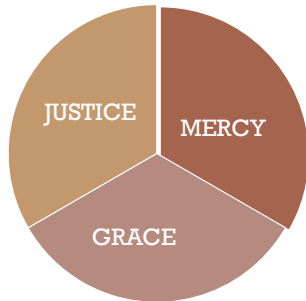


ROMANS CHAPTER 4

Paul's Argument from the Old Testament

Abraham, the patriarch of Israel (cf. Joh 8:39), and David and the prophets Rom 3:21



Justice: You Get what you deserve

Mercy: You don't get what you deserve

Grace: You get what you don't deserve

Abraham Justified by Faith Alone

Rom 4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter?

Rom 4:2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.

- The Rabbis taught that Abraham had a surplus of merit from his works that was available to his descendants. Paul built on that idea and agreed that, assuming that Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about (cf. boasting or bragging in Rom 2:17, Rom 2:23; Rom 3:27). But, Paul insisted, his boasting could only be before other people, not before God.
- Q1. What's the role of works/works of compassion for the NT believer?
- Q2: Is it possible to mix Grace + Works?
- Q3. Is the believer liable for lack of works in his lifetime?

Rom 4:3 What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

- *Gen 15:5 Then the LORD took Abram outside and said to him, "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!"*
- *Gen 15:6 And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.*
- Abram believed the Lord and He credited... to him ... righteousness. This foundational truth is repeated three times in the New Testament (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23) to show that righteousness is reckoned in return for faith.
- Q4. What is the Abrahamic covenant? (Gen 15:7-21)

Rom 4:4 Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation.

Rom 4:5 However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

- Justification can't be earned because you are good or go to church.
- The Pharisees sought justification by works, by pretending to conform to the letter of the law but omitting the spirit of the law (Mt. 5:20)
- Conversely, a person who is not working but is **believing** on God who justifies the wicked his faith is credited as righteousness (Rom 4:3).
- Abraham was the latter kind of person as the Scripture stated. He was justified not because he worked for it but because he trusted God.
- Q5. In Luke 23:42-43 how was it possible for one of the criminals to be justified?

David Prophesies Justification by Faith Alone

Rom 4:6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

Rom 4:7 "Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

Rom 4:8 Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them."

- This fact about Abraham was also true of David, whose description of God's gracious dealing with him Paul quoted from Psa 32:1-2.
- A person, like David, to whom God credits righteousness apart from works, is blessed. Such a person's sins are forgiven and covered.
- Q6. Do Global Methodist believe in Justification by Faith?

Is this Promise only for Jews?

*Rom 4:9 Is this blessedness only for the **circumcised**, or also for the **uncircumcised**? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.*

*Rom 4:10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it **after** he was circumcised, or before? It was **not after**, but before!*

- He repeated the authoritative scriptural declaration that Abraham was declared righteous on the basis of his faith.
- Then Paul asked whether Abraham's justification occurred before or after he was circumcised. Answering his own question, Paul stated, It was not after, but before!
- Abraham's age when he was declared righteous (Gen 15:6) is not stated. But later when Hagar bore him Ishmael, he was 86 (Gen 16:16).
- After that, God instructed Abraham to perform the rite of circumcision on all his male descendants as a sign of God's covenant with him; this was done when Abraham was 99 (Gen 17:24).
- Therefore, the circumcision of Abraham followed his justification by faith by more than 13 years.
- Justification by Faith pre-dates the law.

A New People

*Rom 4:11 And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, **he is the father of all who believe** but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them*

*Rom 4:12 And he is **then also the father of the circumcised** who not only are circumcised but **who also follow in the footsteps of the faith** that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.*

- Therefore, Paul argued, the sign of circumcision was a seal of Abraham's being declared righteous because of his faith which he received while he was still uncircumcised (lit., "in uncircumcision").
- Circumcision, as a "sign" or "seal," was an outward token of the justification Abraham had already received.
- God's purpose was that Abraham be the father **of all who believe and are thereby justified**. This included both the uncircumcised (Gentiles) and the circumcised (Jews).
- Jews must do more than be circumcised to be right with God. **They must also walk in the footsteps of... faith, like Abraham** (cf. Rom 2:28-29).
- The Lord is reclaiming all humanity for himself.

The Promise Realized Through Faith

Rom 4:13 It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

Rom 4:14 For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless,

Rom 4:15 because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

- Q7. What was the purpose of the law?
- God's promise in Gen 12:1-3 preceded the giving of the Law by several centuries (cf. Gal 3:17).
- for through Abraham and his descendants all the world is blessed. He is thus their "father" and they are his heirs.
- These promises of blessing are given to those to whom God has imputed righteousness, and this, Paul added once again, is by faith.
- Believers of all ages are "Abraham's seed," for they enjoy the same spiritual blessing (justification) which he enjoyed (Gal 3:29)

God reclaims the whole world as his

Rom 4:16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

- "because of this" incapacity of the law to secure the promise, it must be by faith that it is attained. [Most commentators hold this view.]
- As Paul has shown in vv. Rom 4:4-5, grace is the necessary corollary to faith, as "obligation" is to works. **Thus, "God's plan was made to rest upon faith on man's side in order that on God's side it might be a matter of grace."** [Barrett.]
- As is the case throughout Romans, and certainly in chap. 4, Paul's universalism is a qualified universalism that gives the Gentiles the same opportunity as Jews to respond to the gospel and to become part of the people whom God is calling out of the world in the last days

- Paul has forcefully stated that the true descendants of Abraham are those who believe (vv. Rom 4:11-12); and when he uses the word “seed” here, it must be with this spiritual meaning that he has given the word.

Rom 4:17 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

- Paul then supported his conclusion in Rom 4:16 with scriptural authority, quoting God’s covenantal promise from Gen 17:5.

The Role of Faith and Belief

Rom 4:18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

- The emphasis in v. Rom 4:18 falls on the paradoxical description of Abraham’s faith as “against hope, on the basis of hope.”
- No better explanation of the phrase can be found than Chrysostom’s: “It was against man’s hope, in hope which is of God.” As Paul will explain in v. Rom 4:19, Abraham had every reason, from a human point of view, to give up the attempt to produce a child through Sarah.
- His faith flew in the face of that hope which is founded on the evidence of reason and common sense—“hope” as we often use the word (“I hope to win the lottery”). Yet his faith was firmly based on the hope that springs from the promise of God.
- We note here that Abraham’s faith is not described as a “leap into the dark,” a completely baseless, almost irrational “decision”—as Christian faith is pictured by some existentialist theologians—but as a leap from the evidence of his senses into the security of God’s word and promise.

Rom 4:19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

Rom 4:20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,

Rom 4:21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

Rom 4:22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."

Rom 4:23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone,

- “That’s why” (dio) indicates that this verse draws a consequence or conclusion from the preceding verses.
- Paul certainly sees this as the conclusion of the immediately preceding verses, in which he has described Abraham’s faith (vv. Rom 4:18-21). And since these verses include aspects of the promise that are brought out in Gen. 17 and later, it would seem that Paul agrees to this extent with the Jewish tradition, that the faith Abraham exercised in Gen 15:6 is explained and exemplified in the later career of the patriarch.
- But the verse may serve to conclude more than the immediate section. With a last reference to Gen 15:6, Paul rounds off the discussion of that verse which has been the constant touchstone since v. Rom 4:3. Now, in a sense, Paul’s historical exposition is ended, and he can turn in application to his Christian readers.

Jesus as the only mediator

Rom 4:24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

- Abraham had to simply trust in God. That trust was confirmed in the immediate promises Abraham witnessed God fulfill in his lifetime.
- But he faced death without seeing all the promises fulfilled, nor understanding how God would fulfill them.
- The writer of Hebrews described the quality of this faith in glowing terms: “All these faithful ones died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God” (Heb 11:13).
- Now Paul directs his readers to the same Abrahamic faith, but clearly focused on God’s fulfillment of the great promise, the blessing of the entire world through the gift of Jesus.

Rom 4:25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

- Jesus died because of our sins, taking the penalty we deserved, according to God’s plan (see Rom 3:23-26).
- Just as God brought life from Abraham and Sarah (even though they thought they were “dead” and unable to have children), so God raised Jesus from the dead. His resurrection made us right with God.