

Salvation Has Always Been By Grace Through Faith Alone

Romans 4:16-25

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Background Notes

Will Abraham be in heaven? If you ask that question to the average American, you will get an overwhelmingly positive response. Yes, Abraham will be in heaven! But now ask **why** Abraham will be in heaven. The typical response to that question will be, “Well, Abraham certainly wasn’t perfect, but his good works certainly far outweighed his bad deeds. So definitely Abraham will be in heaven.”

Now let me ask you a question. What book of the Bible would you use to show this answer is clearly unbiblical? What about the book of Romans? Romans would be a great book of Scripture to use. What chapter in Romans? Romans 4 would be a great chapter to turn to! What verses in Romans 4? And how about starting with verses 2 and 3? You could start there and then move on. Let’s read Romans 4:2-3 again: *For if “Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”* So Abraham was saved by faith alone – not by works, and not by faith plus works, but by **faith alone**. Abraham’s works were evidence of his faith, as James 2 clearly points out (when it is properly interpreted).

In Romans 4, Paul goes to great lengths to emphasize that Abraham, even though he lived in Old Testament times, was saved in the same way that God always saves people – by grace through faith alone. Abraham wasn’t saved by works of the Law, as we have seen earlier in Romans 4, because Abraham lived before the giving of the Law. Abraham wasn’t

saved by the ritual of circumcision, as we have seen in Romans 4, because God declared Abraham righteous before he was circumcised. Abraham was saved simply because he believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness. It was reckoned to him, or accounted to him, or credited to him, or imputed to him for righteousness. God justified Abraham, that is, God declared him righteous, apart from any works. It was by grace through faith alone.

Doctrinal Points

1. Righteousness was reckoned to Abraham by faith alone.

This point is obvious all the way through Romans 4, as we have seen, and it is certainly emphasized in this last section of Romans 4. Look at verse 16: *"Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, 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..."* and verse 22: *"And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."* Abraham's faith was accounted to him for righteousness.

Now what kind of faith did Abraham have? What kind of faith was God looking for? Well, it certainly wasn't a "feeling" kind of faith. Some people today think that they have saving faith if they feel good about themselves, or if they feel spiritual. That's not saving faith! On the other hand, some folks think that they don't have saving faith if they don't feel good about themselves, or if they don't "feel spiritual." That's not what saving faith is all about! Look at Abraham. Nothing is said about "feelings." Abraham simply believed what God said, and it was credited to him, or reckoned to him, for righteousness.

What is it that Abraham believed? What did God say? In Genesis 15 God said that Abraham would be the father of many descendants, and Abraham believed God. "But wait a minute!" you say, "that was Genesis 15. Didn't Abraham have a lapse of faith in Genesis 16 when he took Hagar as a concubine and tried to help God out by having Ishmael as a son?" Yes, that's true, but that's not the end of the story. Abraham bounced back with even stronger faith, and that's the point that's being made here. Look at verses 19-22, *"And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. 20 He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. 22 And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."* So while Abraham's faith was not flawless, it was **genuine**, and it was placed in the **right object**, namely God Himself and what God had said -- and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Righteousness was reckoned to Abraham by faith alone.

2. Righteousness is reckoned to the children of Abraham by faith alone.

Remember, "reckoned" means "accounted to," or "imputed to," or "credited to." Now who are the children of Abraham? Look at the end of verse 16: *"those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."* So Abraham is the

spiritual father of **all** the faithful. That truth is also brought out in Galatians 3:7: *“Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.”* And also Galatians 3:29 *“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

These verses in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 don’t mean that there is no longer any natural seed of Abraham. God’s plans and promises to the Jewish people are still valid, as Romans 11 clearly indicates. However, all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, are the **spiritual** children of Abraham, because Abraham is the spiritual father of all those who come to God in the same way that Abraham came. That is, by faith alone.

Now look at verses 22-25 *“And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 23 Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, 24 but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”* So righteousness is reckoned to the children of Abraham by faith alone. The idea in verse 25, of course, is that God is able to reckon us as righteous by faith alone because the Lord Jesus Christ has already paid the penalty for our sins, and was raised as proof that God was satisfied with the payment: *“who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”* Therefore righteousness can be imputed to us, or reckoned to us, or put to our account -- reckoned to those who believe. Righteousness is reckoned to the children of Abraham by faith alone.

Practical Application

All you have to do is say, “Amen” to God, and really mean it.

We’ve seen in Romans 4 that Abraham was justified, or declared righteous, because he believed what God had spoken. So Abraham said "Amen" to what God said, and he really meant it. Look at verses 17-18: *“(as it is written, “I have made you a father of many nations”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; 18 who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.”* Against all human hope, Abraham in hope believed in God, so he became the father of many nations according to God had spoken. God said it, Abraham believed it, and that settled it! In other words, Abraham said "Amen" to what God said. This is just another simple way to describe saving faith – saying “Amen” to what God has said -- really believing the truth that God has spoken, not just with head knowledge, but with heart commitment as well.

Have you noticed that the word "**repent**" is missing in Romans 4? This great chapter on God’s way of salvation -- why would the word "repent" be missing? Wasn’t Abraham sorry for his sins and willing to repent? Of course he was. Certainly repentance was involved in Abraham’s faith -- but saving faith starts by saying “Amen” to what God has said. If you really mean it when you say "Amen," then you have believed all that God has said about your sinful condition --so certainly there will be repentance.

It all starts with believing what God has spoken: what God has revealed about Himself and His character and His works, and what He has done in history, what our condition is, what our need is – our need of salvation. That's where it starts -- you believe what God has said. All you have to do is say, "Amen" to God -- and **really mean it!**