

“Abraham and Justification”

Romans the Gospel of God

Romans 4:1-8

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November 5, 2021

Jeff: Our Lord and our God, when we bow before You we are reminded of all of the things that are mentioned of You in Scripture—how You are wonderful and mighty, how You are a wise Counselor, how You are a mighty God, How You have revealed Yourself in the Lord Jesus Christ Your Son, Your Beloved, the second Person of the Trinity who has cast light upon the Old Testament, revealing the fullness of the triune God therein, yet how He has also come to save. So Father, we are thankful as we bow before You today that life in the Beloved is life. And Father, as we gather we pray that You will feed us on Your word. Help us not only to remember what that life is but to enjoy it from now until eternity.

Father, as we bow we also acknowledge and are thankful for the Holy Spirit who resides in us. And Father, we pray that You will continue to bless us with His presence. We pray, Father, that He would both stir us up and pray on our behalf when we know not what to pray for. Lord, we are thankful that we can come before You, study it and learn from it and be fashioned by Your Spirit in the image of Christ Jesus.

And we're also thankful that we can come before You and lay our petitions at Your feet. We do that this morning. We think about Butch, and we certainly pray for him. And we certainly pray for Paul as he longs for his brother. And we ask that Your hand would be upon him for good.

We pray for Bob and are thankful for his testimony and for his confidence in Your ability not only to heal but also to preserve. But if You choose not to, Father, we ask that You would continue to strengthen him.

Lord, we give You thanks for David and for the wisdom that You've given to him in order to best discern how to manage his health. And also we pray for Kirstin and ask that You will minister to her throughout the surgery. And Father, bring wellness to her.

Father, we think about Dick. And we are thankful that he has been able to arrange housing. And we pray for Dick's well-being and for his strengthening. We are thankful for the good news about our brother Ted. We do pray that You will bless him as he experiences your good gift. And so we pray that You would give it to Ted Your servant. We're thankful for the goodness of surgery and for how it has helped him. We pray that he would continue to heal.

Father, we think of Alex and we pray that You would comfort him in his loss. We also pray for Curt and the difficult situation he is in with his health. We certainly pray for Curt's wife, that You will bless her with a compassionate heart and a heart that will respond to the movement of Your Spirit. We pray for repentance on her part. We pray for these things, all of them, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. Well, why don't you turn with me this morning to Romans chapter 4? Let's read chapter 4:1-8 today. I was trying to think if we finished chapter 3.

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Don Maurer: You said you would talk about not overthrowing the law, that we establish the law. You didn't cover that last week.

Jeff: Okay. Why don't we start in chapter 4, and then I'll go backwards for a few seconds, and we'll talk about the last part of chapter 3, and then we'll move forward. So let me have you turn your attention there. Don, do you have it ready at hand?

Don: Yes, I do.

Jeff: Go ahead.

Don: So where do I start?

Jeff: Chapter 4, verses 1-8.

Don: Okay. All right. *“What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 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.’*

“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.’” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: Okay, let me have you just cast your eye on verse 30 of chapter 3 for a minute. And it says there that *“God is one, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.”*

So let me just start with a thought about that, and then we can go further. Why would he say this. Why do we say, “Do we overthrow the law by what we have said?”, because you need to think about where Paul was in terms of his own thinking, and for that matter where the Jewish nation was by the time you get to this point.

I want you to think for a minute about the Inter-Testamental period. And I would say that by 50 B.C.—and I would say that would be about fifty years before Christ,—what you started to have turn up in Jewish literature is an affirmation that one is saved by what he does.

In other words, think about it like this. And I'm going to say this a little bit later, but I think that maybe it fits now. What the Jews started to do was to view Genesis 15 through the lens of Genesis 17 and Genesis 22. In other words Genesis 17 and 22 were acts of obedience, whereas Genesis 15 was an expression of God's free, unmerited grace. The Jews should have looked at chapters 17 and 22 through the lens of 15. But that's not the way they did it.

Let me put it like this. And I think this should be up front in your minds. If I say Genesis 15, by now you should probably know what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is that moment in Abram's life where God summons him to cut animals in half and arrange them in a path-like way so that the blood flows down onto that path.

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And remember, what’s happening here is what a king did to his servant. A king would basically say to his servant, “Look, I am the king and you’re the servant. This is what I’ve done for you. This is what I expect from you. Now walk through the halves of those animals.”

And in effect you would say to that king, “If I don’t do what you’ve asked, then may I be like these animals that are ripped asunder like these animals on the ground.” And then you would walk through the halves. And you would always have the blood on the hem of your garment, reminding you of the cutting of the covenant that you’ve just engaged in. And if you’ve failed to do those things the king requested, then you would be punished. But if you did them you would be rewarded.

Now here is God saying to Abram, “You secure your blessedness. Make the path, cause the blood to flow, and We’ll cut this covenant together.” And yet what happens is something that is utterly surprising to the senses. What we find is that Abraham falls into a deep sleep. And God appears in the form of a smoking fire pot. And He Himself in this Theophany passes through the halves! And in essence He says, “Abram, I will secure not only your blessedness, but the blessedness of your posterity.”

Brave Man: The gospel.

Jeff: Amen; that’s the gospel! And we see that very thing being brought to fruition in the Person of Jesus Christ when in Hebrews chapter 10 it says that “His flesh was rent, that we might have access to God.” It’s calling us to hearken back to Genesis 15, and to remember that not only did God promise our blessedness by offering righteousness on our behalf, but also by becoming a curse-bearer. And so God who in effect says, “I will secure your blessedness” also in Jesus Christ in the New Testament becomes like those animals in Jesus Christ who was torn asunder because the curse was laid upon Him instead of us.

And so that is Genesis 15. It’s a chapter that we all ought to commit to memory at least in substance, because it is that moment where God promised father Abraham that He would secure our blessedness.

And then what happens? What happens is Genesis 17. And that’s where God appears to Abram and says, “*Walk before Me and be blameless.*”

Now you have to understand that God is not saying, “Walk before Me and be blameless so that now you can receive the grace that I offered you in Genesis 15.” That’s not what He’s saying. What He’s saying is, “Abram, since you have become Mine by virtue of My efficacious grace in your life, be Mine by showing your love, by demonstrating your loyalty,” and so on. And so the works flow from the relationship.

You don’t sit your kid down, and you never say to your kid, “Now look. If you want to be my kid you better obey me.” That’s not what you say. You say to your kid, “Look, you’re my child.” You know, you’re either mine biologically or the judge decreed it to be so. “You’re either mine biologically or by adoption, but guess what: it doesn’t matter; you’re mine. And therefore be mine. Act like my child,” right?

I always tell my kids this. I just tell them when they argue. I say, “Remember, act right because it reflects on the family,” right?—that sort of thing. I don’t tell them, “Act right

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or you’re not going home.” I don’t tell them that at all, right?—that sort of thing. So that’s the idea.

Now I want you to think about that. That is the kind of thinking that establishes the law. But you see, the Jews had it backwards. The Jews had it as if to say that Genesis 17 comes before Genesis 15. I work and therefore merit what God offered in Genesis 15.

And what Paul is saying is this. He’s saying, “What I’ve just said is the exact order of Genesis 15 and Genesis 17.” And therefore if you have Genesis 15 you establish the law. You don’t nullify it; you establish it. And that’s what any parent knows; any parent knows that. So that’s how we end the chapter there. Yes, Tom? Hold on, Tom; wait a minute!

Tom Hansz: In Genesis 15 with whatever He says it’s a great chapter. And in the middle of it—verses 16 or 17—you also get an idea of how God works, in that He tells Abraham that they shall return in four generations.

Jeff: Yeah.

Tom: And in the last part of that verse He says, “And your folks will stay there four hundred years, because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” So while He’s dealing with Abraham and his descendants, He is also dealing with the Amorites. And He’s going to use the Jews that come back and be the punishment for them. But there are so many things that are happening all combined with each other, and God doesn’t quit! It’s phenomenal!

Jeff: Yes; He’s always doing more than one thing at a time for sure. *(Laughter)* He’s single-minded, but I guess He’s multi-tasking. Well, let’s move on then to chapter 4; we’ll go there.

Don: Wait a minute. What about overthrowing the law?

Jeff: Okay. What about it, Don? *(Laughter)*

Don: Is that what you were talking about?

Jeff: It doesn’t overthrow the law.

Don: Okay.

Jeff: So what I’m saying is that Paul has been saying in chapter 3, at the end of chapter 3 beginning at verse 21, at the end of that chapter he’s been saying that this is what God in Jesus Christ, with Him as our propitiation, in Him is what we find promised in Genesis 3:15.

Don: Okay.

Jeff: And so just as Genesis 17 follows Genesis 15, so Paul is saying that this doesn’t nullify the law; it actually establishes the law.

Don: Okay; very good.

Jeff: Yeah. Are you sleepin’ there, Don?

Don: Oh, maybe. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: He went on auto-pilot. All right, where are we?

Don: Are you sleepin’, Jeff?

Jeff: I’m sleepin’. Don, do you want to read 4:1-8? Just kidding. *(Laughter)*

Okay, so just some introductory things, just a couple. First of all I want you to understand that the Jews aren’t quietly going into the sunset at this point. I mean, you would think that in some ways this would bring us to a final end. It’s certainly a section

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of text unto itself, right? You begin with the righteousness of God being revealed against all ungodliness. There’s a sense in which in 3:21 that you have that wonderful conjunction *“but now.”* There is a righteousness from God that’s revealed that is transferred to us in Jesus Christ by faith in Him. And so in those first three chapters you get who God is: He’s righteous. You get what God does: He’s a righteous Judge. But you also get what God gives, and that is the transfer of righteousness. So there’s a sense in which these first three chapters are just full, complete and compact.

And yet there’s a sense in which Paul anticipates; he knows what they’re going to say next. He says, “All right, I know you guys. You’re going to pull the Abraham card on me because that’s what you do.”

I mean, that’s what a Jewish person does. Wait a minute! If Moses doesn’t work we’ll pull out the Abraham card; he’s the heavy. And so that’s what they do. And so that’s what Paul does; he beats them to the punch.

He says, “Let’s just pull out the Abraham card. What about father Abraham?” And the question that is asked is this. Is he really the exception to all of this? Or does Abraham fit into what is the scheme and theology that I’ve been talking about? In other words, can we take Abram as a test case and put him into what I’ve been saying?

Now there’s a sense in which you can go back and see this. I’ll just show you this, although I’m not going to throw it up on the board. Go back to chapter 3 verse 27.

Transcriber’s Note: Romans 3:27, NKJV. *“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.”*

Jeff: If you want to write this down or if you want to compare this later you can do it. But if you look in verse 27, one of the things there in 27 you find is chapter 4, verses 1 and 2 unfolding. If you look in verse 28 you find verses 2-8 being unfolded.

Transcriber’s Note: Romans 3:28, NKJV. *“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, apart from the deeds of the law.”*

Jeff: In other words 2-8 unfolds what it says in verse 28. And then in 29 and 30 you find verses 4-12 of chapter 4 being unfolded. And then in verse 31 you find 13-25 being unfolded.

And so in other words what Paul is doing is that he has brought his argument to conclusion in chapter 3. And like I said, there is a sense in which it’s a nice, tight, compact argument. But what he’s done is, he’s pulled the Abraham card out before them. He says, “I know exactly what you’re thinking. You’re thinking father Abraham. Well, let’s just think about father Abraham. Let’s just take him as a test case and put him into all the things that I’ve said. And let’s just ask if they’re true of him.”

So for instance he begins by saying that there is no room for boasting. And that’s how he begins chapter 4. There’s no room for boasting. But the question that we have to ask ourselves is this as we start off. The question is this. We have to ask ourselves: What’s the difference between the Jew and the Christian? And I say that knowing that when you think back to those early days of Christianity, there really wasn’t a distinction. I mean, the apostles went to the temple to pray. And there was a great deal of energy that was put into trying to help the Jew understand that their Messiah had come. And eventually you get the division.

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But when you think about it even in those early days, what’s the difference between the Jew and the Christian. And I think the difference is what I mentioned to you already. And remember that I said to you that about the time you hit 50 B.C. you find works that are starting to talk about how works is the basis for our salvation.

I wanted to show you some of those quotes because sometimes we just say it. But I want to start with Romans 9:30, because Romans 9:30 is what Paul says. And then I want to show you the works that you see, the historical proof for that. So just flip ahead to 9:30 for a minute.

And he says, *“What shall we say, then? That the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it—that is, a righteousness that is by faith, but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but”*—and here it is—*“as if it were based on works.”* They pursued it as if it were based upon works.

Now I went ahead and I said, “What happened?” Well, I told you this already. This is what we said when we talked about Genesis chapter 3. They started to mix up Genesis 15 and Genesis 17. And I’m just going to give you three or four, maybe five quotes. But you see it; you see it in the literature.

How about 1 Maccabees chapter 2, verses 51-53? Just listen to this. *“Remember the deeds of the ancestors which they did in their generations, and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. Was not Abraham found faithful when tested? And it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment and became lord of Egypt.”* In other words, there is a clear emphasis on what one does that produces righteousness.

Or how about this one: Jubilees 23:10. *“For Abraham was perfect in all his actions with the LORD, and was pleasing through righteousness all the days of his life.”*

Or how about this one: Sirach 44:20. *“He kept the law of the Most High and entered into a covenant with Him. He certified the covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested proved faithful.”* Again, *“He entered into a covenant with Him.”* And think about that: *“confirmed his own faithfulness.”*

And think about this; this is from the Mishnah. *“And we find that Abraham our father had performed the whole law before it was given. For it is written: ‘Because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.’”*

Now that’s a little bit of a different perspective than I would have with Abraham. The perspective that I would have on Abraham is this. If Abraham would have roused himself from the deep sleep and would have gotten up, and he himself would have passed through the halves before the smoking firepot had appeared—let’s just say it like that—and walked through the halves, God would have struck him dead the moment he emerged from the path because he could not keep the law perfectly, as was required by the law. In fact, if he had disobeyed at one point, which he had, he would have disobeyed the whole. And so the point that we have to take on board is that there is a reversal happening ever so subtly, but nonetheless a reversal that’s happening. And that reversal is that one is beginning to view Genesis 15 through the lens of Genesis 17. Abraham was righteous; Abraham was perfect; Abraham kept the law; Abraham did all the commandments before

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God even revealed them—that sort of thing, that sort of mindset that is creeping into Judaism that solidifies by the time you get into that inter-Testamental period in about 50 B.C.

And so what you have is, you have Paul saying that the Jews pursued this thing by works. And they even started to codify it in their own writings, and that’s wrong. And that’s why they did not recognize their own Messiah. Yes, Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: What did they do to reconcile the fact that Abraham denied that Sarah was his wife? I mean, it’s pretty obvious that he’s a sinner.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: It seems that they ignore this passage.

Jeff: Well you know, if you look in some of these texts, the interesting thing is that they’re always justifying the sins of the patriarchs. Do you know what I mean? There’s always a reason why the patriarch did what the patriarch did, you know?

There’s a book out. I can’t remember what it’s called. I’ll check. I’ll bring that book next time and show you some of the instances where the patriarchs were justified by the Jews; it’s really interesting. Yes?

Bryan Whittington: Okay. James 2 verse 24. How do we get these things meshed?

Jeff: Yeah. Well, why don’t we just do what Luther did; we’ll get rid of James.

(Laughter)

Brave Man: The epistle of straw.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: And James mentions Abraham being justified by works when he offered Isaac on the altar. And he said that fulfilled him being declared as righteous.

Jeff: Yeah. Let me start like this, okay? Let me start like this. And this will tell you something you already know. Let’s think about union with Christ. And when we think about union with Christ what we think about is all the benefits of Christ being ours in Him. But we have a tendency to divide up those benefits in terms of forensic categories.

So for instance we think about justification and we think about adoption, those forensic categories. But we also think about the renovative categories. And we think about things like efficacious calling; we think about regeneration; we think about sanctification. We think about those aspects as being part of the renovative benefits that we receive in Christ.

Now when you think about what Paul is saying in Romans 4 you think about his emphasis on the forensic. He’s emphasizing the forensic benefits. And he’s emphasizing the forensic benefits because what Jews are saying is this. Jews are saying that it is the works or the renovative benefits that lead us into union with Christ. And so he’s emphasizing the forensic aspect of union with Christ, okay?

Now what James is saying is this. He’s saying that everybody gets forensic righteousness; everybody is tooting the grace horn. Everybody knows that you’re in Christ by grace through faith, and this is not of yourselves. Everybody knows that. But now everybody has turned into an antinomian. In other words everybody is saying, “We have grace; we don’t need to do anything, right? I’m saved by grace. I’m a little

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uncomfortable with your emphasis on me doing anything.” That’s the kind of person he’s running into.

So what is he saying? What he’s saying is that if you understand that you possess forensic benefits, justifying grace, then I also want you to understand something else. *You must have works*, because you can’t have one section of benefits in your union with Christ and not the other.

In other words there are those who say that all of this is forensic. All of the benefits that I have in union with Christ are forensic. And some time later the Spirit will work on me and I’ll be sanctified. So there’s a second work of grace as it were that comes upon us, and we do.

But James is saying no. If you have the forensic benefits then you have the renovative benefits. And James goes on to say that your claim to have forensic benefits is vindicated by your works. And so works actually attest to vindicate your claim to have forensic benefits. Yes; go ahead. None of that was persuasive, was it? You can see it all over his face. Go ahead.

Bryan: So it’s really that initial line in 2:14. *“What good is it then, my brothers and sisters, if one says he has faith?”* Someone can say, “Yes, I have faith.” *“But has no works? Can that faith save him?”* So the faith that doesn’t manifest the works that come from the gravity of that salvation—

Jeff: Yes. So part of the benefits is conversion, right?, because think about conversion. Conversion is faith and repentance, right? And you claim to have faith. And faith is the instrument of justifying, right? Faith is the instrument of justification. You claim all that. But you say, “I’m saved by this. I don’t need to be doing anything.” James is saying, “O no, no, no. You don’t understand what it means to be united to Christ, because union with Christ entails not just conversion and forensic benefits. But it entails sanctification, because sanctification vindicates the claim that you’ve been saved by grace through faith.” That’s what he’s talking about.

Bishop: But the works that James is talking about is what he can see, whereas Paul is much more concerned about what God sees when He looks upon us.

Jeff: Yes, that’s a great difference; that’s right. That’s a good point. Don up here?

Sig: Who’s that?

Jeff: Don.

Sig: We have lots of Dons in the room.

Don: And there’s really on conflict. I mean, whether it’s Romans or Ephesians, when you get to the latter part of those letters Paul has all kinds of things that we’re to do to manifest our faith. There’s really no conflict at all.

Jeff: Yeah. One of the things that we’re going to go to later and that you can easily go to now is Ephesians 2:8—what Paul just mentioned, or what Don just mentioned. Don, I’ve elevated your status. *(Laughter)* So he talks about being dead in sin and transgression. In verse 4 he talks about *“but God,”* a kind of statement of Romans 3:21. *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in heavenly places*

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in Christ Jesus.” And then he goes on to say in verse 8, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God.”*

And so you get that first part, right? But the great thing about it is that he goes on. And he says to us, “And don’t forget that there are renovative benefits that must be possessed in this union.” And he says in verse 10 that *“we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

And interestingly that whole section—2:1-10—is built on an inclusio: the way we once walked and the way we should walk now. It says that at the beginning and at the end; it’s a neat thing. So does that satisfy you, or do you have questions? Go ahead if you have them.

Bryan: It’s not a question; there’s just a lot of tension there. I know this. However, what I’m trying to do in my mind is how do I with different “christianities” explain this to somebody?

Jeff: That’s great.

Bryan: There are so many nuances, because the whole of Scripture begins to tie all of these together, like Romans and Ephesians and all of that. And that’s where I was trying to—

Jeff: Yes; that’s a great question. So let’s do it this way. Let’s say that Dad leaves for work. He says to his son Johnny, “Johnny, I want you to clean your room while I’m gone.” And Dad walks out the door and Johnny says, “Clean my room!”

Bryan: Can you say “Arron?” (*Bryan’s son. Laughter*)

Jeff: No, you can’t say “Aaron”; forget that. We’re going to stick with Johnny. So Johnny says, “Clean my room?:

Sig: What about Nathan? (*Jeff’s son*)

Jeff: No, no, no! (*Laughter*) No, actually Nathan cleaned his room, so I can’t use him. (*Laughter*) So he says, “Forget it!” And what does he say that for? He says, “I’m a son. It’s not like Dad’s going to drop me out of his will because I didn’t clean my room. Who cares? I’m a son.” That would be an antinomian. That would be somebody who says, “I’m saved by grace; who gives a rip,” right?

And then there’s the other Johnny. Dad says, “Johnny, clean your room.” Dad walks out the door. And Johnny says, “I’d better get my room cleaned. Dad isn’t going to love me if I don’t get my room cleaned; I’d better get my room clean; I’m going to clean the room.” And he’s all anxiety-ridden; he’s going to clean the room, right? And what is he? He’s the nomian, he’s the legalist; he’s the law-oriented person who thinks that his relationship with his father is based upon his work. You know, “Dad is going to disown me; Dad is going to disclaim me; Dad is going to get rid of me if I don’t do my work,” right?

Both of those are wrong, right? Both of those we intuitively know are wrong. We don’t want our children to think either one of those things. What do we want them to think?

What we want them to react like is this. The father tells Johnny to clean his room. He leaves for work. And Johnny says, “I don’t need to clean my room for Dad to love me. But I love my dad, so I’m going to clean my room.”

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And if you put it in a nutshell that’s what James is saying. James is saying, “Look. Don’t give me this ‘I’m in; I don’t need to care about this.’” If you’re in, if God has loved you, then you love God by doing. That’s what he’s driving at.

And again, when you think about this parentally, it’s something we all know. It’s something we all act according to when we have families and that sort of thing. So that’s how I would explain it.

Sig: Isn’t that where an allowance comes in? *(Laughter)*

Jeff: It is. Works come because your dad comes in. And Dad says to himself, “This still looks like a pigsty. But you really think you did something. Here’s your two bucks.” *(Laughter)*

David Miller: We all have a thing that we trust. I think that people who codify their opinions instead of sending people to the word of God are like the Jews who have attacked us. And I’ve dealt with Protestants who codify their opinions instead of the word of God. They always judge the word of God sort of from the lens of their opinions. But what we have to do is that we all have to judge our opinions through the lens of the word of God.

Jeff: Yes; amen to that.

Bishop: The *Thirty-Nine Articles* point out that while God is pleased with our good works—our renovated blessings—they remain imperfect.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: Even our good works are nothing that we can boast about.

Jeff: Yes. And in my mind I always think of the little boy who goes and picks the flowers for his mom, and it looks like trash. He gives them to his dad and Dad cleans them up and says, “Give that to Mom.” That’s the way our good works are received through Christ.

Bishop: Right.

Jeff: Absolutely. Anything else? Actually that’s kind of a terrible illustration, isn’t it, Bishop? Because the little boy gives the bouquet of flowers to his dad, and he expects the dad to clean it up.

Bryan: Time out. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: No, I don’t think so. I mean, we should just give it back to the kid and let him clean it up. *(Laughter)* All right? Okay, good. So Paul’s reaction to them is in verse 2. “*For if Abraham was justified by works he has something to boast about, but not before God.*” And so the question then comes. If Abraham had something to boast about because he did something, then it does overthrow what we’ve been saying. But the question is how as Abraham justified? That’s really the question. Was it by works or was it by grace?

And we have to ask this question, and I want to ask this question. Why does it matter? And what is justification?

Why does it matter? We’re talking about language and justification and that sort of thing. And we can get ourselves to the point where we could walk out of here and say, “Why does all that stuff matter?”, right? And we have to remember the first three chapters. We have to remember that righteousness is revealed from heaven. And it’s a

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righteousness that judges unrighteousness. And the only way that anyone is righteous is if they receive the righteousness of Christ through justification. That’s why it matters.

You know, I want to tell you something. You know, we have a tendency, and this kind of surprised me a bit. And the reason I’m saying this is because Romans 1 talks about that righteous judgment of God basically leveled against all of humanity for its sinfulness—Jew and Gentile alike. But it picks out sexually oriented sin and idolatry to focus on.

And I’ve been reading, and Gary has been there as well. I’ve been reading *The City of God* by Augustine. I’ve got to say to you that it is both a joy and a pain. It’s long; it’s sometimes just tedious. But there are some things in there that are really striking.

And in our last time together one in our group mentioned a phrase in there that Augustine says. He talks about homosexuality. And he talks about the Romans. Now think about this. The Romans who we think of as full of license, he says that the Romans won’t even put homosexuality on stage as entertainment. In other words, there are homosexuals, temple prostitutes, and so on. But not even the Romans would be so bold as to characterize a homosexual on stage in their entertainment. Right, Gary? Is that what it says?

And when you read that, you have this immediate sort of reaction. Wow! The Romans wouldn’t do it. But we have sitcoms about it all the time. And we’re far beyond where the Romans were in terms of their license to indulge in what Paul would talk about as sin.

And so why does this matter? Well, why it matters is that we need to be justified before God in order to stand. And what we find ourselves in now is a righteousness revealed against us that is a judging righteousness.

So what is justification? Well, let me give you the Westminster Shorter Catechism’s definition of that question. *“What is justification? Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”*

Now I want you to think about that for a minute. There are some moving parts in this that we’re going to see in our text. And first of all I want you to see that he is talking about faith alone. We saw that the last time or the time before that in chapter 3, verses 21-26. This justification is ours by faith alone.

And then what we see is both Christ taking upon Himself our curse so that we have forgiveness in Him. But we also see the imputation of righteousness to our account. And those two things are what we receive in justification.

Now when you look at that definition you see those things in Romans chapter 4. In Romans chapter 4 what do you see? Well, what you see is a non-reckoning of sin to oneself and what? An imputation of that righteousness which is transferable, that we recognize is told to us in 3:21 ff. But we also see a forgiveness of our sins. So we see both aspects. We see the imputation of righteousness and the forgiveness of sins in 4:1-8.

So what we see is, we see in 4:1-8 a justification in the Westminsterian sense. And so that’s what we’re going to be diving into. I’m almost reticent to do it with a minute left. So having said that by way of warm-up I think I’ll just stop and ask you if you have any questions, and then we’ll wrap it up. Did you have your hand up?

Sig: This is one of Jeff’s lone students.

“Abraham and Justification”

Brave Man: So let me just clarify. The term “justification” isn’t necessarily monolithic, right? When James uses “justification” and Romans uses “justification,” the term doesn’t always mean the same thing.

Jeff: Well, I think that the term *justify*, or if you’re going to say *vindicate*, as James does, is that the works are vindicated. And over here what you have is *justify* in the sense that we’ve been talking about, where there is an imputation of righteousness, and there is a forgiveness of sin.

Bishop: I think it’s just that he’s saying that you have to look at the context of how the word is being used.

Jeff: I know he is. But I think he may be saying a little more than that. No, he’s not. Okay. Anybody else? Yes?

Sig: Ron, hold on.

Ron Baling: I think that we look at James and think that he is trying to make us perfect in all of our deeds. He’s not saying that we will cease from sin. But he’s saying that something should be happening.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ron: Something should be happening.

Jeff: So going back to what the bishop said in response, what we have is, we have the word *justified*. And we can use the word *justified* in any number of contexts, right? But when I’m thinking theologically about it, when we think about that word as it’s used in a particular way theologically it has a particular meaning.

It’s like propitiation. You know, we think of the word propitiation in a very theological and precise way, and the word expiation as well. But I remember teaching a church school at one time. And I was using the word propitiation. And there was an old farmer that was there. He sold medical supplies for animals out of the back of his truck. And he looks at me and he goes, “That word doesn’t mean what I know it to mean, not the way you’re using it.” That’s what he said to me.

And so yes, there are contexts in which words are used. But when you think about them theologically, and the way for instance that they are being used strictly in a context like this, you’re absolutely right. He’s saying that even though you’re justified there has to be something else that goes along with it. That’s what our works would indicate.

Bryan: So does this go to Hebrews 12:4? “*In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*” So is this really saying that? Yes, you were saved through faith alone through Christ alone. But out of that, fight to the point of shedding your blood. Is that it?

Jeff: Yes. Well, I think you have to contextualize that in chapter 11, where it’s the hall of faith. “They had faith; they had faith; they had faith.” And their faith was demonstrated by what they did. And some of them even shed their own blood, right? Some of them were martyred as a result of their faith. And he goes to them and says, “Now you haven’t shed your own blood yet as a result of this.”

And I think that in some ways there is actually a double entendre. He’s going back to Hebrews chapter 11; “you haven’t shed your own blood.” But I think there’s the idea that

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you are not Christ. Even if you shed your own blood you couldn't atone for your own sins. But you haven't shed your own blood, not even in the way of Hebrews 11.

So you know, can I say it like this? So pull up your panties and act like a big boy. *(Laughter)* I mean, that's what the writer to the Hebrews is really saying, right?

Bryan: Suck it up.

Jeff: Yeah, suck it up. I mean, do your duty, because your duty indicates the fact that you have faith and that you are justified.

All right. Well, let's pray. Father, thank You for this day and the time You've given, for the Lord and for the righteousness that we have in Him. Thank You, Father, that You've blessed us so. We ask now that You'll strengthen us throughout the day. Make us useful in Your hands, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. *(Applause)*