

"By Faith"
Romans 4
Dr. Jerry Nelson

Many Christians have, at best, a kind of bargain with God. They assume God won't punish them too severely for sin and he will take them to heaven when they die **as long as** they don't do anything too sinful and they do a reasonably good job of living like a Christian. At root most people are convinced that their relationship with God is at least, in part, dependent on what they do or don't do. But in Romans 3:28 we read, "For we maintain that a man is **justified by faith** apart from observing the law." Paul will expand on that principle in chapter 4:1-21. He will cite that principle again and then show both how our **behavior does NOT result** in a right relationship with God and **how faith does**. And then in verse 22 he will reiterate the principle once more and in verses 23-25 he applies it to us.

In the matter of justification by faith not works (3:28) Paul in 4:3 cites the Scripture. "Abraham believed God and it (Abraham's faith) was credited to him for righteousness." Others were saying it was "Abraham's faithfulness (obedience to the law) that earned him righteousness. But Paul is declaring something that most human beings find hard to believe - **to the person who simply trusts God to justify him** (to forgive him and declare him righteous) to that person God **gives** the gift of righteousness - a right standing with God.

In verses 6-8 Paul reminds us that David is an example of a man who had a right relationship with God not based on what he has done but solely on grace through faith. Even some believers are still convinced they must do something to find God's favor by making up for their sins, or punishing themselves for a while, or promising to do better. But on what basis are we forgiven and credited with Christ's righteousness? "However, to the man who does not work but **trusts** God who justifies the wicked, **his faith is credited as righteousness.**" In verses 9-12 we see that it is by faith not by religious affiliation (Jewish circumcision) that Christ's righteousness is credit to us.

Now in verse 13-17 Paul tells us not even law-keeping will earn righteousness. V13 "It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise." Remember once again the point is that a right relationship with God can only be gained **and kept** by faith not works. That second part is where many Christians get it wrong. Many assume they **become** a Christian by grace through faith alone but that they **remain** a Christian by what they do. Soon after they become a Christian they start trying to keep the law of God **in order to** stay in God's favor.

Then in verses 17-22 Paul returns to Abraham as the quintessential example of righteousness by faith not works or law keeping. The kind of faith Paul is describing is not faith in faith but faith **in something**. Real faith is trust in **someone** as in verses 23-25, faith in the crucified and risen Jesus. You might say, "It just can't be that simple." Do you mean all I have to do is believe Jesus and he declares me forgiven and also righteous in God's sight? Yes! But how can I know he will do what he says. That's faith. If you abandon all your ways of saving yourself and trust him to do so, he will. It is truly that simple. That's the good news. What we can't possibly do, God does as we simply trust him.