteous’, in the eyes of a holy God? Abraham had nothing to command him but he believed the promise of God concerning his own seed – who turned out to be Jesus. This is Paul’s doctrine exactly. We are justified by believing the promise of God. Nothing else is necessary. Nothing else makes any contribution to justification. It is Christ’s righteousness which gives us our first covering righteousness, and faith unites us to Jesus.

3. The only people who are truly children of God are those who have been ‘declared righteous’ in this way. ‘So you are to know then that it is the people who have faith who are the sons of Abraham.’ ^{¶1} All Christians are ‘sons of Abraham’. Only those who have the same kind of faith that Abraham had are God’s children. Only they are members of the people of God.

4. This message of a covering righteousness has always been available. It did not begin with the coming of Jesus. It was introduced thousands of years before. The gospel-message of righteousness by faith in God’s promise was known even to Abraham. Nothing is 100% indispensable to salvation that was not available in the case of Abraham. Paul says, ‘*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed”*’. ^{¶1} Before the coming of Jesus, people came to salvation by looking **forward** to the Saviour, *but* the way of salvation has always been the same.

5. We note in passing Paul’s high view of Scripture. The Scripture is spoken of as if it is God! Actually in Abraham’s day the Scriptures did not exist. But this is an indication of how much the apostles thought of Scripture as the Word of God. Scripture and God are so identified that Scripture is ‘God speaking’. The same style of thinking is found in Romans 9:17. **God’s** foreseeing the future and putting something in Scripture is the same as the **Scripture** foreseeing.

Everything Paul wants us to understand about justification was present in Abraham’s day. The basis of salvation – justification by faith in God’s promise about Jesus – was visible in Abraham. It was a promise for all nations, so God was planning to save gentiles – people who are not Jewish. Abraham was the model, and only faith in the Jesus-promise was needed. The opportunity is there for anyone, Jew or gentile. ‘*So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith*’. ^{¶1} We are justified by believing the promise of God. Nothing else is necessary. Nothing else makes any contribution to justification. It is Christ who saves, and faith unites us to Jesus.

^{¶1} 3:7

^{¶1} 3:8

^{¶1} 3:9



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