

Romans 4
February 15, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

I realize we are knee-deep with all the doctrines that have been introduced to us so far. The one we learned last week was “justification.” We said it is a legal term that means we have been acquitted from all of our sins – if we place our faith in Christ Jesus and what He did for us. We learned that it was through the redemption provided by Jesus when He shed His blood to pay the penalty of our sins. Our part was to believe Christ and to accept His forgiveness and His Lordship.

But here’s the beauty hiding behind all of these Christianese terms: What Paul is laying out for his readers an incredible love story in which God shows us how salvation can be obtained that doesn’t rely on works. I am always amazed at how Christians get criticized for our beliefs because outsiders think that when we say that “Jesus is the only way,” we are being *exclusive*. Though we ARE saying that Jesus is the only way, *everyone is invited* to place their faith in Him without having to earn favor with God. It’s *inclusive!* And for those who were born before Jesus, anyone who believed God was credited with righteousness.

Transition: Today’s lesson is an illustration of our forefather, Abraham, who believed God. Because he showed complete faith in God, God credited to Abraham righteousness. But Paul wants his readers to understand, especially his Jewish readers, that contrary to popular belief, Abraham was NOT saved because he was part of the chosen Israelites. Paul sets out to prove that Abraham was only saved because of his faith in God’s promises.

As we read today’s text, I invite you to look for the WAYS Abraham was NOT saved. Let’s begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Romans 4:1-8]

V.1:

- What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?

V.2:

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

V.3:

- What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

V.4:

- Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. (Wages have nothing to do with grace (unmerited favor), but with what is due.)

V.5:

- However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

V.6:

- David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

V.7:

- “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

V.8:

- Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

Process Observations/Questions:

- Q v.1-3: Was Abraham justified by works according to Scripture? [NO!]
- Q: If Abraham was not justified by works, then how was he saved? [He believed God and therefore God credited him with His righteousness.]
- Q: If you were raised Jewish, what objection would you raise to Paul? [The Jews would say that Abraham was saved by works.]
- X-Ref Gen 15:1-5 – Abram had defeated the kings in Gen 14 and wondered if they would return to fight again. God appeared to Abram...let’s read Gen 15:1-5.
- Q V.5 – Who else is eligible to be justified by God? [The wicked]
- Observation: The Jews had a Law that said, “I will not justify the wicked,” (Ex 23:7) The OT Judge was commanded to “justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked.” (Deut 25:1) Again, if you were a Jew, this turns their Laws upside down! But for all of human kind, this was the greatest news ever! Anyone who believed God would receive His righteousness.
- Observation V.6-8: Paul uses David as another example of when God credited righteousness apart from works. The text is Psalm 32 in which David has confessed his sin with Bathsheba. Notice that there are no works to be done by David in order to be forgiven.
- [If time permits, share Ps 32 exegesis by Dr. Ed Dobson-Define sin/describe forgiveness]
 - **Transgression (peshah)**= “a rebellion against God & His authority”
 - **Sins (Hawon)**= “corrupt, crooked, perversity, depravity”
 - **Sin (chattath)**= “to miss the mark”
 - **forgiven” (Naussa)**= “to pick something up and carry it away”
 - **covered**= “they don’t show anymore”
 - **Does not count**= “to **intend** or to determine something” (In order to cancel debts, you have to **determine** or **calculate** the value of the debts. Thus, the psalmist is saying “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not **calculate** or **determine** or **value their sins**”.)

[Read Rom 4:9-15]

V.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.

V.10:

- Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!

V.11:

- And he received the sign of circumcision, 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. (Circumcision, as a “sign” or “seal,” was an outward token of the justification Abraham had already received.)

V.12:

- And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

V.13:

- It was not through 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.

V.14:

- For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,

V.15:

- because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Process Observations/Questions:

- Q V.9 – When Paul references “this blessedness,” what is he referring to? [the righteousness of God]
- Q V.10 – Paul has a test question for his readers: “Did God credit Abraham with righteousness before Abraham was circumcised or after?” [It was BEFORE! Abraham was declared righteous during a state of uncircumcision. He was 86 when he believed God and his promise to make him a great nation.]
- Q V.11 – If faith is all that is required to receive God’s righteousness, then why did Abraham get circumcised 13 years later? [God asked him in Gen 17 to receive the sign of the covenant]
- Paul’s main point: Circumcision had nothing to do with Abraham’s justification. It did not add to Abraham’s salvation, but attested to it.
- Q: What is the parallel scenario for our salvation? [Baptism has nothing to do with our justification. It did not add to our salvation, but attested to it. It’s an outward act symbolizing our inward circumcision of the heart.]
- Observation V.12: Paul makes it clear that Abraham was a forefather for both Jews and Gentiles. He is the father of anyone who has exercised their faith to *believe* upon Jesus (or God during the OT times) and have received the righteousness of God.
- Q V.14: What is mutually exclusive in this verse? [You can’t be God’s heir by following the law and be an heir by faith. It’s only by faith that you will be credited with righteousness.]

[Read Rom 3:16-25]

V.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 are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

V.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 things that are not as though they were.

V.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.”

V.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.

V.20:

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

V.21:

- being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

V.22:

- This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

V.23:

- The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone,

V.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.

V.25:

- He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Process Observations/Questions:

- Q V.16: Why must the promise come through faith? [So it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all of Abraham’s descendants – not just those physically related to him.]
- Observation V.17: Paul is telling us that “God sees Abraham as the ‘father of all!’”]
- Q V.18: What is Paul referring to when he says, “Against all hope?” [See Gen 15:5 – He was an old man of 86 and Sarah was old, so the idea of giving birth to a son by all accounts would be heard as posterous.]
- Q V.20: How does Paul describe Abraham’s faith? [Unwavering! He didn’t allow disbelief to undermine God’s promise. Nothing is impossible with God!]
- Q V.22: How did God reward Abraham for his faith in His promise? [Credited righteousness to Abraham.]
- Q V.23-25: What is God’s promise to us? [God will credit righteousness to us for anyone who believes God raised Jesus from the dead and was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification.]

LOOK:

The gift of salvation by grace is available to all who believe upon Jesus Christ who died for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. The ones who will be most receptive to this gift are sinners who are “dead” and are unable to help themselves before He can release His saving power. As long as the lost sinner thinks he is strong enough to do anything to please God (there

is no one righteous, no not one), he cannot be saved by grace! Only when a lost sinner confesses that he is spiritually dead and unable to help himself that God can save him.

Suggestion: Think about the people who are spiritually lost in your circle of influence, especially those who seem very independent and self-sufficient. Let's ask the Lord to show us when we were like that before we were saved so that we have a genuine connecting point with them. We need to be able to tell our own story around this so people don't feel we're being judgmental of them. We don't ever want to project that we're above it all. We, too, needed to be saved by grace!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 524–526). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Justification Illustrated (Rom. 4:1–25)

The Jewish Christians in Rome would immediately have asked, “How does this doctrine of justification by faith relate to our history? Paul, you say that this doctrine is witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets. Well, what about Abraham?”

Paul accepted the challenge and explained how Abraham was saved. Abraham was called “our father,” referring primarily to the Jews’ natural and physical descent from Abraham. But in Romans 4:11, Abraham was also called “the father of all them that believe,” meaning, all who have trusted Christ (see Gal. 3:1–18). Paul stated three important facts about Abraham’s salvation that prove that the patriarch’s spiritual experience was like that of believers today.

He was justified by faith, not works (vv. 1–8). Paul called two witnesses to prove that statement: Moses (Gen. 15:6) and David (Ps. 32:1–2). In Romans 4:1–3, Paul examined the experience of Abraham as recorded in Genesis 15. Abraham had defeated the kings (Gen. 14) and was wondering if they would return to fight again. God appeared to him and assured him that He was his shield and “exceeding great reward.” But the thing that Abraham wanted most was a son and heir. God had promised him a son, but as yet the promise had not been fulfilled.

It was then that God told him to look at the stars. “So shall thy seed [descendants] be!” God promised; *and Abraham believed God’s promise*. The Hebrew word translated *believed* means “to say amen.” God gave a promise, and Abraham responded with “Amen!” It was this faith that was counted for righteousness.

The word *counted* in Romans 4:3 is a Greek word that means “to put to one’s account.” It is a banking term. This same word is used eleven times in this chapter, translated “reckoned” (Rom. 4:4, 9–10) and “imputed” (Rom. 4:6, 8, 11, 21–24), as well as “counted.” When a man works, he earns a salary and this money is put to his account. But Abraham did not work for his salvation; he simply trusted God’s Word. It was Jesus Christ who did the work on the cross, and His righteousness was put on Abraham’s account.

Romans 4:5 makes a startling statement: God justifies *the ungodly!* The Law said, “I will not justify the wicked” (Ex. 23:7). The Old Testament judge was commanded to “justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked” (Deut. 25:1). When Solomon dedicated the temple, he asked God to condemn the wicked and justify the righteous! (1 Kings 8:31–32) But God justifies the ungodly—*because there are no godly for Him to justify!* He put our sins on Christ’s account that He might put Christ’s righteousness on our account.

In Romans 4:6–8, Paul used David as a witness, quoting from one of David’s psalms of confession after his terrible sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 32:1–2). David made two amazing statements: (1) God forgives sins and imputes righteousness apart from works; (2) God does not impute our sins. In other words, once we are justified, our record contains Christ’s perfect righteousness *and can never again contain our sins*. Christians do sin, and these sins need to be forgiven if we are to have fellowship with God (1 John 1:5–7); *but these sins are not held against us*. God does keep a record of our works, so that He might reward us when Jesus comes; but He is not keeping a record of our sins.

He was justified by grace, not Law (vv. 9–17). As we have seen, the Jews gloried in circumcision and the Law. If a Jew was to become righteous before God, he would have to be circumcised and obey the Law. Paul had already made it clear in Romans 2:12–29 that there

must be an *inward* obedience to the Law, and a “circumcision of the heart.” Mere external observances can never save the lost sinner.

But Abraham was declared righteous when he was in the state of uncircumcision. From the Jewish point of view, Abraham was a Gentile. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised (Gen. 17:23–27). This was more than fourteen years after the events in Genesis 15. The conclusion is obvious: circumcision had nothing to do with his justification.

Then why was circumcision given? It was a sign and a seal (Rom. 4:11). As a sign, it was evidence that he belonged to God and believed His promise. As a seal, it was a reminder to him that God had given the promise and would keep it. Believers today are sealed by the Holy Spirit of God (Eph. 1:13–14). They have also experienced a spiritual circumcision in the heart (Col. 2:10–12), not just a minor physical operation, but the putting off of the old nature through the death and resurrection of Christ. Circumcision did not add to Abraham’s salvation; it merely attested to it.

But Abraham was also justified before the Law was given, and this fact Paul discusses in Romans 4:13–17. The key word here is “promise.” Abraham was justified by believing God’s promise, not by obeying God’s Law; for God’s Law through Moses had not yet been given. The promise to Abraham was given purely through God’s grace. Abraham did not earn it or merit it. So today, God justifies the ungodly because they believe His gracious promise, not because they obey His Law. The Law was not given to save men, but to show men that they need to be saved (Rom. 4:15).

The fact that Abraham was justified by grace and not Law proves that salvation is for all men. Abraham is the father of all believers, both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:7, 29). Instead of the Jew complaining because Abraham was not saved by Law, he ought to rejoice that God’s salvation is available to all men, and that Abraham has a spiritual family (all true believers) as well as a physical family (the nation of Israel). Paul saw this as a fulfillment of Genesis 17:5: “I have made thee a father of many nations.”

He was justified by Resurrection power, not human effort (vv. 18–25). These verses are an expansion of one phrase in Romans 4:17: “who quickeneth the dead.” Paul saw the rejuvenation of Abraham’s body as a picture of resurrection from the dead; and then he related it to the resurrection of Christ.

One reason why God delayed in sending Abraham and Sarah a son was to permit all their natural strength to decline and then disappear. It was unthinkable that a man ninety-nine years old could beget a child in the womb of his wife who was eighty-nine years old! From a reproductive point of view, both of them were dead.

But Abraham did not walk by sight; he walked by faith. What God promises, He performs. All we need do is believe. Abraham’s initial faith in God as recorded in Genesis 15 did not diminish in the years that followed. In Genesis 17–18, Abraham was “strong in faith.” It was this faith that gave him strength to beget a son in his old age.

The application to salvation is clear: God must wait until the sinner is “dead” and unable to help himself before He can release His saving power. As long as the lost sinner thinks he is strong enough to do anything to please God, he cannot be saved by grace. It was when Abraham admitted that he was “dead” that God’s power went to work in his body. It is when the lost sinner confesses that he is spiritually dead and unable to help himself that God can save him.

The Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16) because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Romans 4:24 and Romans 10:9–10 parallel each other. Jesus Christ was “delivered up to die on account of our offenses, and was raised up because of our

justification” (Rom. 4:25, literal translation). This means that the resurrection of Christ is the proof that God accepted His Son’s sacrifice, and that now sinners can be justified without God violating His own Law or contradicting His own nature.

The key, of course, is “if we believe” (Rom. 4:24). There are over sixty references to faith or unbelief in Romans. God’s saving power is experienced by those who believe in Christ (Rom. 1:16). His righteousness is given to those who believe (Rom. 3:22). We are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1). The object of our faith is Jesus Christ who died for us and rose again.

All of these facts make Abraham’s faith that much more wonderful. He did not have a Bible to read; he had only the simple promise of God. He was almost alone as a believer, surrounded by heathen unbelievers. He could not look back at a long record of faith; in fact, he was helping to write that record. Yet Abraham believed God. People today have a complete Bible to read and study. They have a church fellowship, and can look back at centuries of faith as recorded in church history and the Bible. Yet many refuse to believe!

Dr. Harry Ironside, for eighteen years pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, told of visiting a Sunday School class while on vacation. The teacher asked, “How were people saved in Old Testament times?”

After a pause, one man replied, “By keeping the Law.”

“That’s right,” said the teacher.

But Dr. Ironside interrupted: “My Bible says that by the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified.”

The teacher was a bit embarrassed, so he said, “Well, does somebody else have an idea?”

Another student replied, “They were saved by bringing sacrifices to God.”

“Yes, that’s right!” the teacher said, and tried to go on with the lesson.

But Dr. Ironside interrupted, “My Bible says that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin.”

By this time the unprepared teacher was sure the visitor knew more about the Bible than he did, so he said, “Well, *you* tell us how people were saved in the Old Testament!”

And Dr. Ironside explained that they were saved by faith—the same way people are saved today! Twenty-one times in Hebrews 11 you find the same words “by faith.”

If you are a Jew, you are a child of Abraham physically; but are you a child of Abraham *spiritually*? Abraham is the father of all who believe on Jesus Christ and are justified by faith. If you are a Gentile, you can never be a natural descendant of Abraham; but you can be one of his *spiritual* descendants. Abraham “believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”

Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 452–455). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

B. Provided righteousness illustrated (chap. 4)

The Apostle Paul had presented his case that God declares people righteous on the principle of faith instead of works. If his position is true, he should be able to illustrate it from the past. This he did with Abraham, the patriarch of Israel (cf. John 8:39), and David as well (cf. comments on “the Law and the Prophets,” Rom. 3:21).

1. BY FAITH NOT WORKS (4:1–8).

4:1. Paul introduced his illustration of Abraham with the first of six occurrences of the question, **What then shall we say?** (6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14, 30) He referred to **Abraham** as **our forefather**. (“Forefather” is used only here in the NT.) Undoubtedly this was to distinguish Abraham’s physical ancestry from his spiritual fatherhood, mentioned later in 4:11–12, 16. What had this patriarch **discovered in this matter?** What lesson could Paul’s readers learn from the biblical record of Abraham’s experience?

4:2–3. 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 2:17, 23; 3:27). **But**, Paul insisted, his boasting could only be before other people, **not before God**. If a person could establish his finite righteousness by works—though that was impossible—he could never boast of it in God’s presence. Paul then turned to an authority his readers would acknowledge and asked, **What does the Scripture say?** He quoted Genesis 15:6, which states that Abraham’s faith in God and His promise **was credited to him as righteousness**. Because he believed, God imputed righteousness to his account (“credited,” *elogisthē*, from *logizomai*, is an accounting term). Paul had quoted this verse before (Gal. 3:6).

4:4–5. The apostle then discussed the significance of this Scripture quotation. He pointed out that a worker’s **wages are** what are owed him because he earned them, and are **not** graciously given **to him as a gift**. Conversely, a person **who** is not working but is believing on (these participles are in the pres. tense) **God who justifies the wicked** (*asebē*, “the ungodly, impious”; cf. 5:6), **his faith is credited as righteousness** (cf. 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.

4:6–8. This fact about Abraham was also true of **David**, whose description of God’s gracious dealing with him Paul quoted from Psalm 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**. And instead of his **sin** credited (*logisētai*) to his account, God credits (*logizetai*; cf. Rom. 4:3) righteousness to **him**.

2. BY FAITH NOT RITES (4:9–12).

4:9–10. Paul again raised the question of the Jews’ special position (cf. 2:17–21a; 3:1–2). The way the question is worded in the Greek suggests the answer, that **this blessedness is for the uncircumcised** (Gentiles) as well as **for the circumcised** (Jews). But in response Paul turned again to the example of Abraham. 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!** (The Gr. has lit., “not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.”) 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.

4:11–12. 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. 2:28–29). Obviously, then, the rite of circumcision, which many Jews rely on for salvation, contributes in no way to one's status before God. It gives them no special standing before Him because they must be declared righteous on the basis of faith in God.

3. BY FAITH NOT THE LAW (4:13–17).

4:13. The Jews also considered the Mosaic Law, a special revelation of God's standards for human conduct, as the basis for their special standing before God. Therefore Paul turned next to it, declaring, **It was not through Law** ("not" is emphasized by its position at the beginning of the Gr. sentence) **that Abraham and his offspring** (lit., "seed") **received the promise that he would be heir of the world.**

God's promise in Genesis 12:1–3 preceded the giving of the Law by several centuries (cf. Gal. 3:17). Being "heir of the world" probably refers to "all peoples on earth" (Gen. 12:3), "all nations" (Gen. 18:18), and "all nations on earth" (Gen. 22:18), 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). (However, God has not abrogated His promises to Abraham about his physical, believing descendants, the regenerate nation Israel, inheriting the land [Gen. 15:18–21; 22:17]. These promises still stand; they will be fulfilled in the Millennium.)

4:14–15. As Paul explained, **if Jews could become heirs by obeying the Law, then faith has no value** (*kekenōtai*, "it has been made empty"; cf. the noun *kenos*, "empty, without content," in 1 Cor. 15:10, 58). Also **the promise is worthless** (*katērgētai*, "has been made invalid"). The reason this would be true is that **Law brings wrath** (lit., "the Law keeps on producing wrath") as a consequence of disobedience. No one can keep the Law fully; therefore God, in wrath against sin, judges those who disobey.

Paul then stated a related general principle: **And where there is no law, there is no transgression.** A person may still be sinning in his action, but if there is no command prohibiting it his action does not have the character of a transgression, an overstepping of a prohibition (cf. Rom. 5:13).

4:16. Paul then drew his conclusion. **Therefore** (lit., "On account of this") **the promise comes by** (*ek*, "out of") **faith so that it may be by** (*kata*, "according to the standard of") **grace.** Responding in faith to God's promise is not meritorious, since the promise springs from His grace, His disposition of favor toward those who deserve His wrath. The human exercise of faith is simply the prerequisite response of trust in God and His promise. Since faith and grace go together, and since the promise is by grace, the promise can be received only by faith, not by the Law.

Another reason the promise is by faith is so that it **may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring, not only the Jews (those ... of the Law) but to all who exercise faith in God.** If the promise were fulfilled for those who keep the Law, then no Gentiles (or Jews either) could be saved! But this cannot be, because **Abraham ... is the father of us all**, that is, all who believe (cf. "our" in v. 1; also cf. Gal. 3:29).

4:17. Paul then supported his conclusion in verse 16 with scriptural authority, quoting God's covenantal promise from Genesis 17:5. The fact that believers in this Church Age are identified

with Abraham and God's covenant with him does not mean that the physical and temporal promises to Abraham and his physical descendants are either spiritualized or abrogated. It simply means that God's covenant and Abraham's response of faith to it have spiritual dimensions as well as physical and temporal aspects (cf. comments on Rom. 4:13). The quotation is in effect a parenthesis. Therefore the latter part of verse 17 connects with the close of verse 16: "He is the father of us all ..." **in the sight of God.** (The words **He is our father** are not in the Gr., but are added in the NIV for clarification.) **God ... gives life to the dead and calls things that are not** (lit., "the nonexistent things") **as though they were** (lit., "as existing").

Identifying God in this way obviously refers to God's promise in Genesis 17 following the statement quoted above that Abraham and Sarah would have a son of promise when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 (Gen. 17:17, 19; 18:10; 21:5; cf. Rom. 4:19). That he would be the ancestor of many nations seemed impossible in his and Sarah's childless old age.

4. BY FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISE (4:18–25).

4:18. Though humanly there was no hope of ever having a child, the old patriarch believed God's Word. **Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed.** God honored his faith, and he **became the father** (ancestor) **of many nations.** This was in accord with God's promise, **So shall your offspring be** (a quotation of Gen. 15:5).

4:19. Verses 19–21 restate in specific details the first part of verse 18 about Abraham's hope. Abraham **without weakening in his faith ... faced the fact** (lit., "considered carefully") **that his body was as good as dead** (some Gr. mss. add the word "already"), a reference to the patriarch's advanced age (Gen. 17:17; 21:5). Abraham also considered carefully **that Sarah's womb was also dead.** She was unable to conceive a child, as had been demonstrated through their life together (cf. Gen. 16:1–2; 18:11) and as was certainly true for her at age 90 (Gen. 17:17).

4:20–21. In spite of the humanly impossible situation, Abraham **did not waver through** (lit., "by") **unbelief.** "Waver" (*diekriethē*) means "to be divided" (sometimes trans. "doubt," as in James 1:6). The patriarch **was strengthened in his faith** (lit., "was empowered [*enedynamōthē*, from *endynamoō*] by means of faith"). God, responding to Abraham's faith, empowered him and Sarah physically to generate the child of promise. Also he **gave glory to God,** that is, he praised God by exalting or exclaiming His attributes. Abraham was **fully persuaded that God had power** (*dynatos*, "spiritual ability") **to do what He had promised.** What confidence in God this spiritual forefather possessed! He "in hope believed" (Rom. 4:18); he was not weak in faith despite insuperable odds (v. 19); he was not divided in his thinking by unbelief (v. 20a); he was empowered by faith (v. 20b); and he was fully persuaded God has the ability to do what He had said (v. 21).

4:22. Paul concluded his illustration about Abraham by saying, **This is why** (*dio kai*, "wherefore also") **it was credited to him as righteousness.** Abraham's response of faith to God and God's promise to him was the human requirement for God's justifying Abraham, for God's declaring that Abraham stood righteous before Him. No wonder God credited such faith with righteousness!

4:23–24. Verses 23–25 apply the truth about justification and its illustration in Abraham to the apostle's readers—from the believers in Rome who first read this letter to people today. The divine declaration of Abraham's justification was **written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness.** Such an act of justification, however, is not for everyone. It is **for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead** (lit., "out from dead

ones”; cf. 6:4; 8:11). Repeatedly in this chapter Paul referred to Abraham and other believers having righteousness credited to them because of their faith (4:3, 5–6, 9–11, 23–24).

4:25. Mentioning the Lord Jesus led Paul to state again the Savior’s central place in God’s program of providing righteousness for sinful people by grace through faith. Both Christ’s death and His resurrection are essential to that work of justification. **He was delivered over** (by God the Father; cf. 8:32) **to death for our sins** (lit., “on account of or because of” [*dia* with the accusative] “our trespasses” [*paraptōmata*, “false steps”; cf. 5:15, 17, 20; Eph. 2:1]). Though not a direct quotation, these words in substance are taken from Isaiah 53:12 (cf. Isa. 53:4–6). Also **He was raised to life for** (“on account of” or “because of” [*dia* with the accusative]) **our justification**. Christ’s death as God’s sacrificial Lamb (cf. John 1:29) was to pay the redemptive price for the sins of all people (Rom. 3:24) so that God might be free to forgive those who respond by faith to that provision. Christ’s resurrection was the proof (or demonstration and vindication) of God’s acceptance of Jesus’ sacrifice (cf. 1:4). Thus because He lives, God can credit His provided righteousness to the account of every person who responds by faith to that offer.

In chapter 4, Paul presented several irrefutable reasons why justification is by faith: (1) Since justification is a gift, it cannot be earned by works (vv. 1–8). (2) Since Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, circumcision has no relationship to justification (vv. 9–12). (3) Since Abraham was justified centuries before the Law, justification is not based on the Law (vv. 13–17). (4) Abraham was justified because of his faith in God, not because of his works (vv. 18–25).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (p. 1685). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

4:6 God considers those who trust Him as righteous. Expressing it in economic terms, God puts their sins on Christ’s account and credits Christ’s righteousness to their account (vv. 23–25). Believers are not suddenly made morally pure to live sinless lives thereafter; rather, they are now considered “in Christ,” with all the blessings and benefits of that position.