

Intro:

In Romans 3, Paul introduced a new doctrine of salvation:

saving righteousness can be obtained by anyone by faith alone.

In this salvation, boasting is excluded (Rm 3.27) – no one obtains the saving righteousness by any personal merit.

- No boasting because salvation depends on a new law, not one of works but of faith (Rm 3.27-28)
- No boasting because salvation makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile, those justified by faith are one new people of God (Rm 3.29-30)

How do we know this is true?

In Romans 4, Paul sets forth Abraham as the proof of his doctrine. He does so by beginning with a question:

^{KJV} **Rm 4.1** What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

In doing so he is going to take us to Gen 15.6, lead us to think it over and thus to thoroughly demonstrate that Abraham obtained saving righteousness by faith alone.

And if Abraham did it – you can too!

Now, I have entitled this message:

So Abraham Believed ... So What?

Our chapter is heavily doctrinal in its content. We worked our way carefully through this material in 15 messages – about four months of preaching.

I am concerned that as we carefully teach the doctrinal points that you may see Christianity as nothing but having the right doctrine. Paul is going to bring us to some applications concerning his doctrinal teaching, but it won't start for at least one more chapter. Even then, the real applicational part of Romans doesn't come along until chapter 12.

So today we are going to review – then apply what we have learned.

I want you to have an understanding of what Abraham's faith means for you in your life, right now.

So Abraham Believed ... So What?

We will begin with no proposition this morning – our proposition today is the application we will make from the doctrine of the chapter.

I. The key distinctions of saving faith (1-22)

“It is *faith* that is ‘reckoned’: a faith that is *apart from works, apart from circumcision, apart from the law, apart from sight* — and therefore a ‘reckoning’ that is solely a matter of *grace*.”¹

A. Apart from works (4-5)

“Here Paul writes two verses which every believer should commit to memory: for they state what no mind of fallen man ever imagines; for do not people naturally believe that the way to be saved is to ‘be good’?”²

1. The universal standard: righteousness

- a. The holiness and majesty of God are known by all (natural revelation)
- b. The requirement of righteousness is understood by all – no access to God without it

Even those who say there is no God are aware of this standard, whether they seek to fulfill it or not.

2. The almost universal delusion: self-righteousness

- a. Assumes that the works of men are righteous in themselves
- b. Assumes that the works of men are sufficient to satisfy God’s demands

3. The revealed truth: no righteousness but imputed righteousness

- a. You are unrighteous in yourself

This is an overwhelming truth to confess: I stand before God and nothing I have ever done in myself counts diddly* with him. (*heap big theological term)

- b. You can have ‘without-law’ righteousness credited to your account: believe God’s revelation concerning yourself and His Son

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 287

² William R. Newell, *Romans: verse by verse*, p. 132.

B. Apart from ritual (10)

1. All religions make much of ritual – they think their ritual will please their gods
2. The Jews made much of ritual – their rituals were ordained by God for a different dispensation
 - a. They turned their ritual into the end, not the image, of true religion
 - b. They turned their ritual into a kind of idolatry
3. We make much of certain rituals
 - a. As Baptists, we are big on Baptism
 - 1) Mode
 - 2) Candidates
 - 3) Meaning
 - b. We have made a ritual of altar calls

Fifth grade boys Sunday school at Southside: Question, How do you get saved? Answer, Go forward after a service and pray?

- Question: What if the guy has a heart condition and in the stress of the moment has a heart attack and dies before he can 'pray the prayer' – is he saved?
- What if he has the heart attack walking up the aisle – is he saved?
- What if he decides to respond, but before he can make a move has the heart attack – is he saved?

4. Salvation by faith is apart from ritual: it is a work of faith in the heart that is credited for righteousness

C. Apart from law (13)

1. Law does not make righteous, it condemns
 - a. Mosaic law condemns: guilty in one point, guilty in all
 - b. Human law condemns: who hasn't broken human law?

We just had a young fellow vandalize our property. The police are taking this seriously. They know who did it and hopefully our system of justice will deal with him appropriately.

But before the law, is there any of us who can say they have never broken any part of it? Even inadvertently... Our human law condemns us as unrighteous.

2. There is a righteousness that comes from faith – the kind Abraham had

D. Apart from material evidence (19-20)

1. Abraham could not see any evidence for the promise he believed
2. ‘Without-law’ righteousness cannot be seen
 - a. I can’t see heaven
 - b. I can’t see Christ
 - c. I can’t see imputed righteousness
3. Imputed righteousness is received by faith – apart from material evidence

All of these things were true of Abraham:

- He had faith apart from works
- He had faith apart from ritual
- He had faith apart from law
- He had faith apart from material evidence

God credited him with righteousness for that faith

II. The open possibility of saving faith (23-25)

- A. Not for his sake only
- B. But for ours also

This message of saving faith is possible for *anyone* who believes in God who delivered over his Son for our sins and raised Him for our justification.

Proposition: The saving righteousness obtained spiritually by faith alone means a changed life of persistent spiritual living.

III. The ongoing applications of saving faith

- A. Humility – this is what Abraham has found: nothing in which to boast (Rm 4.2)
1. When God confronted Adam and Eve in the Garden with their sin, where was boasting?
 2. When God confronted David through Nathan the prophet, where was boasting?
 3. When God confronted Nebuchadnezzar the king through Daniel the prophet, where was boasting? I'll show you!
 - a. Daniel warns the king to repent of his pride (Dan 4.27)
 - b. Twelve months later, what did the king say? (Dan 4.28)
 - c. Nebuchadnezzar humbled for 'seven times' (Dan 4.29-33)
 - d. Now where was boasting? (Dan 4.34-37)

Humility is the first response to saving righteousness obtained by faith: no credit to me, all credit to God.

- Are our hearts not deceitful, though, even in this?
- How easily Christians fall into pride for many things, including their humility!
- How many Christian relationships and even churches are torn apart because of pride and a lack of humility?

How about you? Would your friends and family say, 'There goes a humble Christian'?

- B. Obedience (Gen 12.4)
1. Everything Abraham did was in response to promise
 - a. Promise first, obedience second
 - b. Obedience is a faith response to promise

2. Should Christians, people saved by faith in Christ, seek to obey God's word?
 - a. By explicit conformity
 - b. By implicit principle
3. Which is first in Christian obedience: faith or works?

What can we say about professing Christians who seem to make no effort to obey even the clearest commands of the Scripture?

- [Who are you to say anything, you legalist!]
- Really? Is that the attitude of saving righteousness by faith?

C. Self-denial (Gen 13.8, 14.22)

- Self-denial in the matter of Lot
- Self-denial in the matter of the spoils of battle

1. Saving righteousness by faith prompts men to deny themselves for Christ's sake
 - a. Deny rights
 - b. Deny wants
 - c. Deny needs

The illustrations of Christians like this throughout history are endless

- Start with the apostles who risked all to found the church
- Read missionary biography after missionary biography and you will see example after example

2. Our culture thinks self-denial is generally a strange thing; modern Christians are following suit

Is there anything approved by our culture that Christians don't indulge in?

Are these indulgences works of the flesh or fruit of the Spirit?

D. Worship (Gen 22.1-2, Heb 11.17-19)

1. Abraham's life was full of worship, but the depth of his worship is seen in this dramatic story of the offering of Isaac
2. Does your Christian profession of saving righteousness by faith motivate your heart to worship?
3. Would we know that by your record of church attendance?

We sing a hymn which has this chorus:

Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?
Your heart does the Spirit control?
You can only be blest and have peace and sweet rest
As you yield Him your body and soul.

Conclusion:

Proposition: The saving righteousness obtained spiritually by faith alone means a changed life of persistent spiritual living.

That is not to say *perfect* spiritual living, but *persistent* and perhaps *perfecting* spiritual living.

The new life in Christ is a process, a process we call sanctification (making holy). Your faith in Christ should produce an increasing holiness of life in your every deed and relationship.