

## RIGHT THIS WAY "FOOTSTEPS OF FAITH" ROMANS 4:1-12

You may think that the opposite of *guilty* is *innocent*, but you would be wrong—at least as far as the law is concerned. There's a difference between *innocent* and *not guilty*, and it's this difference that makes courtroom drama so dramatic. Someone is arrested and charged with a crime. After hearing testimony and weighing evidence, a jury renders its verdict, finding the defendant either *guilty* or *not guilty*. Whether the defendant is innocent or not, namely, whether the defendant, in fact, committed a crime or not, is another matter entirely. And since we all want to see justice served, it's the possibility of wrongful convictions and wrongful acquittals that makes courtroom drama so dramatic and explains our fascination with the Innocence Project and its mission to exonerate those wrongly convicted. That being said, the biblical term "justify" is likewise a *legal* term used to refer to the divine Judge's verdict regarding those who have faith in Jesus (Ro 3:26). He doesn't declare them innocent; he acquits them and declares them righteous; he doesn't make them righteous. God can justify actual sinners, who have faith in Jesus, and remain just himself because "he presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood" (3:25).

### This Week's Core Competency

**Salvation by Grace** – I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by his grace,

*Justification is a matter of declaring a person righteous, as a judge does in acquitting an accused.*

– Millard J. Erickson

through faith in Jesus Christ.

Salvation is a gem with many facets. One of them is *justification*. This doctrine is the subject of Romans 4:1-12, where Paul argues that people are justified by faith alone, and not by works at all. With regard to the experience of Abraham concerning justification, he asks, "What does the Scripture say?" And then he replies, citing Genesis 15:5, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (v. 3). The meaning of justification is conveyed variously in English. For example: "Therefore no one will be *declared righteous* in his sight by observing the law" (3:20); "For we maintain that a person is *justified* by faith apart from the works of the law" (3:28); and "However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is *credited as righteousness*." (4:5).

On the meaning of justification, one theologian writes: "The use of the word justify in the Bible indicates that justification is a legal declaration by God. The verb justify in the New Testament (Gk. *dikaioo*) has a range of meanings, but a very common sense is 'to declare righteous' . . . This is the sense of the term in passages where the New Testament talks about us being declared righteous by God (Rom. 3:20, 26, 28; 5:1; 8:30; 10:4, 10; Gal. 2:16; 3:24). This sense is particularly evident, for example, in Romans 4:5: 'And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness' . . . The idea that justification is a legal declaration is quite evident also when justification is contrasted with condemnation. Paul says, 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?' (Rom. 8:33-34). To 'condemn'

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someone is to declare that person guilty. The opposite of condemnation is justification, which, in this context, must mean 'to declare someone not guilty.' This is also evident from the fact that God's act of justifying is given as Paul's answer to the possibility of someone bringing an accusation or 'charge' against God's people: such a declaration of guilt cannot stand in the face of God's declaration of righteousness" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 723-24). In a nutshell, "Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight" (723).

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Romans 4:1-12

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? 2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-but not before God. 3 What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

4 Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. 5 However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. 6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7 "Blessed are those  
whose transgressions are forgiven,  
whose sins are covered.

8 Blessed is the one  
whose sin the Lord will never count  
against them."

9 Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. 10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! 11 And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. 12 And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

### Cf., another translation

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh, has discovered regarding this matter? 2 For if Abraham was declared righteous by works, he has something to boast about-but not before God. 3 For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

4 Now to the one who works, his pay is not credited due to grace but due to obligation. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in the one who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited as righteousness.

6 So even David himself speaks regarding the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;

8 blessed is the one against whom the Lord will never count sin."

9 Is this blessedness then for the circumcision or also for the uncircumcision? For we say, "faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness." 10 How then was it credited to him? Was he circumcised at the time, or not? No, he was not circumcised but uncircumcised! 11 And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised, so that he would become the father of all those who believe but have never been circumcised, that they too could have righteousness credited to them. 12 And he is also the father of the circumcised, who are not only circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham possessed when he was still uncircumcised. (NET)

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Box "then" indicating *result* in v. 1.
- \* Bracket the question marks (?) in vv. 1, 3, 9, 10.
- \* Circle "justified" in v. 2 and "justifies" in v. 5.
- \* Underline "credited" in vv. 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11 and "credits" in v. 6.

- \* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 4, 5, 10, 11, 12.
- \* Circle "blessed" in vv. 7, 8.
- \* Box "so then" indicating *result* in v. 11.
- \* Box "in order that" indicating *purpose* in v. 11.

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## day 2

**EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Read Romans 3:21 and 3:31. Then explain the link between chapter 4 and chapter 3.
2. Paul refers to Abraham as "*our* forefather." To whom is "our" referring?
3. Explain why Abraham had nothing to boast about before God (cf., 3:27).
4. Put what "credited to him" means in your own words.
5. "However" indicates that Paul *contrasts* two people in verses 4 and 5. Explain the contrast.
6. Paul uses Psalm 32:2, quoted in verse 8, to explain Genesis 15:6, quoted in verse 3. Explain.
7. Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness *before* he was circumcised. So what?
8. *Who* is Paul talking about in verse 11, and *who* is he talking about in verse 12?
9. **Discussion:** Talk about how contemporary gospel proclamation sometimes undermines justification by faith *alone*.

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## day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

"In this chapter, Paul appeals to Abraham to support his insistence that righteousness can be attained only through faith. But, as in 3:27-31, Paul's purpose is not only to establish the doctrine of justification by faith alone, but also, indeed especially, to draw out the implication of this *sola fide* [faith alone]. To accomplish these purposes, Paul 'exposits' Gen. 15:6: 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 255). Romans 4 opens, "What then," which links Paul's argument from the experience of the patriarch to chapter 3 verse 21, "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify," and verse 31, "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." He argues from the experience of Abraham to show that justification by faith is found in the Old Testament. He picks Abraham, because this "forefather" (v. 1) was seen in early Jewish literature as an example of someone who was faithful and whose faithfulness was reckoned as righteousness. For example, in his reflections on "the deeds of the fathers," the author of 1 Maccabees writes: "Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?" (2:52). Besides, some first-century Jews even believed that the patriarch obeyed the law perfectly long before it was actually given! Clearly, Paul wanted to wrestle Abraham from the Jews as the example of justification by works and use him as the example of justification by faith. Paul goes on in chapter 4 to argue from the words of David to bolster his argument from the example of Abraham.

In verses 1-8 Paul proves that people are justified by faith alone. He begins in verses 1-3 by (1) stating that Abraham was justified, i.e., had righteousness credited to him (vv. 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11), by faith and by (2) substantiating his statement by quoting Genesis 15:6: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Had the patriarch been justified by works, he would have had something to boast about, but boasting is excluded by justification by faith (2:27). So, in fact, he had nothing to boast about before God. One commentator explains: "Since Paul rejects any possibility of justification by works (cf. vv.3-5) . . .

all boasting in this context, whether before God or people, must be ruled out. 'But not before God,' then, rejects the logic stated in the conditional sentence: when God's viewpoint is considered, Abraham has no right to boast at all" (261).

Paul continues in verses 4-5 by contrasting "gift" and "obligation" (v. 4). In his mind, "works" and "obligation" go together as do "faith" and "gift." And it is to the second pair that "credited" (vv. 4, 5) pertains. Since Abraham had righteousness credited to him, he must not have worked for it but must have received it by grace. As the following verse confirms, "the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness" (v. 5). On verses 4 and 5, one commentator writes: "Verses 4-5 contrast 'faith' and 'works.' 'Work' yields wages that the person working deserves or earns. 'Faith' receives a gift (v. 4; lit. grace, Gr. *charin*) that the person believing does not deserve or earn. Incredibly, God justifies those who not only fail to deserve justification, but deserve condemnation, because they are 'ungodly' (NASB) or 'wicked' (NIV; v. 5; cf. 3:24). This is how far God's grace goes (cf. Deut. 25:1)!" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 63, [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com)). And then the apostle follows up in verses 6-8 with an appeal to another eminent Old Testament character, David, whom he claims says the same thing, namely that people are justified by faith, not by works. The quotation from Psalm 32:1-2 represents the *flip side* of Genesis 15:6. Justification entails not reckoning sin (v. 8), as well as reckoning righteousness (v. 3). "This blessedness of forgiveness, of sins not reckoned, Paul affirms with full confidence, is also the blessing of righteousness reckoned by God without regard to works. David's words provide a fully equivalent description of Abraham's standing before God in Gen 15:6" (Dunn, 229).

In verses 9-12, Paul proves justification by faith *alone* is for Jews and Gentiles alike. He points out that Abraham was uncircumcised, a virtual Gentile, when he was justified (v. 10), fourteen years before he was circumcised (Ge 17:24; cf., 16:4, 16; 17:1, 24-24) and centuries before the law was given. "Circumcision, therefore, has no independent value . . . Abraham was declared righteous while still uncircumcised. His later circumcision added

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nothing materially to that transaction; it simply signified and confirmed it" (Moo, 269). He also points out that as a result, Abraham is the spiritual father of all who believe. He is the father of believing Gentiles (v. 11), and he is also the father of believing Jews (v. 12). Put differently, he

is the forefather of his physical descendants "according to the flesh" (v. 1), but he is also the spiritual father of all those who are justified by faith, whether they are believing ethnic Jews or believing Gentiles.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

### *The Message of the Passage*

*The experience of Abraham and the testimony of David, recorded in the Law and the Prophets, prove that justification is by faith alone and that this blessedness is for Jews and Gentiles alike.*

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the message of Romans 1:1-7 and your response to it.

**Frontloading** the gospel involves adding works to the front end of the gospel, e.g., demanding that people make commitments of one kind or another upfront. How does this message speak to that issue?

**Backloading** the gospel involves adding works to the back end of the gospel, e.g., demanding that people persevere in doing good works. How does this message speak to that issue?

How does this message speak to those who see justification as a joint effort between people and God?

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# notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **What then** "In 3.21 Paul has argued that his thesis was in fact announced in the Law and Prophets. There is a sense in which 4.1-12 provides the validation for that particular claim. The link between Paul's thesis and this argument is made apparent by the particle *oun*-*'then'* or *'therefore.'* Abraham becomes a linchpin in Paul's argument concerning how righteousness and a right relationship with God have come to human beings quite apart from the Law" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 115).

v. 2 **justified** I.e., "acquit" or "declare righteous" (cf., 3:20). "The verb 'justify' means not 'to make righteous' (in an ethical sense) nor simply 'to treat as righteous' (though one is really not righteous), but 'to declare righteous.' No 'legal fiction,' but a legal reality of the utmost significance, 'to be justified' means to be acquitted by God from all 'charges' that could be brought against a person because of his or her sins. This judicial verdict, for which one had to wait until the last judgment according to Jewish theology, is according to Paul rendered the moment a person believes" (Moo, 227-28).

v. 3 **credited** Cf., "counted" (ESV); "reckoned" (NRSV); "accounted" (WEB). The Gk. verb *logizomai*, which occurs 11 times in chapter 4, is an "old and common verb meaning 'to set down accounts' (literally or metaphorically). It was set down on the credit side of the ledger 'for' righteousness. What was set down? His believing God" (Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 4, *The Epistles of Paul*, 350). "The fact that it [*logizesthai*] was a technical term in commercial dealings ('reckon or put to someone's account'; see BGD, *TDNT* 4:284) obviously suggested an analogy from the business world, as also the talk of 'works'" (James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a, *Romans 1-8*, 203). "The 'reckoning' of Abraham's faith as righteousness means 'to account to him a righteousness that does not inherently belong to him.' Abraham's response to God's promise leads God to 'reckon' to him a 'status' of righteousness" (Moo, 262). "Abraham believed in Yahweh's promise of numerous progeny, and this faith was 'booked to his credit' as uprightness . . . By 'faith' is meant Abraham's acceptance of Yahweh at his word and his willingness to trust and abide by it even when he had no perceptible evidence. It involved his personal confidence and included hope in a promise that no mere human could guarantee (4:18)" (J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 373). "The exchange is between Abraham's faith and Abraham's righteousness. The former is credited or reckoned in lieu of or as the latter" (Witherington, 120-21).

v. 7 **blessed** A "blessed" person is not the recipient of good fortune; a blessed person is the recipient of God's blessings. God is the one who blesses. The quotations in verse 3 (Ge 15:6) and in verses 7 and 8 (Ps 32:1, 2) are linked by the use of a key word translated "credited" (v. 3) and "count" (v. 8).

v. 10 **before** According to Genesis 17:24-25, "Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, and his son Ishmael was thirteen," about 14 years after the LORD appeared to him in Genesis 15—or "twenty-nine years, according to the rabbis" (Moo, 268).

### Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

If I could travel back in time, there are many moments I would like to visit. One of the events I would like to drop in on would be the moment when God first called Abram in Genesis 12. What made Abram drop everything and obey so completely? Abram simply believed. His belief translated into action, but it wasn't because of his obedience that he was blessed. He was blessed because he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. When we think of credit, most of us think about the "magic card" in our wallets. Years ago, while shopping with my son, he wanted an expensive game. I told him we didn't have the money for it. He insisted I use the "magic card". In his understanding, if you gave the salesperson the card, you received the goods without really paying for them. He didn't understand that the charges were imputed to the cardholder and must be paid later. David said that when we believe, the Lord would never charge sin against us and make us pay for it. Jesus was charged for our sin and He paid the ultimate price once and for all. "Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." (Hebrews 10:14) Rest in the truth today that He has done the work and we are the blessed David spoke of long ago.

#### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 4:1-12

1. Why was Abraham declared righteous?
2. Who does David say is blessed?
3. Will the Lord ever count our sins against us once we have believed?

#### What Do You Think

1. In what ways do people try to earn their salvation?
2. Do you find yourself trying to do good to earn God's favor?

#### What R U Going To Do

Our good deeds do not save us, but once we belong to God we want to obey and please Him. Write down something you can do this week to serve God or others. Now, do it!

#### Core Comp

Salvation by Grace - I believe that I become a child of God through faith in Jesus, not because of anything I do.

#### Memory Verse

Romans 4:7 - *Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

### KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse \_\_\_\_\_, completed *Scrolls* \_\_\_\_\_, brought Bible \_\_\_\_\_, brought a friend \_\_\_\_\_.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

#### *2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

#### *6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

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**Wendy Hollabaugh** (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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