

Abraham in the New Testament

Studies to supplement the Sunday preaching on Abraham's life

Study 2 Abraham & Justification by Faith

At home: Read through Genesis 15:1-6.

What do you think v6 means?

Does it mean that when Abraham believed God's promise about a son, God then pretended Abraham was perfect?

This week's study looks at the wonderful doctrine of 'justification by faith alone'. Are you aware that, if you are trusting in Jesus Christ, the Lord looks on you as righteous, just like Jesus? Isn't that amazing?

1. Warm-up Question: One or two in the group think up a (non-religious) sentence in which you use the word 'justify' or 'justification'.

2. In the group, read out **Romans 4:1-5**.

At first glance v5 looks like a neat parallel to v4. But Paul, by the end of v5, seems to have steered away from that neat parallel. Hopefully the following questions will bring out what Paul is up to in these verses.

a) In v4 a worker receives wages credited to his bank account because he has done something. What has he done?

b) According to v4, why does the employer give him these wages?

Paul here is making the point that the work the worker does is exactly what is required in order to have the wages credited to his account. We might say, "Work deserves its wages".

c) In v5 a non-worker receives *righteousness* credited to his account because he has done something. What has he done?

Now, notice that the parallel with v4 has broken down. Here, in v5, the 'work' the non-worker does is NOT what is required in order to have righteousness credited to his account. 'Faith' and 'righteousness' have no connection to each other; one does not lead to the other; faith cannot do the work required to achieve the credit of righteousness.

d) According to v5, what is it about God that suggests he is determined to credit righteousness to a person through something completely unconnected—through faith?

3. But surely it is immoral of God to 'justify the ungodly'?—to count the ungodly as if they were godly (v5)? Surely he is just sweeping their ungodliness under the carpet and pretending it's not there?

Paul has already fully dealt with this question in **Romans 3:25-26**—read these verses out in the group.

Work carefully through these four steps:

- When Christ died as the 'sacrifice of atonement' (NIV, 3:25) he was paying the proper penalty for sins (in 3:10-20 Paul has made clear that each of us is caught 'under the power of sin' (3:9), and 'held accountable' (3:19)).
- So God was 'demonstrating his righteousness', at last, by

punishing these sins when he 'presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement' (3:25).

- This act of atonement by Christ is the proper 'work' which can result in the credit of righteousness.
- But the love and gift of God is this: when we put our faith in Christ and his work of atonement, this faith results in righteousness being credited not to Christ's account, but to our account!

All of this amounts to the fact that believers are 'justified by faith alone'. In other words, we are accepted by God as if we were righteous. It is '... *faith alone*' because, without achieving or earning anything, we trust in God's word that the death and resurrection of Jesus achieves all of this for us.

This doctrine of justification by faith alone, however, was not invented by Paul. It was discovered by Abraham himself!

4. Read out (again) **Romans 4:1-3**.

Abraham had righteousness credited to his account.

- a) Had Abraham done any good works or religious rites in order to have this righteousness credited to his account as an obligation? Use the following verses to find your answer:

- v2
- v10
- v13

- b) By what means did God credit righteousness to Abraham's account?

- v3
- v9
- v11
- v12
- v13
- v16
- v17

- v18
- v19
- v20-22

But note: Although it was faith that delivered righteousness to Abraham's account, it was delivered to his account by God only because Christ would come and make a sacrifice of atonement. Study 3 will look at 'faith' in more detail.

5. Read out **Romans 4:20 – 5:2.**

a) From 4:21, and Genesis 15:3-6, what was the promise Abraham had received from God, that he put his faith in?

b) From Romans 4:24-25, what is the promise we have received from God, that we must put our faith in?

c) From Romans 5:1-2,

- as a result of being justified by faith alone, what kind of connection with God do we now have?
- because we have been justified by faith alone, what does our future hold?

“...that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort...”

Article XI of the *Thirty Nine Articles*,
in the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer*