

II. SALVATION—THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED (3:21–8:39)**A. Justification—declared righteous in Christ (3:21–5:21)****1. The Divine Method (3:21–31)****2. The OT Illustration of Justification by Faith (4:1–25)****a. Abraham received righteousness by faith (4:1–12)****b. Abraham received the promise of that he would inherit the world by faith (4:13–16)**

Paul continues to show that Abraham was not only justified apart from personal merit, he would receive all of God's promises apart from merit. Paul is establishing *the principle* that receiving the promises of God is tied to faith, not works. This shows a continuity between the Old and New Testaments; the same principle can be carried over when he talks about receiving righteousness through faith in Christ.

4:13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

4:14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;

God promised Abraham and his descendants that they would be heirs of the world. The actual OT promise was that God would give Abraham and his descendants land (Gen. 12:1); the land, however, became a pointer to entrance into the new heaven and earth—the consummation of the Messianic kingdom (cf. Mat., 5:5; Isa. 66:22; Rev. 21:1; Carson, *Matthew*, EBC, 134; Murray, 142). But how would this promise be received? Would it be received through the works of the law or through faith? (4:13) It would be received by faith.

If Abraham's descendants were to be heirs of the promise by law, then Abraham's faith was unnecessary and faith has no value. Assuming that obedience to the law was the means to receive the promise, then by implication the promise that Abraham received by faith alone would be meaningless, as well (4:14).

So there are only two choices: Either the promise given to Abraham was based on the condition that good works were needed to receive it, or it was unconditional, given by grace, apart from human merit, but it can't be both. If the promise is received by faith, it can't be received by works. If it is earned, the promise that is based on faith is invalid.

In sum, God didn't tell Abraham, "Obey the law and I will bless you;" He said, "I will bless you. Believe My promise." If Abraham was only required to believe, the promise is based on grace not the Law, on faith not merit.

4:15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

4:16 For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

The reason the promise could never be experienced (4:14) if it came through obedience to the Law is because “the law brings about wrath” (4:15).

Paul had already said in Romans 2:12–13, “For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.” Then in Romans 3:19–20 he said, “Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”

If people needed to keep the law to get the inheritance, then the inheritance could never be attained because we all break the law of God. So if the promise is dependent upon merit, goodness or the stability of man, there would be no assurance that any of Abraham’s spiritual descendants would receive it. In reality, it would be utterly impossible for them to do so. Unless we are saved by grace, we cannot be saved at all (Hodge, 123). On the other hand, if the promise is given by grace and received through faith, it cannot fail (i.e. “it is guaranteed”), because the promise’s fulfillment is dependent upon the faithfulness of God, not man. Furthermore, both those under the law and those without the law can receive it provided each has faith in God (4:16b).

In simple terms, if God’s promises were only received by those who earn them through obedience, no one would receive them, for no one is perfectly obedient. Therefore, God’s promises must be gifted. And if they are gifted, then they can’t be earned; they must be received by faith. Thus, faith is essential for it accords with grace. Grace is important because grace gives the guarantee.

As Piper says,

The only way that our eternal future can be guaranteed is if it rests on God's grace. Grace is the free and undeserved work of God to bring his people to glory. Grace is the mighty, omnipotent purpose of God to make sure we get our inheritance. Grace is the ground of our guarantee. And faith is the only condition of the heart that "accords" with that free and undeserved work (sermon by John Piper, Ro 1:1, Sept 19, 1999—John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org).

One last comment should be made. When Paul says in verse 15, “where there is no law, there also is no violation” he is not saying, “where there is no law, there is no sin.” Prior to knowledge of the law, sin existed, but it was not known to be a transgression of God’s standards. However, when the law appeared it became evident that men are transgressors and are condemned. “In other words, before the Law came in (430 years after the promise to Abraham, Galatians 3:17), all kinds of sinful attitudes and actions might go unnoticed because there was no specific commandment that was violated. But when the Law comes in, the knowledge of sin explodes. What was lying dead, as it were, is brought to light as a specific violation or transgression of an explicit command” (John Piper, Ro 1:1, Sept 5, 1999—John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org). Paul’s point is that the law condemned, it didn’t save. The law didn’t result in life; it resulted in wrath (4:15). The person whose sin has been awakened by the law should surely desire salvation by grace that comes by faith.

c. Abraham received the promise of descendants by faith (4:17–25)

The paragraph that follows not only speaks of Abraham's universal fatherhood, but also stresses the nature of Abraham's faith—something that is essential to understand if people are credited righteousness by means of faith. True descendants of Abraham have faith like Abraham.

4:17 (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

Verse 16 ends, ". . . Abraham, who is the father of us all." Verse 17 begins with the parenthesis and quote from Genesis 17:5: "As it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations.'" This proves that Abraham is the father of us all and assures us that the promises given to Abraham extended beyond the Jews.

If the sentence were uninterrupted, it would read, ". . . Abraham, who is the father of us all in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist."

Abraham is "the father of us all in the presence of Him (God) whom he (Abraham) believed." In other words, Abraham is the father of us all in the presence of God. The expression "in the presence of God" probably means "in God's sight." Or we might say, "in God's eyes" (as God saw it, from God's vantage point, etc.) Abraham is the father of all who have faith.

Next, God is described as the God who (1) gives life to the dead and (2) calls into being that which does not exist. These pinpoint the attributes of God that relate to Abraham's faith.

Abraham saw God as the Giver of life and the One who could raise the dead. Elsewhere, resurrection was considered to be a unique sign of God's omnipotence (Eph. 1:19–20). If God can raise the dead, He can also fulfill His promises to Abraham whose body was as good as dead (4:19), and give him descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky (Gen. 15:5).

Abraham also saw God as the One who "calls into being that which does not exist." God told Abraham, "*I have made you* the father of many nations" (ESV, NKJ), yet when He said this Abraham was 100 years old and didn't even have a son. However, God could say, "*I have made* you a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5), not "*I will make* you one" since that which is in the mind of God is "history" even before it takes place. In other words, God brings those things that do not yet exist in history into existence. God called the universe into existence when there was nothing. In this case, Abraham believed that God's promises toward him would come to pass even without visible evidence.

Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith is not synonymous with superstition or a gullibility to believe anything; faith has a rational basis behind it. As Stott says, "faith is believing or trusting a person, and its reasonableness depends on the reliability

of the person trusted" (Stott, 133). It was reasonable to trust God to fulfill promises since God has the power to do as He says and is faithful to His word.

4:18 In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."

4:19 Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;

4:20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

4:21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

4:22 Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Verse 18 is a new section that further amplifies Abraham's faith and gives to us the application.

Abraham believed in hope against hope. Humanly speaking, there was no reason for Abraham to hope that he could be the father of many nations, yet he believed it anyway since it rested on the promise of God.

Through the eyes of faith, Abraham did not consider the fact that he was already 99 years old (Gen. 17:24) and his wife had been barren and was beyond the age of child bearing (she was 90—Gen. 17:17; 18:11) as a reason that God could not fulfill His promise (4:19). Where most would think that it was too late for God to do anything, Abraham did not stumble by entertaining doubt. Rather, through his persistent trust in the ability of God, his faith deepened and God received glory (4:20; Heb. 11:8–19). Abraham believed that God could fully perform all that He had said He would do (4:21). "Therefore his faith 'was credited (*logizomai*, λογίζομαι) to him as righteousness.'" (4:22). This is the point Paul is trying to drive home. The phrase "credited (*logizomai*, λογίζομαι) as righteousness" appears 4 times in this chapter (4:3, 5, 9, 22). In the immediate context this emphasizes that the greatness of faith is found in God's power and faithfulness (Murray, 152).

Hebrews 4:18–22 helps us visualize what faith is.

➤ *in hope against hope he believed. . . according to that which had been spoken (4:18)*

Abraham believed what God had said even though he had no ground (humanly speaking) to do so; in hope against hope he believed. When Abraham was first told that he would become a father of many nations he was 75, and his wife Sarah had not yet given birth to a child; she was already 66 years old. Nevertheless, Abraham believed what God had said to him.

Abraham's faith was *not* based upon believing something that God had *not* verbalized. He trusted in what God had said; that is, his faith was rooted in the character of God, not in faith itself. This is much different than the faith of some in the modern church who redefine faith as "believing something strongly." Abraham did not just strongly believe that all things are possible with God; he believed "according to that which had been spoken" (4:18), "with respect to the promise of God" (4:20), and he was "fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform" (4:21). This is the kind of faith that is credited as righteousness (4:22).

➤ *without becoming weak in faith he contemplated (his situation) . . . yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God (4:20)*

Abraham didn't close his eyes to reality. He contemplated the situation he was in and knew that his wife was beyond the normal age of bearing children, yet he also contemplated God, the power of God, and the faithfulness of God to His promises. Therefore, his belief that he would be the father of many nations did not weaken, though he could not understand how it would come to pass.

➤ *being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform (4:21)*

Once again notice that Abraham's faith was based on the faithfulness of God to keep His promises and the power of God to accomplish what He said He would do.

***4:23 Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,
4:24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised
Jesus our Lord from the dead,***

The brief history of Abraham's faith and the subsequent righteousness he received from God was not just to tell us about Abraham. It had a much higher purpose. Abraham is a representative of all who believe in Christ. What was true of him, is true of all others who stand the same in relation to God. "The method in which he was justified, is the method in which other sinners must be justified" (Hodge, 128).

Just as Abraham believed in the promises of God and that He could raise the dead (4:17; Heb. 11:19), so must we, for the resurrection of Christ is essential to the message of salvation, and is the final and decisive evidence of His claims. To believe He rose from the dead is to believe He is Lord, Savior, and the Redeemer of men.

4:25 He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

The flow of Paul's argument is as follows:

- Abraham was declared righteous by faith; that is, he was justified by faith.
- Abraham's faith was seen in that he believed that the promises of God would come to pass; he even believed that God could raise the dead.
- Abraham's faith was recorded for our benefit, for righteousness is credited to us in the same way it was credited to him; we must have faith like Abraham.
- Abraham believed God can raise the dead; we must believe this as well, for Christ died for our sins, and was raised for our justification.

The two clauses in the verse are clearly parallel.

Christ who	was delivered over	because of our transgressions,
and	was raised	because of our justification

The preposition *dia* (διὰ) can be translated as "because of," "on account of," "for," or "for the sake of." This has caused a problem in the second part of each clause: *for our sins* and *for our justification*.

What does Paul mean by He was raised "because of our justification"?

There are three main views:

VIEW 1

Both clauses are retrospective; they give the reason for something having happened (Stott, 135). These two clauses answer the questions, “Why did Jesus die?” and “Why did Jesus rise?”

The preposition *dia* (διὰ) should be translated as “because of” or “on account of”.

who	was delivered over	because of (on account of) our transgressions,
and	was raised	because of (on account of) our justification

The *reason* that Jesus was delivered over to death was *because of* our sins. Thus, the parallel expression would mean that the reason Jesus was raised was “*because of* our justification.” That is, our justification was in some sense the cause of the resurrection (Moo, 289).

Those who hold this view say, “He was raised because of our justification.” This means that the resurrection was the inevitable sequel to our justification that was accomplished at the cross. In other words, Jesus was raised because our justification was accomplished by His death (Harrison, EBC, v.10, 54). Schreiner interprets this as meaning that the resurrection authenticates and confirms to us that *our* justification has been secured (Schreiner, 244). I suppose we could say, if Jesus’ death did not secure our justification there would be no resurrection. Thus, “the resurrection would depend on our justification” (Schreiner, 244).

PROS

1) “Because of” is the most common way to translate the Greek preposition *dia* (διὰ) (Harrison, EBC, 54; Moo, 289).

2) There is almost unanimous consensus that the first clause is causal: the reason that Jesus was handed over was “because” of our transgressions (Schreiner, 243). Since the two lines are parallel, then the clear meaning of the first clause should be carried over into the second clause.

CONS

1) *Our* justification happens when we believe, not before Jesus’ resurrection (Stott, 135). This has been the emphasis in chapter 4.

REPLY: Although our justification *is applied* to us when we believe, it was *accomplished* at Christ’s death; Romans 5:9 says, “we have now been justified by his blood.” Likewise, Romans 3:24–25 says, we are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood.”

2) The lines may be written for a purely rhetorical effect and not intended to be taken as parallel in meaning (Moo, 289). See view 3 below.

REPLY: This is possible, but not typical of parallel clauses.

3) Justification was accomplished at the death of Christ (Ro. 5:9); it did not require resurrection to complete it. The resurrection was not mentioned in 3:21–26, a passage that explains justification (Harrison, EBC, v. 10, 54).

4) It is easy to understand the first clause if *dia* (διὰ) is translated as “because of.” If we were to ask, “Why was Jesus delivered over?” The answer would be, “because of our transgressions.” However, this meaning is not immediately apparent in the second clause: Why was Jesus raised? The answer, “because of our justification” does not make much sense.

5) Schreiner’s view that the resurrection authenticates and confirms to us that our justification has been secured sounds more like the second view (TK).

VIEW 2

Both clauses are prospective (Moo, Hodge, Murray); that is, they look forward and mean “for the sake of.” The two clauses state the *purpose* of Christ’s death and resurrection, not their cause (view 1).

The preposition *dia* (διὰ) should be translated as “for the sake of.”

“He was delivered up for the sake of our sins
and was raised for the sake of our justification”

Our justification did not cause the resurrection, nor was the resurrection the inevitable consequence of being justified (view 1). Jesus’ *death* accomplished our justification (it provided the grounds that makes it possible for us to be justified by God). However, Jesus’ resurrection is also related to our justification. Jesus was raised for the sake of our justification; His resurrection secured our justification.

How so?

(the following applies to the 2nd and 3rd VIEWS)

- Jesus’ resurrection secures our justification in that it authenticates and confirms it. In other words, when Jesus rose again on the third day, it was the public announcement that God was fully satisfied with the sacrificial death of his Son (+ view 1).
- Jesus’ resurrection secures our justification in that it frees Christ from the influence of sin forever (Ro. 6:10—Christ’s resurrection removed Christ from the influences of sin that He experienced when He became man) giving Him ongoing power over sin. We experience this same power over sin through our union with Him (Moo, 290; Harrison, EBC, v. 10, 54).
- Jesus’ resurrection secures our justification in that it is through the mediation of the resurrected Christ that we stand justified. Jesus’ death made it possible for us to be justified; the fact that He rose from the dead and lives made it possible for Him to be our mediator and apply the justification He accomplished at the cross to us.

"With a dead Savior, a Savior over whom death had triumphed and held captive, our justification had been forever impossible. As it was necessary that the high priest under the old economy should not only slay the victim at the altar but carry the blood into the most holy place and sprinkle it on the mercy seat, so it was necessary not only that our great High Priest should suffer in the outer court, but that He should pass into heaven to present His righteousness before God for our justification, both therefore as the evidence of the acceptance of His satisfaction on our behalf and as a necessary step to secure the application of the merits of His sacrifice. Thus the resurrection of Christ was absolutely essential, even for our justification."(Hodge, 129)

This focuses on two aspects of God's redemptive action—Jesus' death and resurrection (Murray, 155, 156). His substitutionary death secured our standing with God; His resurrection secures its application for us.

PRO

1) In the preceding context Paul had said that justification is by faith and righteousness is imputed to us. Jesus rose to guarantee our justification.

CON

1) If the two clauses are parallel, it is hard to apply this understanding to the first clause: He "was delivered over for the sake of our transgressions."

REPLY: We might say, "He was handed over for the sake of [for the purpose of] *taking care of* transgressions. Or, as Murray translates it, "in order to atone for sin."

REPLY: This requires questionable additions to the text (Moo, 289). Murray's translation "in order to atone for" is an elaborate paraphrase for the simple preposition "for" (Stott, 136).

2) Translating this preposition as "for the sake of" is rare, though not unprecedented.

VIEW 3

The first line is causal or retrospective (view 1): "He was handed over because of our sin"; the second line is prospective (view 2): "Christ was raised for the sake of our justification" (Moo, 289). The parallelism of the two clauses is purely for rhetorical effect; they are not to be taken as parallel in meaning.

who	was delivered over	because of our transgressions,
and	was raised	for the sake of our justification

Jesus died for our sins and His death provides the grounds for justification. Jesus rose *for our sake*; that is, for the sake of our justification (see view 2 above).

PRO

1) This combines the strongest points in the first two views.

CON

1) This destroys the parallelism of the two lines.

REPLY: The lines may be written as they are for a purely rhetorical effect, since Paul is not separating Christ's death from justification (Moo, 289).

Conclusion: The third view seems to be the easiest to understand, although it is better to read parallel grammar with the same meaning.