



Commentary on Romans

"The Gospel of God"

Chapter 4

By

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Romans 4:1-5

“What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed *is the man* to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.” Roman 4:1-8

The Old Testament has many heroes. Paul pointed to two of those heroes who played a vital role in the history of Israel: Abraham and David.

Keep in mind that the original text of Romans did not have chapter and verse divisions. Those were added more than a thousand years after the writing of the New Testament. We are reading one continuous letter the Apostle Paul wrote to people in Rome almost two-thousand years ago.

Paul continued the theme from chapter three into chapter four: righteousness through faith alone.

Here's a reminder of the context from the end of chapter three –

“Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.”

Romans 3:27-31

Remember that phrase, “the law of faith,” because Paul continued to build on it with examples from the Old Testament.

Verse 1

“What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?”

ΤΙ ΟΥΝ ΕΡΟΥΜΕΝ ΑΒΡΑΑΜ ΤΟΝ ΠΑΤΕΡΑ ΗΜΩΝ ΕΥΡΗΚΕΝΑΙ ΚΑΤΑ ΣΑΡΚΑ

ΤΙ ΟΥΝ ΕΡΟΥΜΕΝ (*ti oun eroumen*) “what then will we say”

This follows Paul's claim that there is one God “who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith” and his question about voiding the law through faith. Paul's strong claim is – “Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.”

Paul then introduces a question Jews might ask – “What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?”

Paul reaches back into the Old Testament to explain the doctrine he preached. Some have accused Paul of introducing new doctrines into the apostolic teachings of Christianity, but it's clear from Paul's letter to the Romans that he was building on ancient teachings that Jesus Christ and His apostles had been teaching for many years.

αβρααμ τον πατερα ημων ευρηκεναι κατα σαρκα (*abraau ton patera hēmón eurekaenai kata sarka*) “discovered Abraham the father of us according to the flesh”

There is no greater name in Jewish history that Paul could have appealed to than **Abraham**. Jews respected Abraham highly and referred to him as “father.”

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was filled with the Holy Spirit when he spoke these words –

“To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.” Luke 1:72-75

The rich man in torment cried out to "Father Abraham" to have mercy on him (Luke 16:24).

Jews accused Jesus of being a Samaritan and having a demon. They asked Jesus if He was greater than their father Abraham. Jesus responded by saying –

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad." John 8:56

The deacon Stephen addressed the priest's question by telling the crowd in attendance –

"Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.'" Acts 7:2-3

Stephen reminded the crowd of what God said to Moses –

"I *am* the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. 'Then the Lord said to him, 'Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.'" Acts 7:31-32

Paul also addressed Abraham as "father" and added the words "according to the flesh." That would be important for Jews reading Romans to remember.

Paul referred to Abraham as "father" three times in Romans 4. Reminding the Jews of the ancient truths that he was expounding was a powerful way of communicating the truth God had given Paul.

Jews of the 1st century viewed Abraham as the highest example of justification by works. What Paul wrote in his letter to Romans may have sounded contrary to what the Jews believed to be true, so his addressing the Jews in Romans 4 was vital to their understanding the deeper meaning of Abraham's relationship with God.

Verse 2

"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God."

ει γαρ αβρααμ εξ εργαων εδικαιωθη εχει καυχημα αλλ ου προς τον θεον

ει γαρ αβρααμ εξ εργαων εδικαιωθη (*ei gar abraau ex ergón edikaióthē*) "if indeed Abraham by works was justified"

Paul gets right to the heart of Jewish belief – that Abraham was justified by works. They would have immediately understood the depth of what Paul was saying.

εχει καυχημα (*echei kauchēma*) "he has ground of boasting"

If Paul stopped right there, Jews would have agreed with him. That's how they saw their own works and why they boasted of what they did. They viewed themselves as being very special because of God's choice and their commitment to the Law of Moses.

However, Paul didn't stop there. Remember what he wrote earlier in the letter?

"Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith." Romans 3:27

αλλ ου προς τον θεον (*all ou pros ton theon*) "but not toward God"

Paul was saying that though Abraham may have had something to boast about to other men, he certainly couldn't boast "toward God." No way. Paul is about to turn the Jews' understanding of Abraham upside down.

Verse 3

"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'"

τι γαρ η γραφη λεγει επιστευσεν δε αβρααμ τω θεω και ελογισθη αυτω εις δικαιοσυνην

Paul quoted an Old Testament verse that would have been familiar to the Jews in Rome – Genesis 15:6. Here's the context –

"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.' But Abram said, 'Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?' Then Abram said, 'Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!' And behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.' Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Genesis 15:1-6

What "work" did Abraham perform? Nothing. He "believed" and God accounted that to Abraham "for righteousness."

ελογισθη (*elogisthē*) "accounted" .. the Greek root word is *logos*, logic .. the idea is for computing, taking into account, adding to one's account.

God added "righteousness" to Abraham's spiritual account because he "believed" God.

That refers back to when Paul wrote –

"Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."

It's also important to remember that Abraham lived centuries before God gave His Law to Moses. There was no "law of works" for Abraham to fulfill. He was "justified by faith."

Verse 4

"Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt."

τω δε εργαζομενω ο μισθος ου λογιζεται κατα χαριν αλλα κατα το οφειλημα

τω δε εργαζομενω (*to de ergazomenó*) "to the one moreover working" .. *ergazomenó* means "perform, accomplish, acquire by labor"

ο μισθος ου λογιζεται κατα χαριν αλλα κατα το οφειλημα (*ho misthos ou logizetai kata charin alla kata to opseilēma*) “the reward not is reckoned according to grace but according to debt”

Paul used the word ελογισθη in verse three and λογιζεται in verse four. They both come from the same root and carry the idea of reaching a logical decision through reason.

Paul appeals to logic in something Jews would immediately understand. If a person works, the wages are counted as debt – not grace. If you work for wages, the idea is that the person you work for owes you. You earned your wages. That’s not grace (*charin*), which is based on “unmerited favor.” No one can earn something that can’t be earned.

Verse 5

“But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness”

τω δε μη εργαζομενω πιστευοντι δε επι τον δικαιουντα τον ασεβη λογιζεται η πιστις αυτου εις δικαιοσυνην

τω δε μη εργαζομενω (*tó de mē ergazomenó*) “to the one however not working”

πιστευοντι δε επι τον δικαιουντα τον ασεβη (*pisteuonti de epi ton disaiounta ton asebeē*) “believing however on Him justifying the ungodly”

λογιζεται η πιστις αυτου εις δικαιοσυνην (*logizetai hē pistis autou eis dikaiosunme*) "is reckoned the faith of him for righteousness"

Paul used the word *logizetai* again. Interestingly, the word is used a total of 41 times in the New Testament and Paul used it 34 times – 19 times in Romans, 11 times in Romans 4. The idea of logical reasoning that led to an accounting/reckoning is central to Paul's argument for salvation by faith without works. God is the one who reckons and the One to whom we must give an account.

Other Views

Here are other views from Romans 4:1-5:

"To meet the views of the Jews, the apostle first refers to the example of Abraham, in whom the Jews gloried as their most renowned forefather. However exalted in various respects, he had nothing to boast in the presence of God, being saved by grace, through faith, even as others. Without noticing the years which passed before his call, and the failures at times in his obedience, and even in his faith, it was expressly stated in Scripture that he believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness, Ge 15:6. From this example it is observed, that if any man could work the full measure required by the law, the reward must be reckoned as a debt, which evidently was not the case even of Abraham, seeing faith was reckoned to him for righteousness. When believers are justified by faith, their faith being counted for

righteousness, their faith does not justify them as a part, small or great, of their righteousness; but as the appointed means of uniting them to Him who has chosen as the name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness. Pardoned people are the only blessed people." *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*

"The subject of the chapter is an application of the foregoing to the special (and crucial) case of Abraham, with particular reference to two ideas that are continually recurring throughout the last chapter: (1) the supposed superiority of Jew to Gentile (and, *à fortiori*, of the great progenitor of the Jews); (2) the idea of boasting or glorying based upon this superiority. Following out this the Apostle shows how even Abraham's case tells, not against, but for the doctrine of justification by faith. Indeed, Abraham himself came under it. And not only so, but those who act upon this doctrine are spiritually descendants of Abraham. It is entirely a mistake to suppose that they of the circumcision only are Abraham's seed. The true seed of Abraham are those who follow his example of faith. He put faith in the promise, they must put their faith in the fulfilment of the promise." *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*

"The apostle, in the preceding chapter, having shown the impossibility of man's being justified by the merit of his obedience to any law, moral or ceremonial, or any otherwise than by grace through faith, judged it necessary, for the sake of the Jews, to consider the case of Abraham, on being whose progeny, and on whose merits, the Jews placed great dependance; as they did also on the ceremony of circumcision, received from him. It was therefore of great importance to know how he was

justified; for, in whatever way he, the most renowned progenitor of their nation, obtained that privilege, it was natural to conclude that his descendants must obtain it, if at all, in the same way. Was he justified by works, moral or ceremonial? That is, by the merit of his own obedience to any law or command given him by God? And in particular, was he justified by the ceremony of circumcision, so solemnly enjoined to be observed by him and his posterity? That Abraham was justified by one or other of these means, or by both of them united, the Jews had no doubt. To correct their errors, therefore, the apostle appeals to Moses's account of Abraham's justification, and shows therefrom, 1st, That he was not justified by works, but simply by faith in the gracious promise of God, independent of all works." *Benson Commentary*

Romans 4:6-12

“What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed *is the* man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. *Does this* blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.’ How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised.” Roman 4:1-12

In our last study (verses 1-5) we saw how the Apostle Paul introduced the great patriarch Abraham into his (Paul's) presentation about justification by faith in God rather than works of the flesh. In this new study we will see what we can learn from the life of David, the great king of Israel, and more about Abraham.

Verse 6

"just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works"

καθαπερ και δαβιδ λεγει τον μακαρισμον του ανθρωπου ω ο θεος λογιζεται δικαιοσυνην χωρις εργαων

καθαπερ και δαβιδ λεγει τον μακαρισμον του ανθρωπου (*kathaper kai daibid legei ton makarismos tou anthrópou*) "just as also David declares the blessedness of the man"

ω ο θεος λογιζεται δικαιοσυνην χωρις εργαων (*hó ho theos logizetai dikaiosunén chóris epgón*) "to whom God credits righteousness apart from works"

Paul made the truth claim to the Jews in Rome that God saved King David "apart from works," the same claim he made about Abraham. How did Paul support that claim? From David's own writing in Psalm 32.

Verses 7-8

"Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed *is the* man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin."

μακαριοι ων αφεθησαν αι ανομιαι και ων επεκαλυφθησαν αι αμαρτιαι μακαριος ανηρ ω ου μη λογισηται κυριος αμαρτιαν

μακαριοι ων αφεθησαν αι ανομιαι (*makarioi hón aphethésan hai anomiai*) "blessed are they of whom are forgiven the lawless deeds" .. *anomia* means "without law", the idea in this context of lawlessness in respect to God's Laws, an utter disregard for God's law

και ων επεκαλυφθησαν αι αμαρτιαι (*kai hón epekaluphthésan hai hamartiai*) "and of whom are covered the sins" .. *epekaluphthésan* combines the words *epi* (on, upon) and *kaluptó* (hide, conceal, cover) .. the word was used for "covering up or over" .. the idea in this context is of the "lawlessness" (sins) being covered over.

μακαριος ανηρ ω ου μη λογισηται κυριος αμαρτιαν (*makarios anér hó ou mé logisétai kurios hamartian*) "blessed the man against whom no not will reckon the Lord sin" .. *logisétai* comes from the root for the word "logic" and means "count, reason, decide, conclude, reckon) .. the idea is of reasoning to a logical conclusion .. it is reasonable for God not to count people's sins to their account based on His grace.

King David used a second way of stating the same amazing benefit of God's grace in the next part of Psalm 32. He wrote that God "covering" man's sins and "not imputing" man's sins are a great blessing to human beings.

Paul asked the Romans a question that followed logically from verses 1-8 –

Verse 9

"Does this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness."

ο μακαρισμος ουν ουτος επι την περιτομην η και επι την ακροβυστιαν λεγομεν γαρ οτι ελογισθη τω αβρααμ η πιστις εις δικαιοσυνην

ο μακαρισμος ουν ουτος επι την περιτομην η και επι την ακροβυστιαν (*ho makarismos oun outos epi tén peritomén é kai epi tén akrobustian*) "is the blessing then this on the circumcision or also on the uncircumcision"

Paul reached back to his earlier points about the Jews and Gentiles –

"Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles

also, since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." Romans 3:27-30

And asked the same question in a different way – "Does this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also?"

Paul's answer is the same as it was earlier. God credited Abraham's spiritual account with righteousness based on his faith in God's promise – λεγομεν γαρ οτι ελογισθη τω αβρααμ η πιστις εις δικαιοσυνην (*legomen gar hoti elogisthé tó abraam hé pistis eis dikaiosunén*) "we are saying indeed was credited to Abraham the faith as righteousness"

Verse 10

"How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised."

πως ουν ελογισθη εν περιτομη οντι η εν ακροβυστια ουκ εν περιτομη
αλλ εν ακροβυστια

Paul addressed the issue of circumcision in 12 verses in his letter to the Romans. Here's what he wrote previously –

"For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision." Romans 2:25

"Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?" Romans 2:26

"And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?*" Romans 2:27

"For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh;" Romans 2:28

"but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God." Romans 2:29

"What advantage then has the Jew, or what *is* the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." Romans 3:1-2

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

"*Does* this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness." Romans 4:9

Now to Paul's answer in verse 10 –

πως ουν ελογισθη (*pros oun elogisthé*) "how then was it credited"

εν περιτομη οντι η εν ακροβυστια (*en peritomé onti é en akrobustia*) "in circumcision being or in uncircumcision"

εν περιτομη αλλ εν ακροβυστια (*en peritomé all en akrobustia*) "not in circumcision but in uncircumcision"

Paul stayed true to his message through his letter to the Romans. God is the God of Jews and Gentiles – the circumcision and uncircumcised. God credits righteousness to all people the same way.

Verse 11

"And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also"

και σημειον ελαβεν περιτομης σφραγιδα της δικαιοσυνης της πιστεως της εν τη ακροβυστια εις το ειναι αυτον πατερα παντων των πιστευοντων δι ακροβυστιας εις το λογισθηναι και αυτοις την δικαιοσυνην

So, what was the purpose of Abraham's circumcision? It was a sign of what God was going to do in the world –

και σημειον ελαβεν περιτομης (*kai sémeion elaben peritoués*) "and the sign he received of circumcision" .. *sémeion* means "sign, miracle, indication" .. the word is used 77 times in the New Testament, often in relation to miraculous signs that authenticated the work of Christ and His apostles as being of God.

σφραγιδα της δικαιοσυνης της πιστεως της εν τη ακροβυστια (*sphragida tés dikaiosunés tés pisteós tés en té akrobustia*) "a seal of the righteousness of the faith that he had while in the uncircumcision" .. *sphragida* means "seal, impression of seal, proof"

A *sphragís* was an engraved object that ancient kings, queens, governors and other rulers would press into soft wax or clay to seal a document. It demonstrated the promise and protection of the owner. Legal signatures have taken the place of ancient seals.

εις το ειναι αυτον πατερα παντων των πιστευοντων δι ακροβυστιας (*eis to einai auton patera pantón tón pisteuontón di akrobustias*) "for the to be him of all those believing in uncircumcision"

The Apostle Paul did something here that all students of Scripture should do – he went to the **source** of a teaching to find the **true** meaning.

"The Apostle here puts forth his view of the real import of circumcision. It was not (as so many of his contemporaries supposed) the cause or condition of Israel's privileges so much as the sign or ratification of them. It ratified a state of things already existing when it was instituted. Hence, to those who inherited that state of things (justification by faith) the want of circumcision was no bar." *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*

"It clearly appears from the Scripture, that Abraham was justified several years before his circumcision. It is, therefore, plain that this rite was not necessary in order to justification. It was a sign of the original corruption of human nature. And it was such a sign as was also an outward seal, appointed not only to confirm God's promises to him and to his seed, and their obligation to be the Lord's, but likewise to assure him of his being already a real partaker of the righteousness of faith." *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*

εις το λογισθηναι και αυτοις την δικαιοσυνην (*eis to logisthénai kai autois tén dikaiosunén*) "for to be credited also to them the righteousness"

God credited (*logisthénai*) "righteousness" to the uncircumcised Gentiles who believed in the same way God credited Abraham before he was circumcised.

Verse 12

“and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised.”

και πατερα περιτομης τοις ουκ εκ περιτομης μονον αλλα και τοις στοιχουσιν τοις ιχνεσιν της εν τη ακροβυστια πιστεως του πατρος ημων αβρααμ

και πατερα περιτομης τοις ουκ εκ περιτομης μονον (*kai patera peritoués tois ouk ek peritomés monon*) “and father of circumcision to those not of circumcision only”

αλλα και τοις στοιχουσιν τοις ιχνεσιν της εν τη ακροβυστια πιστεως (*alla kai tois stoichousin tois ichnesin téés en té akrobustia pisteós*) “but also to those walking in the steps of the during uncircumcision faith” .. *stoichousin* comes from a word that means “walk in a row, line, rank” and carries the idea of keeping in step .. it was a well-known military term meaning “to march in file” .. *ichnesin* means “move forward, arrive” and carries the idea of walking another’s footsteps .. the context would be walking in line of the footsteps of Abraham’s “faith”.

του πατρος ημων αβρααμ (*του patros hémón abraau*) “of the father of us Abraham”

Abraham is the example of faith and righteousness for both circumcision (Jew) and uncircumcision (Gentile) because he received favor from God prior to circumcision. Circumcision was a "sign" of what God had done for him and his children.

Other Views

"And the father of circumcision – The father, that is, the ancestor, exemplar, or model of those who are circumcised, and who possess the same faith that he did. Not only the father of all believers Romans 4:11, but in a special sense the father of the Jewish people. In this, the apostle intimates that though all who believed would be saved as he was, yet the Jews had a special proprietorship in Abraham; they had special favors and privileges from the fact that he was their ancestor. Not of the circumcision only – Who are not merely circumcised, but who possess his spirit and his faith. Mere circumcision would not avail; but circumcision connected with faith like his, showed that they were especially his descendants; see the note at Romans 2:25. Who walk in the steps ... – Who imitate his example; who imbibe his spirit; who have his faith. Being yet uncircumcised – Before he was circumcised. Compare Genesis 15:6, with Genesis 17." *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*

"Thus Abraham was the spiritual forefather of all believers, who walked after the example of his obedient faith. The seal of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification, making us new creatures, is the inward evidence of the righteousness of faith." *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*

“Cometh this blessedness then, &c.—that is, “Say not, All this is spoken of the circumcised, and is therefore no evidence of God’s general way of justifying men; for Abraham’s justification took place long before he was circumcised, and so could have no dependence upon that rite: nay, ‘the sign of circumcision’ was given to Abraham as ‘a seal’ (or token) of the (justifying) righteousness which he had before he was circumcised; in order that he might stand forth to every age as the parent believer—the model man of justification by faith—after whose type, as the first public example of it, all were to be moulded, whether Jew or Gentile, who should thereafter believe to life everlasting.” *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*

“Paul had already argued that circumcision was not a good work, but the seal of God stamping Abraham’s faith as a faith which resulted in the bestowal of righteousness. Now, he proposes the question, Is the bestowal of a righteous standing before God connected with the observance of ordinances or apart entirely from such things? He answers his question by citing the case of Abraham who was declared righteous in answer to his faith, fourteen years before he was circumcised.” *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Romans*, Kenneth Wuest, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955

“Paul concluded that for Jew and Gentile alike there is only one way to be justified, and that is the way of faith. 57 God is the Father of all who place their trust in him regardless of their racial or religious background. To possess the revelation of God is of no ultimate importance apart from the walk of faith. Conduct demonstrates the reality of faith. People have

a fatal tendency to elevate doctrine over behavior. Although a clear and comprehensive knowledge of the nature of God as revealed in his redemptive activity is of great importance, one cannot claim to have Abraham as father to say nothing of the God of Abraham unless that knowledge transforms life." *The New American Commentary*, Volume 27, Robert Mounce, Broadman & Holman Publisher, 1995

Romans 4:13-15

“For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is* no transgression.” Romans 4:13-15

The Apostle Paul has made some powerful points about righteousness, justification, the Law, and faith. We’ve most recently seen insights to these truths from the lives of Abraham and David.

In this study we’ll see how God’s promise to Abraham, that affects both Jews and Gentiles, is granted through **faith**.

Verse 13

“For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”

ου γαρ δια νομου η επαγγελια τω αβρααμ η τω σπερματι αυτου το κληρονομον αυτον ειναι του κοσμου αλλα δια δικαιοσυνης πιστεως

ου γαρ δια νομου η επαγγελια (*ou gar dia nomou hē epangelia*) “not indeed by law the promise was” .. the word *epangelia* means “announcement, promise” and is almost always used for God’s promises in the New Testament.

τω αβρααμ η τω σπερματι αυτου το κληρονομον αυτον ειναι του κοσμου αλλα δια δικαιοσυνης πιστεως (*tō abraau ē tō spermati autou to klēronomon auton einai tou kosmou alla dia dikaiosunēs pisteōs*) “to Abraham or the descendants of him that heir he should be of the world but by righteousness of faith”

Paul’s meaning and intent is clear. Abraham and his descendants did not become “the heir of the world” through the Law, but through the **righteousness of faith**.

This is the primary point of Paul’s letter. Righteousness is by “faith alone.”

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.” Romans 3:21-22

“... being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously

committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."

Romans 3:24-31

"What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness."

Romans 4:1-5

"*Does* this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are

uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised." Romans 4:9-12

Paul was consistent in his message. Righteousness is not faith plus anything. It is by "faith alone."

Verse 14

"For if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect"

ει γαρ οι εκ νομου κληρονομοι κεκενωται η πιστις και κατηργηται η επαγγελια

ει γαρ οι εκ νομου κληρονομοι (*ei gar oi ek nomou klēronomoi*) "if indeed those of law are heirs" .. *klēronomoi* comes from *klēros* (lot) and *nemō* (to distribute, allot) .. it means "an inheritor, heir"

κεκενωται η πιστις (*kekenōtai hē pistis*) "has been made void the faith" .. *kekenōtai* means "deprive of content, empty, make unreal"

και κατηργηται η επαγγελ (*kai katērgētai hē epangel*) "and made of no effect the promise" .. *katērgētai* means "make idle, rendering inert, cause to cease, make invalid"

Paul presents the opposite side of verse 13 ("not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith"). If those who are heirs are "of the law," then **faith** is made empty and unreal and the **promise** is made invalid.

Think about that! The "law" makes God's promise invalid. It also voids "faith," if the heirs are "of the law."

Why is that?

Verse 15

"because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is* no transgression."

ο γαρ νομος οργην κατεργαζεται ου γαρ ουκ εστιν νομος ουδε παραβασις

ο γαρ νομος οργην κατεργαζεται (*ho gar nomos orgēn katergazetai*) "indeed law wrath brings" .. *orgēn* is the same word we saw earlier in Romans when Paul wrote about the "wrath" of God .. *katergazetai* means "work out, produce, accomplish, bring about"

Paul points out the problem with the Law – it produces "wrath."

ου γαρ ουκ εστιν νομος ουδε παραβασις (*ou gar ouk estin nomos oude parabasis*) "where indeed no there is law neither is transgression" .. *parabasis* means "overstepping, deviation"

Paul is getting to the heart of what God did for us in Jesus Christ. The Law brings about wrath (God's wrath), but there is no deviation, overstepping, transgression where there is no law.

God promised Abraham that he would be "heir of the world." God also promised that to Abraham's descendants. How would Abraham and his descendants receive the promise? By obedience to God's commands? That's certainly important, but is that what God said to Abraham about the promise?

"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" Romans 4:3

Paul was quoting from Genesis 15:6:

"And behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.' Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Genesis 15:4-6

Righteousness could never have come from keeping the Law, Paul wrote, because that would have invalidated the principle of faith –

"faith is made void and the promise made of no effect"

How could it be of "faith" if it was contingent on obeying the Law? It couldn't! The very thing the Jews were counting on to receive God's approval was the very thing that emphasized their unrighteousness.

Paul addressed this very issue years earlier when he wrote to the Galatian Gentile Christians who were being encouraged by Judaizers to change from faith-trusting to Law-keeping –

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.' But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for 'the just shall live by faith.' Yet the law is not of faith, but 'the man who does them shall live by them.' Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree'), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Galatians 3:10-14

Paul had a powerful grasp on reality. He understand the truth about righteousness and faith and explained it clearly to his readers in Rome.

Other Views

“Abraham was the father of all who walk in his steps. For this all is not limited by the Law any more than it is limited by circumcision. The promise of that world-wide inheritance was not given through the agency of the Law (which at that time did not exist), but as an effect of the righteousness which proceeds from faith. This Messianic kingdom cannot have anything to do with law; for if it had, faith and the promise would cease to have any office. Faith and law cannot co-exist. They are the opposites of each other. The proper effect of law is punishment; for law only exposes sin. Faith, on the other hand, is the real key to the inheritance. It sets in motion grace; and grace, unlike law, excludes no one. It is open alike to the legal and to the spiritual descendants of Abraham; in other words (as the Scripture itself testifies), to all mankind, as the representative of whom Abraham stands before God. But in reality the Law is unable to admit them to this. It has an entirely contrary function—namely, to call down punishment upon the offences that it reveals. The Law and faith, therefore, mutually exclude each other, and faith is left to be the sole arbiter of salvation.” *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*

“The promise was made to Abraham long before the law. It points at Christ, and it refers to the promise, Ge 12:3. In Thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. The law worketh wrath, by showing that every transgressor is exposed to the Divine displeasure. As God intended to give men a title to the promised blessings, so he appointed it to be by faith, that it might be wholly of grace, to make it sure to all who were of

the like precious faith with Abraham, whether Jews or Gentiles, in all ages. The justification and salvation of sinners, the taking to himself the Gentiles who had not been a people, were a gracious calling of things which are not, as though they were; and this giving a being to things that were not, proves the almighty power of God. The nature and power of Abraham's faith are shown. He believed God's testimony, and looked for the performance of his promise, firmly hoping when the case seemed hopeless. It is weakness of faith, that makes a man lie poring on the difficulties in the way of a promise. Abraham took it not for a point that would admit of argument or debate. Unbelief is at the bottom of all our staggerings at God's promises. The strength of faith appeared in its victory over fears. God honours faith; and great faith honours God. It was imputed to him for righteousness. Faith is a grace that of all others gives glory to God. Faith clearly is the instrument by which we receive the righteousness of God, the redemption which is by Christ; and that which is the instrument whereby we take or receive it, cannot be the thing itself, nor can it be the gift thereby taken and received. Abraham's faith did not justify him by its own merit or value, but as giving him a part in Christ." *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*

"The argument of Romans 4:9-12 is reiterated and confirmed here in other terms. Abraham is the father of all believers: for it is not through law that the promise is given to him or his seed, that he should be heir of the world—a condition which would limit the inheritance to the Jews, but through the righteousness of faith—a condition which extends it to all who believe. We might have expected a quasi-historical proof of this proposition, similar to the proof given in 10 f. that Abraham's justification

did not depend on circumcision. But the Apostle takes another and more speculative line. Instead of arguing from the O.T. narrative, as he does in Galatians 3:14-17, that the promise was given to a justified man before the (Mosaic) law was heard of, and therefore must be fulfilled to all independently of law, he argues that law and promise are mutually exclusive ideas. For (Romans 4:14) if those who are of law, i.e., Jews only, as partisans of law, are heirs, then faith (the correlative of promise) has been made vain, and the promise of no effect. And this incompatibility of law and promise in idea is supported by the actual effect of the law in human experience. For the law works wrath—the very opposite of promise. But where there is not law, there is not even transgression, still less the wrath which transgression provokes. Here, then, the other series of conceptions finds its sphere: the world is ruled by grace, promise and faith. This is the world in which Abraham lived, and in which all believers live; and as its typical citizen, he is father of them all." *Expositor's Greek Testament*

"By the phrase 'righteousness of faith' we are not to understand that the faith exercised by the sinner is righteous in quality. The promise was made to Abraham not upon the basis of any attempted obedience to the law on his part but because of that faith which he exercised, which faith was of such a nature as to cause God to put righteousness down to his account." *Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, Kenneth Wuest, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing

“To show that the faith of Abraham, on which his justification depended, was not by the Law, the apostle proceeds to show that the promise concerning which his faith was so remarkably evinced was before the Law was given. If this was so, then it was an additional important consideration in opposition to the Jew, showing that acceptance with God depended on faith, and not on works.” Albert Barnes’ *Notes on the Whole Bible*

“He now more clearly sets the law and faith in opposition, the one to the other, which he had before in some measure done; and this ought to be carefully observed: for if faith borrows nothing from the law in order to justify, we hence understand, that it has respect to nothing else but to the mercy of God. And further, the romance of those who would have this to have been said of ceremonies, may be easily disproved; for if works contributed anything towards justification, it ought not to have been said, through the written law, but rather, through the law of nature. But Paul does not oppose spiritual holiness of life to ceremonies, but faith and its righteousness. The meaning then is, that heirship was promised to Abraham, not because he deserved it by keeping the law, but because he had obtained righteousness by faith. And doubtless (as Paul will presently show) consciences can then only enjoy solid peace, when they know that what is not justly due is freely given them. Hence also it follows, that this benefit, the reason for which applies equally to both, belongs to the Gentiles no less than to the Jews; for if the salvation of men is based on the goodness of God alone, they check and hinder its course, as much as they can, who exclude from it the Gentiles.” *Calvin’s Commentary on the Bible*

Romans 4:16-18

“Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Romans 4:16-22

The Apostle Paul was one of the great intellects of the ancient world. God used Him to expand the Church in the Roman Empire and write almost half of the New Testament. Paul spent almost as much time in prison as he did preaching and teaching in cities and villages, but did not waver from his Heavenly calling.

Paul's letter to Christians in Rome is thought by many scholars to be his most powerful writing. The apostle used his great intellect and the supernatural gifts God gave him to communicate clearly to Jews and Gentiles the truth that salvation is by grace through faith alone.

Verse 16

"Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all"

δια τουτο εκ πιστεως ινα κατα χαριν εις το ειναι βεβαιαν την επαγγελιαν παντι τω σπερματι ου τω εκ του νομου μονον αλλα και τω εκ πιστεως αβρααμ ος εστιν πατηρ παντων ημων

δια τουτο εκ πιστεως ινα κατα χαριν (*dia touto ek pisteōs hina kata charin*)
"therefore it is of faith that it may be according to grace"

This is a common theme in Paul's writings: salvation is by grace through faith –

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Romans 5:1-2

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

The word for “faith” (*pisteōs*) comes from the word *pistis* (be persuaded) and means “belief, trust, confidence.”

The word for “grace” (*charin*) means “favor, kindness.”

Paul continued his argument that Jews and Gentiles are saved through faith on the basis of God’s grace (favor) based on the life of Abraham.

εις το ειναι βεβαιαν την επαγγελιαν παντι τω σπερματι (*eis to einai bebaian tēn epangelian panti tō spermati*) “for to be sure the promise to all the seed” This continues Paul’s reminder to Jews especially that the “seed” covenant God made with Abraham would be a blessing to all people of the world – Jews and Gentiles.

“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” Genesis 22:18

“And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” Genesis 26:4

“Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south;

and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Genesis 28:14

ου τω εκ του νομου μονον (*ou tō ek tou nomou monon*) “not to that of the law only”

Meaning not to Jews (of the law) only. Gentiles were also included in the promise. That a was a difficult thing for Jews to accept 2,000 years ago and continues to be difficult for them to accept to this day.

αλλα και τω εκ πιστεως αβρααμ ος εστιν πατηρ παντων ημων (*alla kai tō ek pisteōs abraau hos estin patēr pantōn hēmōn*) “but also to that of the faith of Abraham who is the father of all of us”

Paul continually pointed the Romans to the covenant God made with Abraham that made him the father of all people – Jews and Gentiles.

Verse 17

“(as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did”

καθως γεγραπται οτι πατερα πολλων εθνων τεθεικα σε κατεναντι ου επιστευσεν θεου του ζωοποιουντος τους νεκρους και καλουντος τα μη οντα ως οντα

καθως γεγραπται οτι πατερα πολλων εθνων τεθεικα σε (*kathōs getraptai hoti patera pollōn ethnōn tetheika se*) "as it has been written a father of many nations I have made you"

Paul references the Torah to remind Jews and Gentiles that his argument is based on what God said to Abraham.

κατεναντι ου επιστευσεν θεου (*katenanti hou episteusen theou*) "before whom he believed God"

Abraham heard what God promised and believed God.

του ζωοποιουντος τους νεκρους και καλουντος τα μη οντα ως οντα (*tou zōopoiontos tous nekrous kai kalountos ta mē onta hōs onta*) "the one giving life to the dead and calling the things not into being even existing" .. *zōopoiontos* means "make to live, quicken, animate" .. *kalountos* means "summon, invite, call"

Paul reminded the Romans of a powerful ability that only God could claim – He had the power to give life to the dead and call things that didn't exist into existence. How could God fulfill the promise He had made to Abraham and his seed? Through the power of His will.

Verse 18

“who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’”

ος παρ ελπιδα επ ελπιδι επιστευσεν εις το γενεσθαι αυτον πατερα πολλων εθνων κατα το ειρημενον ουτως εσται το σπερμα σου

ος παρ ελπιδα επ ελπιδι επιστευσεν (*hos par elpida ep elpidi episteusen*)
 “who against hope in hope believed” .. *par* means “close beside” and carries the idea of “against” or “contrary to” in the context .. *elpida* and *elpidi* come from the word *elpō* (to anticipate, welcome) and mean “confident expectation” .. *episteusen* means “be persuaded, have trust in”

Hope is a wonderful word in Jewish and Christian theology. We are a people of hope. We hope in what we see and in what we do not see. Even when things are contrary to human hope, we hope in God. Things like life after death. We hope in God who “gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.”

Paul’s strong hope in God’s plan and power to raise the dead to life again (resurrection of the dead) is a hope that he preached throughout his life as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

"But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" Acts 23:6

"I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust." Acts 24:15

"And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this *promise* our twelve tribes, earnestly serving *God* night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews." Acts 26:6-7

"Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance." Romans 8:23-25

"But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been

justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:4-7

εις το γενεσθαι αυτον πατερα πολλων εθνων κατα το ειρημενον (*eis to genesthai auton patera pollōn ethnōn kata to eirēmenon*) "for to become him the father of many nations according to that having been spoken"

ουτως εσται το σπερμα σου (*houtōs estai to sperma*) "so shall be the offspring of you"

Another reminder of God's covenant promise to Abraham. Keep in mind that when God made this promise, Abraham had no physical hope of fathering a child with his wife. That's the idea of "contrary to hope, in hope believed" –

"Then Abram said, 'Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!' And behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.' Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Genesis 15:3-6

Other Views

"Therefore it is of faith.—The words 'it is' have to be supplied. 'It' stands for the Messianic inheritance, or, in common phrase, salvation. Faith on man's part is correlative with grace on the part of God, and salvation being thus dependent upon grace is as wide and universal as grace itself. It knows no restriction of law.

Not to that only which is of the law.—Not only to that part of the human race which belongs to the dispensation of the Law, but also to that which is in a spiritual sense descended from Abraham by imitating his faith." *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*

"The promise was made to Abraham long before the law. It points at Christ, and it refers to the promise, Ge 12:3. In Thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. The law worketh wrath, by showing that every transgressor is exposed to the Divine displeasure. As God intended to give men a title to the promised blessings, so he appointed it to be by faith, that it might be wholly of grace, to make it sure to all who were of the like precious faith with Abraham, whether Jews or Gentiles, in all ages. The justification and salvation of sinners, the taking to himself the Gentiles who had not been a people, were a gracious calling of things which are not, as though they were; and this giving a being to things that were not, proves the almighty power of God. The nature and power of Abraham's faith are shown. He believed God's testimony, and looked for the performance of his promise, firmly hoping when the case seemed hopeless. It is weakness of faith, that makes a man lie poring on the

difficulties in the way of a promise. Abraham took it not for a point that would admit of argument or debate. Unbelief is at the bottom of all our staggerings at God's promises. The strength of faith appeared in its victory over fears. God honours faith; and great faith honours God. It was imputed to him for righteousness." *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*

"As it is written – Genesis 17:5. I have made thee – The word used here in the Hebrew Gen 17:5 means literally, to give, to grant; and also, to set, or constitute. This is also the meaning of the Greek word used both by the Septuagint and the apostle. The quotation is taken literally from the Septuagint. The argument of the apostle is founded in part on the fact that the past tense is used – I have made thee – and that God spoke of a thing as already done, which he had promised or purposed to do. The sense is, he had, in his mind or purpose, constituted him the father of many nations; and so certain was the fulfillment of the divine purposes, that he spoke of it as already accomplished." *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*

"Before him whom he believed; i.e. in the sight or esteem of God. He was not the father of many nations by carnal generation in the sight of men, but by spiritual cognation in the sight of God. Or, as it may be read, like unto God, after his example; and then the meaning is, that God so honoured Abraham's faith, that he made him a father, in some respects like himself. As God is a universal Father, not of one, but of all nations, so was Abraham. Again, as God is their spiritual Father, not by carnal generation, so was Abraham also." *Matthew Poole's Commentary*

“Who against hope believed in hope,.... Abraham believed the promise of God, that he might become the father of many nations, being assisted by a supernatural aid: “in hope”; of the fulfilment of it by the grace and power of God: “against hope”: against all visible, rational grounds of hope; Sarah’s womb and his own body being dead, but inasmuch as God had said it, he believed: according to that which is spoken, so shall thy seed be; his faith rested upon the word of God, which showed the nature of it, and that it was of the right kind.” *Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*

“What Scripture considers as faith is defined by the confidence of Abraham in the inviolability of divine promise. This becomes the theme of the final paragraph in chap. 4. The paradoxical quality of Abraham’s faith is seen in the contrasting prepositional phrases “against all hope” and ‘in hope.’ From a human standpoint there was no hope that he would have descendants. Yet with God all things are possible (cf. Matt 19:26). Therefore he believed what God said. His hope was not the invincible human spirit rising to the occasion against all odds but a deep inner confidence that God was absolutely true to his word. Faith is unreasonable only within a restricted worldview that denies God the right to intervene. His intervention is highly rational from the biblical perspective, which not only allows him to intervene but actually expects him to show concern for those he has created in his own image. Because Abraham believed, he became ‘the father of many nations.’ The opportunity to believe has not been assigned to any one nation or ethnic group. Belief is universally possible. The quotation from Gen 15:5

reinforces the remarkable number of those who believe and are therefore the offspring of Abraham." *The New American Commentary*, Volume 27, Robert H. Mounce, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995

Romans 4:19-25

“Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.” Romans 4:16-25

Verse 19

"And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb."

και μη ασθενησας τη πιστει ου κατενοησεν το εαυτου σωμα ηδη
νενεκρωμενον εκατονταετης που υπαρχων και την νεκρωσιν της
μητρας σαρρας

και μη ασθενησας τη πιστει (*kai mē asthenēsas tē pistei*) "and not having become weak in the faith" .. *asthenēsas* means "feeble, without strength"

ου κατενοησεν το εαυτου σωμα ηδη νενεκρωμενον (*ou katenoēsen to heautou sōma ēdē nenekrōmenon*) "he considered of himself the body already having become dead"

εκατονταετης που υπαρχων (*hekatontaetēs pou hyparchōn*) "a hundred years old about being"

Abraham's faith in God was not feeble even though he considered his body as already dead because of his advanced age. God made Abraham a promise and Abraham believed God.

και την νεκρωσιν της μητρας σαρρας (*kai tēn nekrōsin tēs mētras Sarras*)
"and the lifelessness of the womb of Sarah"

Sarah was barren, but even that combined with Abraham's advanced age did not cause Abraham to become weak in faith.

Verse 20

“He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God”

εις δε την επαγγελιαν του θεου ου διεκριθη τη απιστια αλλ ενεδυναμωθη τη πιστει δους δοξαν τω θεω

εις δε την επαγγελιαν του θεου ου διεκριθη τη απιστια (*eis de tēn epangelian tou theou ou diekrithē tē apistia*) “at however the promise of God not he did waver through unbelief” .. *epangelian* means “a summons, promise” and comes from the word *epaggelia* which meant a legally sanctioned promise .. *diekrithē* means “separate, distinguish, discern, doubt, hesitate, waver” .. it comes from the word for “judge” .. *apistia* means “distrust, unbelief”

Abraham faced a tough test of his faith in God, but he did not waver (doubt, hesitate) at God’s promise that he (Abraham) would become the father of many nations. He did not “distrust” God, even though that would certainly have been the natural thing to do in his circumstance.

God’s **promise** is the focus of Paul’s argument for salvation by faith without works. God could have established salvation through any process He preferred and what He preferred was salvation by faith without works.

As Paul wrote earlier in his letter to the Romans –

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Romans 1:16-17

“Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” Romans 3:27-28

How can God do that? Because He promised Abraham and we are party to that promise through faith in Jesus Christ.

αλλ ενεδυναμωθη τη πιστει (*all enedunamōthē tē pistei*) “but was strengthened in faith” .. *enedunamōthē* means “filled with power, made strong”

Not only did Abraham not waver at God’s promise, he was actually strengthened in his faith through the test. That is an important example of what God is doing in our lives as He tests our faith. His purpose is to strengthen us spiritually.

δους δοξαν τω θεω (*dous doxan tō theō*) “having given glory to God”

Abraham’s response to having his faith tested was that it was strengthened as he gave glory to God. Quite remarkable how tested faith works!

Verse 21

“and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.”

και πληροφορηθεις οτι ο επηγγελται δυνατος εστιν και ποιησαι

και πληροφορηθεις οτι ο επηγγελται (*kai plērophorētheis hoti epēngeltai*)
“and having been fully assured that what He had promised” *plērophorētheis*
means “fully carry through, fully believe, fully persuaded, full assurance”

Abraham had no doubt about God keeping His promise to him. He was fully persuaded, fully convinced that it would happen just as God said.

δυνατος εστιν και ποιησαι (*dunatos estin kai poiēsai*) “able He is also to do”
.. *dunatos* describes what is possible .. God has the power (ability) to accomplish His promises .. *poiēsai* means “to do, act, cause” .. God is able to do all that He promises.

Abraham looked at the material facts (e.g. he was old, Sarah was barren) and chose instead to believe God’s supernatural promise.

Verse 22

"And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."

διο και ελογισθη αυτω εις δικαιοσυνην

διο και ελογισθη αυτω εις δικαιοσυνην (*dia kai elogisthē autō eis dikaiosunēn*) "therefore also it was credited to him unto righteousness" .. *elogisthē* means "count, charge with, credit to, take into account" .. *dikaiousunēn* means "judicial approval"

Paul used the word several sentences earlier in Chapter 4 –

"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" verse 3

"Does this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness." verse 9

"How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised." verse 10

God is the One who keeps accounts for everyone and credits to those accounts as He will. God credited much to Abraham because of his faith in God's promises.

Verse 23

“Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him”

ουκ εγγραφη δε δι αυτον μονον οτι ελογισθη αυτω

ουκ εγγραφη δε δι αυτον μονον οτι ελογισθη αυτω (*ouk graphē de di auton monon hoti elogisthē*) “not it was written now on account of him alone that it was credited to him”

Paul pointed to Abraham and wrote that this amazing process of God crediting righteousness to one’s personal account was not just for Abraham

—

Verse 24

“but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead”

αλλα και δι ημας οις μελλει λογιζεσθαι τοις πιστευουσιν επι τον εγειραντα ιησουν τον κυριον ημων εκ νεκρων

αλλα και δι ημας οις μελλει λογιζεσθαι (*alla kai di hēmas hois mellei logizesthai*) “but also on account of us to whom it is about to be credited” .. *logizesthai* means “to reckon, to consider” and comes from the root word

for *logic* .. this “crediting” is logical, reasonable” .. it is the process of reaching a logical and reasonable decision

God’s promise to Abraham is “also for us.” How do we receive such an amazing gift?

Through **faith in Jesus Christ**.

ΤΟΙΣ ΠΙΣΤΕΥΟΥΣΙΝ ΕΠΙ ΤΟΝ ΕΓΧΕΙΡΑΝΤΑ ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΤΟΝ ΚΥΡΙΟΝ ΗΜΩΝ ΕΚ ΝΕΚΡΩΝ (*tois pisteuousin epi ton egeiranta Iēsoun ton kurion hēmōn ek nekron*) “to those believing on the One having raised Jesus the Lord of us out from the dead”
We can receive the amazing gift God promised Abraham because God raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead! That’s the Gospel of God. It is the center of our **faith** – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Verse 25

“who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”

ος παρεδοθη δια τα παραπτωματα ημων και ηγερθη δια την δικαιοσιν ημων

ος παρεδοθη δια τα παραπτωματα ημων (*hos paredothē dia ta paraptōmata hēmōn*) “who was delivered over for the trespasses of us” .. *paredothē* means “to hand over, to give up” .. *paraptōmata* means “a falling away, trespass, sin”

και ηγερθη δια την δικαιοσιν ημων (*kai ēgerthē dia tēn ikaiōsin hēmōn*)
“and was raised for the justification of us” .. *ēgerthē* means “to waken, raise up” .. *ikaiōsin* means “acquitted, absolved of wrongdoing, pronounced righteous”

Wow! God “delivered up” Jesus because of “our offenses,” our sins. Jesus died for us and in place of us. God made a judicial decision that His Son would be “delivered up” for our sins. God was “just” in that decision —

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Romans 1:17

“... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” Romans 3:23-26

“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.” Romans 4:4-5

God "raised" Jesus from the dead because of "our justification." We are justified in God's sight as Judge of Life because of His promise and our faith in Christ. May I say again .. WOW!

We are greatly blessed by God through the promise He made to Abraham about four thousands of years ago and through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross two thousand years ago. We believe what God promised and that "faith is accounted for righteousness."

Other Views

"The nature and power of Abraham's faith are shown. He believed God's testimony, and looked for the performance of his promise, firmly hoping when the case seemed hopeless. It is weakness of faith, that makes a man lie poring on the difficulties in the way of a promise. Abraham took it not for a point that would admit of argument or debate. Unbelief is at the bottom of all our staggerings at God's promises. The strength of faith appeared in its victory over fears. God honours faith; and great faith honours God. It was imputed to him for righteousness. Faith is a grace that of all others gives glory to God. Faith clearly is the instrument by which we receive the righteousness of God, the redemption which is by Christ; and that which is the instrument whereby we take or receive it, cannot be the thing itself, nor can it be the gift thereby taken and received. Abraham's faith did not justify him by its own merit or value, but as giving him a part in Christ." *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*

"And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Not because his faith was strong, and he had a full assurance of it, but because it was right, resting on the promise of God, and relying upon his power and faithfulness to perform it; for though the righteousness of faith is not imputed to any sort of believers, not to mere nominal ones, yet to all such as have true faith, though it may be but weak; for faith, as to nature, kind, and object, though not as to degree, is the same in all true believers, and the same righteousness is imputed to one as to another."

Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

"Application of the foregoing. The history of Abraham is a type of the dispensation of grace; his faith, the imputation of righteousness to him, and his reward, each severally a type of the same things in the Christian. Even in details the resemblance holds. Abraham put faith in a God "who quickeneth the dead," and in like manner the Christian must put faith in God as the Author of a scheme of salvation attested by the resurrection of Christ. The death of Christ was the ground of that scheme, the resurrection of Christ its proof, without which it would not have been brought home to man." *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*

"Here God the Father is represented as the proper object of justifying faith, in whose power, and love, and faithfulness to his promises, the penitent sinner, that would be justified, must confide for the pardon of his sins, acceptance with God, and the whole salvation of the gospel. For as Abraham's faith, which was counted to him for righteousness, consisted in his being fully persuaded that what God had promised concerning the

number of his seed, &c, he was able and willing to perform; so the faith which is counted for righteousness to believers in all ages must be so far of the same nature, as to imply a full persuasion that what God hath declared and promised, namely, in the revelation which he hath made us of his will, he is able and willing to perform, and actually will perform. This persuasion, however, must be in and through the mediation, that is, the sacrifice and intercession, of Christ. Who was delivered — To ignominy, torture, and death; for our offences — Namely, to make an atonement for them." *Benson Commentary*

"Verses 24–25 show the prominence of the resurrection in the basic gospel message. It was the central theme of the apostolic kerygma and dominated the early evangelistic preaching of the apostles (cf. Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:10; 13:30). It must continue to hold that central place in all preaching that reaches out to those who have never accepted Christ. Psychological insights on how to co-opt God for one's own advantage are not only powerless to effect change but obscure the real gospel in the attempt to make it relevant. Verse 25 appears to reflect an early Christian confessional creed. The neat parallelism and the rich theological significance of the Greek nouns betray an ecclesiastical origin. Jesus is the one who was delivered up to death. Isaiah the prophet foretold that the messianic Servant would "pour out his life unto death" (Isa 53:12). Yet he was "raised to life for our justification." God's entire redemptive plan is summarized in this final verse of chap. 4. Christ died for our sins and was raised again for our justification. The two are inseparably bound together. Without his death there would be no basis for acquittal. Without his resurrection there would be no proof of

the redemptive reality of his death. Jesus Christ, crucified and raised to life, is God the Father's gracious provision for the sins of a fallen race. The simplicity of the message makes it clear for all who will hear. The power of the message is experienced by those who reach out in faith."

The New American Commentary, Volume 27 – Romans, Robert H. Mounce, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995

In Our Next Romans Ebook

We will look at one of the most exciting chapters in all of the Bible: Romans 5.

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