

1. **Introduction:** In chapter 1 Paul described the frightening reality of what runaway sin can do to people who live apart from Christ. Even a casual look at today's world confirms that Paul's description is still valid. The one thing that can undo the sinful depravity of fallen humanity is salvation. Salvation is God's remedy for sinful people. In this lesson, we continue with Paul's discussion of salvation and its implications beginning with verses 3:29-31.

- These verses answer two questions concerning the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. (1.) Does this doctrine express the only way to salvation? (2.) Is this doctrine contrary to the Law of God

2. **Romans 3:29-30:** ***“Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.”***

- There is only one way to obtain salvation and that is by faith “in Christ.
- Only Jesus, the God-Man, could make salvation possible.
- When we stood condemned by the Law, Jesus took our place and suffered the consequences due to our sins including experiencing death and the Father's wrath.
- If a person **will** come to God through faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, God will receive that person and never cast them out.
- Everyone **may** come at any time just as they are. The question is never “may you come” but always “will you come?”
- All who “will to come” are received into God's forever family. Everyone “may come.” Only some “will come.”

3. **Romans 3:31:** ***“Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.”***

- How does “justification by grace through faith in Christ” uphold the Law?
- The penalty for sins is death. Perfect obedience to God's Law is necessary for righteousness. Perfect obedience is not possible for fallen people. Therefore, everyone stands before God condemned by their sins.
- How can fallen sinners satisfy the Law, acquire righteousness, and be freed from the death penalty due to their sins?
- Only God could conceive the solution-path He followed.

- His solution was for the second person of the Trinity to become incarnate on earth as Jesus, the God-Man, fully human and fully God.
- Jesus would serve as the “Lawful substitute” for all who would believe in Him.
- He would live a perfect life under the Law, thus earning righteousness which, as the “lawful substitute,” He could impute to those who believe in Him.
- Taking their sins upon Himself, He, as their lawful substitute, would pay the penalty due by dying on their behalf.
- Justification (or the Father declaring a believer to be legally righteous) is grounded on the achievements of Jesus’ substitutionary life and death.
- Justification meets God’s requirement of justice under the Law since it is based on Jesus’ earning righteousness and paying the penalty due to sins.
- Justice is vindicated, the Law is satisfied, and sinners are saved.
- Justification declares believing sinners legally righteous but does not make them experientially righteous.
- Since Jesus paid the death penalty for believers’ sins, being made legally righteous by the Father frees them from God’s wrath and brings them into union with Christ.
- “In Christ” they are enabled to become experientially righteous in thought, word, and deed. Becoming experientially righteous requires the transformation process of sanctification carried out through the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.
- Sanctification proceeds at different rates for each person, but each new believer gradually becomes experientially righteous.

4. Does Salvation by Grace Make the Law Unnecessary: Some people believe “salvation by grace through faith apart from the Law” makes God’s Law unnecessary.

- Paul adamantly says NO!
- In God’s provision of justification by grace through faith in Christ and His work, the validity of the Law is confirmed because every nuance of the Law is satisfied. Jesus met every demand of the Law. Consider three points.
- **The first point is** that justification by grace through faith confirms the law by demonstrating the Law is so high and holy, sinners cannot fulfill it.
- Martin Luther tried with all his being to be obedient to the Law and fell into despair as he realized it was impossible for him to do so. Then he discovered Paul’s announcement in Romans of justification apart from the Law and his life changed.
- Every person, who has seriously attempted to fully obey the Law, can only agree with Luther that human ability is not able to perfectly obey the Law.

- **The second point** is the Law requires the death penalty for sin.
- Jesus, as our Lawful substitute, in obedience to the Law, took upon Himself our sins and willingly died to satisfy the penalty for those sins.
- God is serious about the importance of obedience to the Law.
- **The third point** is justification is based on true righteousness earned by Jesus, a righteousness that precisely fulfills the Law.
- God imputes Jesus' earned righteousness to believers, a righteousness no person could possess by their own effort, a righteousness all of grace, a righteousness no one deserves.
- Salvation by grace through faith upholds the Law's requirements by imputing Jesus' earned righteousness together with His substitutionary payment of the death penalty due for sins, not by any lesser means.
- The steps of God's plan of salvation are so surprising that a full understanding seems impossible.
- Only God could conceive salvation that could only be made possible by a God-Man.
- Paul will next show that Abraham was saved by grace through faith, not by his works. If Abraham could not be saved by works, who can? We know the answer is no one.

5. **Romans 4:1-5**: *“What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified 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 counted to him as righteousness.” ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”*

- Having explained God's way of “salvation through grace by faith” in 3:21-31, Paul provides Abraham and David as two examples from Scripture to prove the validity of his explanation.
- Twice (Romans 1:2 and 3:21) Paul pointed out that salvation, apart from the Law, through the gift of God's righteousness was announced beforehand.
- Now he will show not only that salvation by grace was previously announced, but that it is the only way anyone was ever saved or ever would be saved.
- Paul begins with Abraham, the acknowledged father of the Jewish people. With the exception of Jesus himself, Abraham is the most important person in the Bible.

- The Bible mentions many great people such as Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel and many others. Any of these, if they asked, would without doubt admit Abraham to be their father in the faith.
- God promised Abraham (Genesis 17:5) he would become the father of many nations. That promise was fulfilled both physically and spiritually.
- Physically, Abraham became the father of the Jewish people through Isaac and the Arab people through Ishmael.
- Spiritually, Abraham became the father of all true believers, both Jews and Gentiles.
- He is our father in the faith. From Romans 3:11-12 we know ***“None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”***
- Like all people, Abraham had no natural righteousness in him. He could not be saved by works of goodness. So how was he saved?
- Once, God took Abraham out under the night sky and promised him offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven. At that time Abraham was 85 years old and had no children. What God said seemed impossible.
- Yet, Abraham believed God! (Genesis 15:6) ***“And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”***
- “Counted as righteousness” means Abraham is justified by his faith. That is the first time justification by faith is set forth in the Bible.
- To what does “counted it to him” refer? “Count” is an accounting term. Faith is not a substitute for righteousness, so it can’t be counted as righteousness. To be counted as righteousness, it must be righteousness or the accounting books will be in error.
- What transaction enabled righteousness to be counted to Abraham’s account?
- Actually there was a double transaction – something removed and something added. A great exchange to Abraham’s benefit.
- Christ’s righteousness was credited to Abraham’s account. Abraham’s sins were credited to Christ’s account. Abraham and everyone else who has been or will be saved were all saved through grace by faith based on the salvation work of Christ.
- Though this is the first mention of God counting Abram’s belief as righteousness, Abram believed God so thoroughly he willingly moved his people and possessions from Ur to Haran, then from Haran to a land to which God would lead him.
- Abraham continued all his life to believe God. Most of the time he acted on those beliefs. Abraham’s faith kept him generally pointed in the direction God wanted him

to go – but occasionally God allowed Abraham to follow his own instincts without specific guidance. Inevitably that got Abraham into trouble.

- God wants of all of us to believe Him – to listen and understand what He says and to put His words into action.
- Genuine faith in God “trusts and obeys.” Trust that God has our best interests at heart. Obey Him, He knows what He is doing and will lead us into His open arms.

6. **Method of Salvation:** There is only one way people are saved, and that has always been the case. People are saved by grace through faith which leads to imputation of Christ’s righteousness to sinners’ accounts, the transfer of sinners’ sins to Christ’s account, and Christ’s payment of the penalty due.

- Adam and Eve’s knew about salvation in a limited way. From the Garden of Eden to Apostolic times, God steadily revealed more, but incomplete, details of His plan of salvation.
- Paul spent most of 3 chapters explaining the need for salvation and God’s remedy. For verification, he uses just one verse about Abraham from Scripture followed by one verse on the testimony of David. Powerful!

7. **Abraham Believed:** Abraham’s name was originally Abram (exalted father) but was changed by God to Abraham (father of a multitude) when Abram was 99 years old.

- Abram listened to God, believed Him, and did what God asked him to do.
- At God’s instruction, Abram moved all his people and possessions from Ur to Haran and from Haran to Canaan.
- When he left Haran, Abram was told simply to go to a land God would show him.
- That required deep trust. God promised if Abram obeyed Him then He would bless him and make of him a great nation.
- Abram did what God asked. He was 75 years old when he left Haran. When he arrived in Canaan, God made a covenant with Abram promising him a son, a multitude of descendants, and to be his shield and very great reward.
- After living in Canaan 10 years, Abram and Sarah still had no children.
- In an attempt to gain an heir, Sarah gave her handmaiden, Hagar, to Abram to see if she would conceive. She did and, when Abram was 86 years old, Hagar bore Ishmael.
- When Abraham was 99 years old, Sarah was still childless. In a vision God declared a covenant with Abram, promising to make him the father of a multitude of nations, and changing his name to Abraham.

- Fourteen years after God declared him righteous, as a sign of the covenant, Abraham and all males in his entourage were circumcised as were his future male descendants.
- God promised, that a year later, Sarah would have a son of their own flesh to be their heir. When Abraham was 100 years old, Isaac was born.
- From the very first mention of Abram in Scripture, we find he listened to God, believed God, and did what God required.
- Taking Hagar, which led to the birth of Ishmael, did not come from God.
- It was an attempt to create a human fix to the problem of having no heir.
- A few other times Abraham fell into similar traps deviating from God's leading (generally getting into trouble when he did).
- But mostly Abraham believed God and properly acted on God's instructions.
- At the point in time of Genesis 15:6 (quoted by Paul in Romans 4:3), Abraham believed something so great in significance that it led God to count that specific belief to Abraham as righteousness.
- Abraham's belief (faith) was the vital channel through which God justified Abraham. His justification was based on the content of his belief not merely the act of belief.

8. **What did Abraham believe that was so important:** Consider God's promise to Abram in Genesis 12:2-3, *"Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

- If Abraham does as God asks, God promises in five "I will" statements to show him a land, make him into a great nation, bless him and make his name great, bless those who bless him, curse those who dishonor him, and in him bless all families of earth.
- This event is described in Hebrews with focus on Abraham's willingness to become a pilgrim and journey to an unknown destination chosen by God. Hebrews 11:8, *"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."*
At the beginning of Abraham's faith pilgrimage, the initiative is entirely by God.
- Though Abraham had been a worshipper of false gods, God graciously called him.

- Abraham does nothing to merit God’s appearance to him. Abraham’s response is to do what God asks. He asks no questions. Clearly, this is a case of what we call “election” – God’s initiative all the way – just as in our own salvation.
- Abraham’s role is to trust and obey. We will look more deeply into the role of Abraham’s faith later in this chapter.
- God’s promise to Abraham is powerful and far-reaching. It is a promise from One who does not lie, One who is capable of doing even that which seems impossible.
- God can reach into a pagan society and call out a man to become the founder of a special people from whom will come the Savior for the nations.
- At the time of Paul, most Jews believed Abraham was justified by works and circumcision. That in spite of the fact that, as seen in Genesis, Abraham was justified 14 years before circumcision was instituted and 400 years before the Law was given.
- Abraham’s justification, as cited in Genesis 15:6, is quoted 3 times in the NT (Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, James 2:23).

9. **Salvation and Abraham:** In the following verses from Galatians 3, Paul says Abraham knew of Christ, looked forward to His coming, and trusted Him as Savior. He makes 4 points related to Abraham’s justification in Christ

- **Galatians 3:5-6:** *“Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—⁶ just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness?”*
- **Galatians 3:8-9:** *“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”*
- **Galatians 3:13-14:** *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”*
- **Galatians 3:16:** *“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.”*

- **The first point** is in 3:5-6. Paul says the Spirit works the miracle of justification through “hearing with faith.” The spiritually dead cannot hear with faith. Hearing with faith is made possible by regeneration.
 - **The second point** in 3:8 is Abraham believed God in spiritual matters, and God “beforehand” revealed the gospel to him saying, *“in you shall all the nations be blessed”* (Genesis 12:3).
 - Abraham’s faith was always directed at spiritual things (not merely at obtaining a land of his own). He believed the blessing of salvation would come to him.
 - God’s promise to bless all nations through Abraham benefits all who believe.
 - **The third point** in 3:13-14 is that Abraham’s faith anticipated redemption – *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law ... so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.”*
 - The blessing given Abraham extends thorough him to all nations.
 - Redemption is a commercial term which is illustrated by the act of “redeeming” an item that has been pawned.
 - It was primarily used in ancient times with regard to redemption of a slave by paying the redemption price.
 - Jesus redeemed us from slavery to sin. The redemption price was His life.
 - **The fourth point** in 3:16 is on how nations will be blessed through Abraham.
 - Abraham believed God that a future descendant of his would come as savior-redeemer. Based on Abraham’ belief in the coming savior-redeemer, Jesus Christ, God declared Abraham to be righteous (justified).
 - Abraham’s faith in the coming Jesus was the channel through which God declared him justified before God based on Jesus’ future work of salvation.
 - It is Christ’s righteousness that is counted to Abraham. In the same transaction Abraham’s sins are credited to Christ.
 - Christ bore Abraham’s sins on the cross. In Christ Abraham’s sins were judged, punished, and received God’s wrath.
 - Abraham was saved the same way as everyone who has ever been saved or ever will be saved. Jesus saves, and He alone.
- 10. What is Next:** Romans 4:6-8. David’s testimony.