

# Romans

## Chapter 4

### I. A Model of Justification by Faith - 4:1-25

Having laid the foundation of justification by faith in Romans 3:20-31, Paul turns his attention to the Old Testament to prove that justification by faith was always God's design. To lend credibility to his argument, Paul must not choose just anyone, he must choose someone who is honored by all Jews. His choice is Abraham.

#### A. The Issue Identified - Romans 4:1-8

**4:1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? 4:2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. 4:4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. 4:5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. 4:6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, 4:7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. 4:8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.**

These eight verses introduce us to Paul's argument showing that justification by faith was universally applied by God in the Old Testament. Verse 1 is the transition verse from the thoughts of verse 31 of chapter 3. Remember that Paul's closing argument in Romans 3 is that justification by faith does not invalidate the law, it establishes the law. To prove this, Paul turns his attention to a real-life example, Abraham.

#### Romans 4:1

The reason Paul chose Abraham is that it was universally accepted by the Jews of Paul's day that Abraham was justified by works. They argued that of all the men on earth, Abraham was the most righteous. Because of this, God chose Abraham. Note the order, Abraham was righteous, then God chose Abraham. In fact, some of the rabbis of Paul's day taught that Abraham had never sinned! How one can read the Genesis account of Abraham's life and come to that conclusion is hard to understand. If Paul can show that Abraham was justified by faith, he has proven his point and struck a severe blow against the self-righteous attitudes of the rabbis of his day.

Some representative quotes from apocryphal literature will show just how Abraham was viewed by the rabbis of Paul's day.

**Ecclesiasticus 44:19-21**

Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations, and no one has been found like him in glory; he kept the law of the Most High, and was taken into covenant with him; he established the covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested he was found faithful. Therefore the Lord assured him by an oath that the nations would be blessed through his posterity; that he would multiply him like the dust of the earth, and exalt his posterity like the stars, and cause them to inherit from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

**The Prayer of Manasseh 1:8**

Therefore thou, O Lord, God of the righteous, hast not appointed repentance for the righteous, for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who did not sin against thee, but thou hast appointed repentance for me, who am a sinner.

**Book of the Jubilees 23:10**

Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and wellpleasing in righteousness all the days of his life.

Paul's selection of Abraham was no accident. It was the best example he could possibly have chosen in order to prove that justification was by faith apart from doing the law.

**Romans 4:2**

Note Paul's argument. If Abraham was justified by his works, he has every reason to boast before God. When we compare this thought with Romans 3:29 we note that justification by works and justification by faith do not mix at all. One produces boasting, the other does not. In fact, we found that one of the reasons God has designed salvation to come by faith is that it would forever exclude boasting.

**Romans 4:3**

Paul supports his argument that Abraham was justified by faith by quoting Genesis 15:6 in verse 3. Note the Scriptural order, Abraham believed God, then he was justified. The word "counted" is interesting. It comes from the Greek word *logizomai* which is used to refer to the crediting of payment to one's account. In other words, when Abraham believed God, God credited His righteousness to Abraham. This is exactly what happens in salvation. When we accept Christ's payment for our sin, God credits the righteousness of Christ to our account. This not only wipes out the past debt of sin, but leaves a credit balance which actually makes us as righteous as Christ is Himself.

**Romans 4:4-5**

Paul now takes the thoughts of verses 2 and 3 and generalizes them to everyone. Verse 4 contains the works principle. If we work, the reward, that is salvation, is not according to grace but according to debt. In other words, God is not gracious in granting salvation to the one who earns it, He is

obligated. Verse 5 repeats the argument in verse 3, the one who does not work for justification, but believes on Him that can justify the ungodly, his faith is credited to his account for righteousness.

### **Romans 4:6-8**

To add further credibility to his argument, Paul quotes David from Psalms 32. The meaning of these three verses in Romans becomes more clear when we study the context of Psalms 32.

**32:1 A Psalm of David, Maschil. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 32:2 Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. 32:3 When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. 32:4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. 32:5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.**

David is describing the condition of a man when he is right with God and when he is not, in fact, David is contemplating sin in his life and the consequences of that sin. We know from 2 Samuel 11-12 what the particular sin was that David had in mind, his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband. Verses 1 and 2 describe the general blessedness of David when he had no hidden sins. In verse 3 and 4, however, when he kept silent he was troubled in body and in mind. Verse 5 shows the remedy, confession, which restores the condition of blessedness.

Paul uses this passage to make the point that when we come to God by confessing our inability to keep his law, we have our sins covered and our iniquities forgiven. If, however, we insist on our works, we do not have our sins covered. It is interesting to note that in the New Testament we never find any Pharisee admitting sin. On the contrary, they admitted their supposed righteousness every chance they got. Only the person who comes to God by realizing his need of forgiveness will ever receive it. Proverbs 28:15 says that **"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."**

### **B. Abraham Justified Apart from Circumcision - Romans 4:9-12**

**4:9 Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. 4:10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: 4:12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.**

These four verses are essential to an understanding of Paul's argument regarding Abraham. One of the cornerstones of the Jewish concept of salvation was the rite of

circumcision. In fact, we already saw this at the end of chapter 2 where Paul shows that the mere act of circumcision does nothing to guarantee salvation. What Paul now shows is that the rite of circumcision, when applied to the life of Abraham, occurred after justification and not before.

<u>Abraham's Age</u>	<u>Passage</u>	<u>Event</u>
75	Genesis 12	Called by God from Haran
86	Genesis 15:6	Abraham is justified
99	Genesis 17	Abraham Circumcised
100	Genesis 21	Isaac is born

In examining the above chart, we find that Abraham was seventy-five when God called him from the Haran. At that time, God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. Note that it was twenty-four years later that Abraham had his son! Also note the fact that Abraham was declared righteous over thirteen years before he was circumcised.

#### Romans 4:9-10

Paul's point in verse 9 now becomes clear. If God reckoned righteousness to Abraham only after circumcision, then we have to do something to merit God's favor. However, since Abraham was not circumcised until after God's declaration of his righteousness, circumcision has nothing to do with justification. Verse 10 continues Paul's argument by stating that Abraham's righteousness was reckoned, (Greek *logizomai*), when he was in uncircumcision, not circumcision.

#### Romans 4:11-12

Verse 11 is a commentary on the entire meaning of circumcision. In fact, it is an explanation of Genesis 17:11:

**And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.**

Paul is saying that the entire reason God gave the rite of circumcision was for the express purpose of reminding Abraham and his descendants of the covenant He made with Abraham. Note Paul's words, "**he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had being yet uncircumcised.**" The word translated "sign" is the Greek word *sumion* which can be understood as a mark, token, or pledge. The word translated "seal" is *sphragida* which means signet, seal, official mark. Circumcision is only an external sign of an internal condition, righteousness. The problem is that the Jews of Paul's day had elevated the rite of circumcision to a requirement of salvation, something God never intended. In fact the following rabbinical quotes show us how circumcision was viewed:

"Circumcision saves from hell" *Jalkut Rubem* (num. 1)

"God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised should be sent to hell" Midrash Millim (fol. 7, col. 2)

"Abraham sits before the gate of hell, and does not allow that any circumcised Israelite should enter there" *Akedah Jizehak* (fol. 54, col. 2)

Since Paul has shown that circumcision is merely a sign, he can show that Abraham is a model of faith, not works. Verse 11b states "**and the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised.**" Paul uses this same concept in Galatians 3:6-9 where he writes that all who are of faith are children of Abraham.

**3:6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. 3:7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. 3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. 3:9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.**

This was devastating to the average Jew who took extreme pride in their heritage. Paul shows that Abraham is the father of a people who are part of the covenant by faith not descent. It is no surprise that the religiously pious Jew would choke on this and want to kill Paul. To them, this concept was utter blasphemy. To consider the ungodly Gentiles as partakers of the covenant of God was unthinkable. This was Jonah's problem. He wasn't afraid of preaching to the Ninevites, he just did not want God to forgive them. In fact, we find his attitude in Jonah 4:1-2 where he basically tells God that he is upset because God forgave the Ninevites and did not destroy them. The real problem was that he did not want any Gentile participating in the blessings of God.

#### C. Abraham Justified Apart from the Law - Romans 4:13-17

**4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. 4:14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: 4:15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, 4:17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.**

Having shown that Abraham was justified apart from circumcision, Paul needs to continue by showing that Abraham was justified apart from the law. Paul must do this because the Jews of Paul's day had not only elevated the rite of circumcision to a requirement of salvation, they had also elevated the law and their traditions in the same way. In fact, it was the law that proved to be the most difficult obstacle to the salvation of the average Jew since salvation was, in their minds, accomplished by the law.

**Romans 4:13-15**

Paul begins his argument in verse 13 by stating that God's promise to Abraham was not given to Abraham through his observance of the law, but through his faith. Probably the best commentary on verses 13, 14, and 15 is Galatians 3:17 through 19:

**3:17 And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. 3:18 For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. 3:19 Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.**

Note the following points regarding these verses in comparison with Romans 4:12-15:

- 1) The law was given four hundred and thirty years after Abraham received the promise of God. How can righteousness be by the law if righteousness was extended to Abraham before he had any knowledge of the law?
- 2) The inheritance, that is, the promise of salvation, cannot be by law and by promise. This thought is stated in Romans 4:14 and Galatians 3:18. Why is this? The reason is that salvation is a gift and a gift can not be earned. Even if it could be paid for, the price is so high that no human could ever hope to pay for it. If salvation is by law, then it is not by grace. If it is by grace, then it is not by law.
- 3) God gave the promise of blessing to Abraham. Note carefully that the promise God gave to Abraham was not in any way dependent on any action of Abraham. In Genesis 15:8-21 we find the account of God confirming the promise to Abraham by following the customs of Abraham's day. There is only one slight difference: only God passed between the animals thus signifying that he was swearing by himself that Abraham would receive the promise. God wanted Abraham to fully understand that the covenant of blessing was not in any way dependent on Abraham.
- 4) The purpose of the law as defined by Paul in Romans 4:15 and Galatians 3:19 was to expose sin. Without the divine standard in which to measure his actions, man would have no concept of exactly what defined sin. This single purpose is probably the most important function of the law. It exposed sin and forced man to realize that it is impossible for him to attain perfection on his own.

**Romans 4:16-17**

Verses 16 and 17 sum up Paul's argument regarding the law's inability to save. In verse 16 he states "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace." The

meaning of this should be clear. If salvation is by the law, then it is not by grace. However, Paul has before proved that salvation is by grace. Since it is by grace, and Paul has shown that grace and law do not mix, it should be clear to all that salvation cannot be by law. This idea may be summed up by the following syllogism:

- Fact: Salvation is by grace through faith - Romans 3:21-26
- Fact: Grace and law do not mix any more than a free gift can be purchased
- Result: Salvation cannot be by the law

Paul further drives home his point in verse 16 by writing "**to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham.**" The meaning of this statement is that through faith, the promise of God is given not only to the Jew, (the seed according to the law), but also to the Gentiles (the seed according to faith). Paul is not saying that the promise can be obtained by law and by faith since this would run counter to every point he has been trying to make in the preceding verses. In other words, Paul's reference to seed is not physical seed, but spiritual seed. Compare this with Galatians 3:29 where Paul writes "**And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.**"

Just to make sure that the reader understands this concept, Paul shows that God's original intent was to bless all nations through Abraham, not just the Jews. Verse 17 refers back to Genesis 22:17-18 which reads:

**That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.**

Paul shows that the Jews had misunderstood God's promise as referring to them as a nation when in fact God was referring to a spiritual seed as well as a physical seed. He reiterates this concept in Galatians 3:8 where he writes "**And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.**" Paul's point is clear, God's original intent was that all nations would be blessed through the gospel, that is, the good news of salvation by faith not works.

Note in verse 17 how this blessing came about, "**before him whom he believed, even God.**" Abraham received the promise of God by believing God, not by any works. This is critical to an understanding of this passage as well as the Abrahamic covenant. All nations were blessed through Abraham because Abraham believed God! Paul then states that Abraham's belief was exercised specifically in believing God's promise regarding an heir. The reference to "**who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were**" relates to Abraham's physical inability to produce offspring. Isaac's birth was a miracle performed by God by giving Abraham and Sarah the ability to have a child well past their childbearing years.

Verse 19 in the next section supports this interpretation by saying the Abraham considered his body dead, dead in the sense of his ability to produce an offspring. By his simple act of believing God, Abraham became the father of all those who by faith put their trust in the same God.

**D. Abraham Justified by Grace - Romans 4:18-22**

**4:18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. 4:19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: 4:20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. 4:22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.**

Having shown that Abraham was not justified by circumcision or by the law, Paul must now show how Abraham was justified. Since the last part of chapter 3 as well as the preceding part of chapter 4 all prove salvation can not be by law and promise, it should be clear to the reader of Romans that obviously salvation is by promise. However, the question is "Exactly what do I believe?."

The answer to this question is simple, all that God has revealed. Many people are confused about how the Old Testament saints were saved. The answer is that they were saved by faith just like we are today. The only difference is that we have the full revelation of God, they only had a part. This is important to understand since it is obvious that the pre-crucifixion believers had no concept of Christ's substitutionary death and resurrection. However, God had revealed a part of his truth and it is this part that they were required to believe.

The reason we need to understand this is that Abraham did not have full knowledge regarding the coming Christ, his death on the cross, his substitutionary payment for sin, his complete fulfillment of the law (which Abraham did not have since it came 430 years later), and many other New Testament truths we take for granted. However, Abraham did receive God's promise regarding an heir, and by believing this promise of God, Abraham was justified. In other words, by taking God at his word regarding an heir, Abraham exercised no more faith than we do when we accept Christ's payment for our sins.

**Romans 4:18-19**

Paul proves the assertion just made in verse 18 by saying that Abraham believed and became the father of many nations by believing God's promise. Furthermore, we read in verse 19 that he did not consider his own body when God gave him the promise. At this point we need to make a point. The point is that doubt and unbelief are two different things when it comes to faith. God strengthens our faith by withholding immediate answers to our prayer. During those times we may struggle with doubt about God's seeming silence, but there is a conviction in our souls that he will answer in his own time. Unbelief, however, is a refusal to believe God.



**Romans 4:20-22**

Verse 20 states that Abraham did not *diakrino* at the promise of God through unbelief. The word *diakrino* literally means to "judge between two opinions." It is the same word used in James 1:6 where it translated "wavering." The idea is that Abraham did not waver between God's promise and his unbelief. Verse 20 further says that Abraham was strong in faith and as a result glorified God. We give glory to God, that is show off God's attributes specifically faithfulness and truth, by believing God.

Abraham did not always have great faith. If we remember his life, we see several times in which he exhibited weak faith and even doubt. He left Ur, only to spend fifteen years in Haran. He went down to Egypt when a famine struck the land of Palestine. He first thought his servant Eleazar was to be his heir, then Ishmael by Hagar. Because of the trials he faced, Abraham's faith was strengthened until it could finally be said of him that he did not waver at the promise of God.

Not only did Abraham not waver, but he was fully persuaded that God could do whatever he said. Because of this faith, Abraham received the righteousness of God imputed to him.

**E. Abraham - Our Model of Justification - Romans 4:23-25**

**4:23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; 4:24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; 4:25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.**

**Romans 4:23**

Paul wraps up his example of Abraham in Romans 4 by using Abraham as a model of our justification by faith. Verse 23 states that the account of Abraham's justification was not just to show the start of the Jewish nation, but was written to hold up Abraham as a model of justification by faith.

**Romans 4:24**

Verse 24 reiterates the concept of the previous section in which we stated that we receive the righteousness of God when we believe all that God has revealed. Abraham did not have the full revelation that we have, yet he believed what God had told him. However, we have the full revelation therefore we must believe what God expects us to, that is, the gospel message.

**Romans 4:24b-25**

What is the gospel message? The answer is in verse 24b and 25, that Jesus was raised up from the dead after being delivered up for our offenses. The word "delivered up" is translated from the Greek word *paradidomi* which referred to a prisoner being delivered to the judge for sentencing and execution. Christ received the condemnation of our sin and was executed for that sin. But that is not the whole gospel message! Not only did Christ die for us, but he rose again thereby revealing God's approval and acceptance of his substitutionary death (see Romans 1:3-4). The gospel message is incomplete without the

resurrection of Christ since the message of the gospel is that we can overcome death. Death is the victory of sin (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). If we die and stay dead then sin has won. However, because Christ arose from the dead thus breaking the power of sin and death, we also can break the power of sin and death by placing our trust in Christ. Probably the two verses that best summarize the message of the gospel is 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 which reads:

**For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and rose again the third day according to the scriptures;**