

**SONS OF ABRAHAM**  
**PART 2**

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:6-14

February 7, 2010

**REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:**

Does faith alone justify?

This issue didn't suddenly arise in the Reformation during the 16th century. It dates back to Paul's controversy with the Judaizers in Galatia in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century and even further to early in the 2nd Millennium B.C. with Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:6).

Rather than openly denying justification by faith alone, Paul's opponents in Galatia craftily proposed a deadly mixture of law and gospel, faith and works, grace and merit. Justification, then, was not by faith alone but rather by faith plus works, Christ plus circumcision, etc... By doing this, they not only called into question the means of justification (i.e., faith alone) but also the ground of justification (i.e., imputed righteousness).

In opposition to the Judazier's distorted gospel, Paul argues that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ alone (cf. 2:16). In 2:16, Paul appeals to his (and Peter's) experience as well as to Scripture (cf., Ps. 143:2) to prove that justification comes by faith alone apart from works of the law,

Similarly, in 3:1-5, he appeals to the experiences of the Galatians, which proved the truth of justification by grace through faith alone. And then, in chapters 3-4, he shifts his argument from experience (3:1-5) back to the Scriptures. In appealing to Scripture, Paul appeals to Abraham as a "test case" to strengthen his argument that justification is by faith alone apart from works of the law. So, he begins with Abraham (v. 6) and ends with Abraham (v. 14).

In vv. 6-9, Paul expresses faith alone positively. Here he reveals the path to a blessed life (i.e., justification). He takes his readers back to the very beginning of Israel's history when God made His promise to Abraham. Based on God's promise, Paul argues that faith alone not works is the sole means that leads to God's blessing (i.e., justification) and thus makes one a son of Abraham.

In vv. 10-14, he expresses this same truth negatively and reveals the path to a cursed life. He argues that the law only leads to cursing. The good news, however, is that guilty, unrighteous, cursed sinners do not have to despair because Jesus assumed this curse for them on the Cross so that blessing of Abraham (i.e., the promised Spirit/justification) might come to the Gentiles (vv. 13-14).

With this context in mind, let's begin with 3:6-9. In vv. 6-9, Paul sets forth 3 arguments, which prove that the blessing of justification comes through faith alone apart from works of the law.

The first argument Paul offers is in v. 6.

I. ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED AS AN UNCIRCUMCISED GENTILE. V. 6

By appealing to Genesis 15:6, Paul shows how Abraham was justified by faith alone apart from anything he had done. We saw how the Genesis account of Abraham's life reveals that he was hardly a "hero of faith" whose moral uprightness and obedience merited God's favor. Rather, the great father of the Jewish people was justified when he was an uncircumcised Chaldean!

Before moving to Paul's second argument, we need to come back to a very important phrase at the end of v. 6 where Paul writes, "Abraham believed God, and it was *counted to him as righteousness*," (emphasis mine).

This phrase raises several important questions that we need to ask:

**LESSON:**

A. WHAT DID PAUL UNDERSTAND TO HAVE BEEN COUNTED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS?

The answer is that Paul understood God's own righteousness to have been imputed to Abraham.

As Biblical revelation unfolds, we see that this righteousness was none other than Christ's righteousness, which was spoken of and foretold in both the law and the prophets, especially Jeremiah 23:5-6.

Jeremiah writes,

“<sup>5</sup> Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>6</sup> In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”

It bears noting that Jeremiah refers to Christ as LORD in this text. The word, LORD, is Yahweh, the proper name for God. By this designation, Jeremiah ascribes full divinity to Jesus.

This leads us to a second question:

B. HOW DOES THE LORD COME TO BE MAN'S RIGHTEOUSNESS?

The answer is in our text, namely the word *counted*. The word counted is what Bible teachers refer to as imputation.

C. WHAT IS IMPUTATION?

*Imputation* is an accounting term. It comes from the Greek word, λογίζομαι, and is translated in our English Bibles as "counted, reckoned or credited." Phil Ryken writes, "Trusting God was like opening a bank account. Immediately, God transferred righteousness into Abraham's account," (*Galatians*, p. 97).

Note carefully that the scriptures do not say that Abraham deserved or merited righteousness. Rather, through faith alone, God *counted* Abraham righteous. Still, we have seen that Abraham was hardly righteous in Himself. In and of himself, Abraham was inherently unrighteous (ungodly, Rom. 4:5).

Through the instrumental gift of faith, God "imputed" (counted) righteousness to Abraham before he did anything. God justified Abraham before he received circumcision (Gen. 17) and before he obeyed God's command to sacrifice Isaac (Gal. 22). Abraham was justified not as a "hero" but as a "zero," not as a "performer" but as a "believer," not as someone who was "godly" but rather "ungodly."

This word, *counted*, gets to the heart of the whole issue of justification. It has to do with the ground of justification as well as the means by which justification is brought about.

Paul's phrase, "counted to him as righteousness" struck at the heart of the Judaizer's false gospel. As noted at the beginning, the Judaizers falsely asserted that faith alone was not a sufficient means for justification. Instead, they mingled faith and works so that man's justification was ascribed partly to faith and partly to works.

By virtue of Abraham's acceptance of circumcision (Gen. 17) and his willingness to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22), the Judaizers maintained he merited the reward of righteousness because of his obedience and faithfulness under trial and testing. The sole ground of justification therefore wasn't imputed righteousness but rather partly Abraham's own inherent righteousness.

This is the very thing Paul opposes. He insists that the only ground of Abraham's justification was imputed righteousness rather than inherent, merited righteousness and that faith alone was the only means by which justifying righteousness is received.

J. Greshem Machen wrote, "We must trust Christ for nothing or for all; to trust Him only for part is the essence of unbelief... A man must choose as the way of salvation either the law or grace. In bidding men choose the latter way the Apostle was contending for the very heart of the Christian religion," (*Notes on Galatians*, p. 53).

D. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN WHEN IT SAYS WE ARE COUNTED RIGHTEOUS THROUGH FAITH?

Francis Turretin writes,

“...when we say that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us for justification and that we are just before God through imputed righteousness and not through any righteousness inherent in us, we mean nothing else than that the obedience of Christ rendered in our name to God the Father is so given to us by God that it is reckoned to be truly ours and that it is the sole and only righteousness on account of and by the merit of which we are absolved from the guilt of our sins and obtain a right to life; and that there is in us no righteousness or good works by which we can deserve such great benefits which can bear the severe examination of the divine court, if God willed to deal with us according to the rigor of His law; that we can oppose nothing to it except the merit and satisfaction of Christ, in which alone, terrified by the consciousness of sin, we can find a safe refuge against the divine wrath and peace for our souls,” (Francis Turretin, *Justification*, pp. 31-32).

Turretin’s definition of imputation highlights a critical and often times neglected aspect of justification. He notes that Christ not only fully satisfied the justice of God by His *death* but also by His *life*.

To be sure, by His death on the cross, Jesus paid the penalty for our sins (He bore our sins on the cross, 1 Pet. 2:24). He redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). He received the full divine wrath that our sins deserve and fully exhausted it (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 4:10). By His grace we are justified through the redeeming work of Christ (Rom. 3:24).

Christ’s suffering in our place is what Bible teachers have referred to as His passive obedience. However, it may surprise you to learn that we are not justified by the Cross alone (i.e., passive obedience).

To stand acquitted before God’s judgment, it is not enough to have the penalty of our sins paid for and be left morally neutral. The popular definition for justification, “just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned” is incomplete. To stand before God justified, we must also possess actual righteousness. This is where imputation comes in.

R.C. Sproul explains,

“Christ’s mission of redemption was not limited to the cross. To save us he had to live a life of perfect righteousness. His perfect, active obedience was necessary for his and our salvation. He earned the merit of perfect righteousness, not only for his own humanity, but for all those whom He redeems. Christ perfectly fulfilled all demands of the law, meriting by His active obedience the blessing promised in the old covenant. We are constituted as righteous by the obedience of Christ, which is imputed to us by faith,” (*Faith Alone*, p. 104).

Christ not only paid the full penalty for our sins but He also took upon Himself our responsibility to perfectly obey God's law and fulfill it completely. This is what Bible teachers refer to as Christ's active obedience (doing as opposed to suffering).

Thus, the Scriptures reveal that we are not only justified by the death of Christ but also by the life of Christ. By His passive obedience (i.e., by suffering in our place) Christ paid the penalty for us. By His active obedience (i.e., obeying what the law of God required) He merited for us the reward of eternal life. Christ not only died for us but also lived for us. He not only suffered for us but also obeyed for us. Tim Keller puts it like this: "Jesus lived the life we should have lived, and died the death we should have died!" Both of these acts make up the complete righteousness, which is to be imputed to us in justification.

A complete definition, then, of justification would be not only, "just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned," but also "just-as-if-I'd-always-obeyed!"

In short, the imputed righteousness of Christ, which consists of the obedience of His life and the suffering of His death, is the sole ground of our justification before God. And the startling truth about this is that through faith we come into such a close union with Christ that both His active and passive obedience are counted to us as if we have done them ourselves. Those who are "in Christ" are considered to have fulfilled the whole righteous requirements of the law as to obedience as well as to its punishments and penalties!

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The Judaizer's distorted gospel of "faith plus" posed a significant threat to the heart of the gospel. Paul considered the imputation of Christ's righteousness to be essential to the gospel. He was contending for the very essence of the Christian faith and life.

Paul set forth only two options. Either you are justified by imputed righteousness, which resides outside of you and is received through faith alone, or you are justified by an inherent righteousness, which resides in you by virtue of a deadly mingling of faith and works. The doctrine of imputed righteousness is the essence of what it means to be a Christian.

What difference then does it make in our daily lives?

1. **IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE BASIS FOR COMFORT AND HOPE IN OUR ONGOING STRUGGLE WITH SIN.**

In those too often moments when we are acutely aware of our impatience, anger, lack of contentment, grumbling and complaining, jealousy, envy, bitterness, greed, selfishness, gossip, laziness, pride, grudges, unforgiving spirit, half-hearted, inconsistent obedience or just flat out disobedience, imputed righteousness comforts us by reminding us that Christ was never once guilty of any of these sins. This is why we must have Christ's perfect life imputed to our account.

Michael Horton writes,

“Jesus Christ becomes our Savior not only in his atoning death but throughout his life. In this way, every day of his life was as necessary for our salvation as that dark afternoon on Golgotha... It is not only Christ's atoning death, but his saving life during the thirty-three years of his conformity to the Father's will that shelters us from God's just sentence,” (A Dying Man's Consolation: The Active & Passive Obedience of Christ, <http://www.modernreformation.org/default.php?page=articledisplay&var1=ArtRead&var2=728&var3=main>).

Christ's perfect life imputed to us in light of our ongoing failures serves as a source of comfort and hope, just as God's reiteration of His promises did for Abraham throughout critical moments in his life.

Listen to how Martin Luther applied the doctrine of imputation to battle weary believers,

“We...teach and comfort an afflicted sinner this way: ‘Brother, it is impossible for you to become so righteous in this life that your body is as clear and spotless as the sun. You still have spots and wrinkles (Eph. 5:27), and yet you are holy.’ But you say: ‘How can I be holy when I have sin and am aware of it?’ ‘That you feel and acknowledge sin- this is good. Thank God, and do not despair. It is one step toward health when a sick man admits and confesses his disease.’ ‘But how will I be liberated from sin?’ ‘Run to Christ, the Physician, who heals the contrite of heart and saves sinners. Believe in Him. If you believe, you are righteous... And the sin that still remains in you is not imputed but is forgiven for the sake of Christ, in whom you believe and who is perfectly righteous... His righteousness is yours; your sin is His,’” (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 233).

## 2. IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE BASIS FOR CONFIDENCE IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

The same Jesus, who humbled himself, suffered throughout His life and became obedient unto death on a cross, is the same Jesus who will return to judge the world in perfect righteousness.

His courtroom will be no kangaroo court. He will not put on a sham trial. There will be no miscarriage of justice. There will be no mercy and no leniency. No court of appeals. His judgment will be according to the unyielding, exacting demands of His law, which will serve as the standard by which all men are tried.

When you are called to account, you will either stand before God in your own inherent righteousness, which is imperfect and stained with sin. Or, you will stand before God in the imputed righteousness of Christ, which is perfect and undefiled and with Jeremiah will confess, “The LORD is our righteousness.”

If you are trusting in Christ alone, you can humbly and confidently confess, “since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Rom. 5:1).

“<sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us,” (Rom. 8:33-34).

“<sup>17</sup> By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment...,” (1 Jn. 4:17-18).

The Good News of imputed righteousness is that the sin, which is in us, is not counted against us. We who are condemnable will not be condemned. We who are worthy of wrath will not receive punishment because Christ’s righteousness has been reckoned to us through faith alone. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” (Rom. 8:1).

### 3. IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS CREATES HUMILITY IN BELIEVERS AND GIVES GLORY TO GOD.

Imputed righteousness stands as an ongoing reminder that in and of ourselves we are unworthy, unrighteous and deserving of the judgment of God were it not for Christ. Such an awareness of undeserved grace creates humility and crushes pride.

Martin Luther writes,

“...a Christian remains in pure humility. He really and truly feels that there is sin in him and that on this account he is worthy of wrath, the judgment of God, and eternal death. Thus he is humbled in this life. Yet at the same time he remains in a pure and holy pride, by which he turns to Christ. Through Him he strengthens himself against this feeling of divine wrath and judgment; and he believes that he is loved by the Father, not for his own sake but for the sake of Christ, the Beloved,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, p. 235).

Further, because justification is by grace through faith alone, man owes this entire blessing to God and thus has no reason for glorying in himself.

True faith is characterized by a humble, self-denying nature. Justifying faith claims no credit for itself when it receives Christ. All the glory and credit are ascribed to God and His grace alone.

In Romans 4:2, Paul says that Abraham was justified by grace through faith alone so that he might not have a reason to boast, “if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.”

In Romans 4:16, Paul says the promise God made to Abraham rested on grace so that all the glory would go to God and not Abraham.

If circumcision or his act of obedience in reference to Isaac served even as a part of Abraham's justification, he would have contributed something of his own to which a reward was due in the judgment of God (Turretin, *Justification*, p. 90). But, Paul makes it clear in both Galatians and Romans that Abraham has no reason to boast in himself before God. Therefore, works did not justify him.

In the same way, if a mixture of faith and works justified you, you would have something to boast in. But, when you are justified by faith alone, which gives nothing to God but only receives, all boasting is excluded.

Imputed righteousness then serves as both the foundation and motive of all genuine worship. It creates humility, crushes pride and turns our eyes away from ourselves and fixes them upon Christ, wherein lies our only righteousness before God.

In Romans 4:20, Paul says Abraham's faith gave glory to God. Faith alone glorifies God because like Abraham, faith trusts in God's faithfulness and power, rather than man's inherent goodness and merit, to bring about what He has promised.

Luther, however, notes that legalism doesn't glorify God but despises Him. "Faith plus" makes God out to be an angry judge who has to be placated by our works. Legalism accuses God of lying in all His promises. It denies the sufficiency of Christ and His blessings. It deposes Christ from His throne and sets up self in His place. It deprives God of His glory and divinity and attributes this to its own works (Luther's Works, vol. 26, p. 229).

Faith, on the other hand, glorifies God because it attributes to God the glory of being all-sufficient, all-powerful, all-gracious, all-loving, all-forgiving, all-truthful, all-trustworthy, all-merciful and eternally faithful to all His Promises. "He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it," (1 Thess. 5:24).

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