



FUNDAMENTAL GRACE BIBLE STUDY

16 May 2020

ROMANS: Chapter 4

Theme: God's glorious purpose to justify all by grace through faith

Prominent Verse: (Rom4:5) *"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."*

Outline:

- v. 1-8 – Justification by grace through faith witnessed by Abraham and David
- v. 9-16 – The fatherhood of Abraham of all by faith
- v. 17-22 – Abraham's testimony: God quickening the dead by his word
- v. 23-25 – The content of our faith: Christ crucified and resurrected according to the mystery

1. Introduction

- a. In the foregoing chapter Paul continues establishing the doctrine of justification by faith, and the Jews, which he addressed directly in Chapter 2, would be keenly aware that he introduces two witnesses (i.e. Abraham and David) who represent critical genealogical lines and covenantal pillars (Gen12-17; Ps89) for their promised inheritance, which would only be secured through Christ (Mt1:1).
- b. These witnesses "from faith to faith" prove the only means which the just could live before God was by grace through faith (Rom1:17; Hab2:4).
- c. That this principle is found throughout the scriptures becomes quite clear within this chapter; however, the *means* God grants promises to the ungodly (i.e. by grace through faith) is not to be confused with the *terms* (i.e. gospel, content, covenant) he presents for their belief or obedience of faith (e.g. Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Peter all had differing instructions).
- d. Therefore, in Romans 4 (and Galatians 3), we can appreciate the distinction of Abraham being a "father of all" (i.e. pattern) by faith and many being counted as his "seed" or "children of Abraham" by following that same pattern and receiving "the blessing of Abraham" by faith (Gal3:6-14) while in uncircumcision.
- e. While no one could foresee it, the scripture foresaw and provides testimony of God's means to justify and bless all through faith without negating the terms he offered them for obedience (Gal3:9,19).
- f. Most notably, Paul connects the imputation of righteousness to Abram by faith was written aforetime for our sake, providing the terms of such imputation contingent upon faith according to the mystery of Christ crucified for us (1Cor2:1-9) – something hid in God that neither Abraham nor David could find or describe (Col1:25-27; Eph3:9).

2. Justification By Grace Through Faith Witnessed: What Abraham Found & David Describes (v. 1-8)

- a. *"What shall we say then...?"* question #1, common in Romans (6:1,15; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,30)
- b. *"Abraham our father"* begins a discussion concluding in Abraham's fatherhood to all (v.16)
- c. *"pertaining to the flesh"* speaks to Israel's heritage as children of Abe (Ac3:25; Jn8:39)
- d. *"...if Abraham were justified by works"* Paul has not left the conclusion of Romans 3:27
- e. *"he hath whereof to glory"* if he was justified by works, where would his glory be found?
- f. *"not before God"* the topic remains on justification in the sight of God (Ps143:2; Rom3:20)
- g. *"what saith the scripture"* answers question #1, common in Paul's letters (Gen15:6; Gal3:22)
 - i. THAT *"Abraham believed God"* differs from WHAT *"Abraham believed"* of God
 - ii. *"it was counted to him"* God's judgment of Abram's faith in a promised seed
 - iii. *"for righteousness"* the witness of God's gracious attribution to man w/o works¹

¹ This same topic is addressed in James 2:14-26 with the opposite conclusion (i.e. justification by works), which can be explained. To frame properly: 1) these are different events in Abraham's life separated by over thirteen years (Gen15:6; 22:12),



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- iv. *“to him that worketh is the reward”* the employer is indebted to the laborer
- v. *“not reckoned of grace”* works & grace are like oil & water (see Romans 11:6)
- vi. *“to him that **worketh not**, but believeth”* showing *belief* is for all, but not a work
- vii. *“**believeth on him**”* provides the proper object of *belief*: God must be trusted
- viii. *“justifieth the ungodly”* which was a mystery – how could God? (Rom1:18; Job9:2)
- ix. *“his **faith**...counted for righteousness”* what God sees in man & reckons unto him
- x. *“Even as David...**describeth**”* blessed witness in Ps 32:1-2, but how is unknown

3. The Fatherhood of Abraham: Uncircumcision & Circumcision by Faith (v. 9-16)

- a. Paul now advances the question and affirmation levied in Rom3:29-30
- b. *“Cometh this blessedness upon...”* the precedent is Abraham, but when is now in view
- c. *“circumcision only, or...the uncircumcision also?”* two audiences are in view
- d. *“for we say...”* likely indicating the Jews’ testimony of heritage as “children of Abraham”
- e. **“How was it then reckoned?”** a critical timing question concerning one man’s faith
- f. *“when he was in circumcision”* when he was 99 years old (Gen17:24)
- g. *“or in uncircumcision?”* A: when he was ~76 years old (Gen15:6; Cf. 16:3,16)
- h. *“in uncircumcision”* his faith was counted for righteousness, making all the difference (v.3,9)
- i. *“sign of circumcision”* physically representative of spiritual truth, also binding (Gen17:11,14)
- j. **“that he might be the father of all”** introducing a threefold² patriarchy in faithful Abraham:
 - i. *“though they be not circumcised”* Abraham = father of the uncircumcision
 - ii. **“And...father of circumcision”** Israel and possibly other circumcised peoples of the stock of Abraham (e.g. Ishmaelites, Edomites, Samaritans; Ac13:26; Gen17:25; 21:9-13; 25:12-34; 36:1; Deu23:7; 2Kgs17:24-41; Jn4:1-24; Lu10:33)

2) God’s instructions to Abraham differed in that one required no action (i.e. belief in a promise) and the other (i.e. offering Isaac) did. James is not providing an answer to Paul’s “faith alone” doctrine by showing it lacked works; rather, the *faith* which James rightly affirms required works in accordance with the law of which they would be judged (Jas1:22-2:12). Given the tribal Jewish audience he wrote to (Jas1:1), this is quite fitting; the same is true of Jesus in MMLJ (See Mt23:1-3,23). Paul was given the manifold wisdom of God in the mystery of Christ (Rom16:25-26; Eph3:1-11) to reveal the righteousness of God without the law by the *faith* of Christ (Rom3:21; Phil3:9; Gal2:16) of which James, writing during the remnant’s scattering from the stoning of Stephen (Cf. Ac8:1; Jas1:1) prior to the saving and sending of Paul (Ac9:1-16; Cf. 26:15-18), knew nothing.

² Paul addresses a distinction in the category of “the circumcision” by stating “who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of our father Abraham”. Simply put, a Jew or Gentile at a particular time in God’s operation could be considered “circumcision” by the common denominator of faith. See Romans 2:24-29 for Paul’s previous introduction of this oft overlooked distinction in time past, which illuminates a proper God-given definition of a Jew, or circumcision. This distinction is contingent on keeping the righteousness of the law (i.e. spiritual circumcision of the heart) by faith and, therefore, is not reserved solely for the Jew in the flesh, but for the Gentile also. Caution ought to be given to the notion this was a new concept introduced by Paul and descriptive of the mystery of Christ – it is not. Paul is calling attention with clarity to a previous distinction in the sight of God. Firstly, Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6 and Jeremiah 4:4 show the witness of true, heart circumcision from long ago, which Israelites should have understood in accordance with the love of God (Deu6:4-6) and necessary for their new covenant (Jer31:31-34; Eze36:22-27; Heb8:8-10). Moreover, John the Baptist and Christ connected the same topic in connection with being true children of Abraham, which was always connected to the obedience of faith in accordance with the law of God and whom he sent (Mt3:9; 23:1-3,23; Jn8:39). This topic becomes all the more convoluted when consideration is not given to the Israel’s pre and post-Exilic history of division, adultery and propagation concerning the origin and connection of other people potentially circumcised people groups of the stock of Abraham (e.g. Ishmaelites, Edomites, Samaritans; Ac13:26; Gen17:25; 21:9-13; 25:12-34; 36:1; Deu23:7; 2Kgs17:24-41; Jn4:1-24; Lu10:33), while simultaneously respecting that God chose for Christ and, therefore, salvation to come of the Jews (i.e. the tribe of Judah; Gen49:10; Jn4:22; Heb7:14). Secondly, the promise of Genesis 12:3 and 2 Chronicles 6:29-33 provide necessary examples of the provision (i.e. steps of faith) God made for Gentiles in time past to walk in, which were always predicated on their blessing Israel in some way. In light of this, special consideration should be given to the following persons: Rahab, Ebed-melech, the centurion soldier, Canaanite woman, Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius (Josh2:1-3; 6:25; Jer39:15-18; Lu7:1-9; Mt15:21-28; Ac8:27-39; 10:1-48). Each of these, most notably Cornelius, could be considered a Gentile, circumcised in heart, considered a Jew, or circumcision, inwardly in the sight of God by walking in the steps of that faith of their father Abraham (Rom4:12).



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- iii. *“not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith”* faithful Gentiles of time past who blessed Israel (Josh2:1-3; 6:25; Jer39:15-18; Lu7:1-9; Mt15:21-28; Ac8:27-39; 10:1-48)
 - k. *“For the promise, that he should be heir of the world”* specifically identifies *what* promise was in view for this man and *“his seed”* Israel (Gen12:1-3,7; 15; 17; 21; 26; 28; Ex32:13; Ps105:6-11; Isa41:8; Lu1:55-56,67-75; Ac3:25; 7:17)
 - l. *“if they...of the law be heirs, faith is made void”* removing trust in & glory to God (Gal3:12)
 - i. Note: the law cannot establish faith, but faith does establish the law (Rom3:31)
 - m. *“the promise of none effect”* rendered such because God it’s unjustified to give by works
 - n. *“Because the law worketh wrath”* the law isn’t the problem, the sinner is (Gal3:10)
 - o. *“where no law is, there is no transgression”* as it will always point out your sin (Rom3:20)
 - p. *“Therefore it is of faith”* the righteousness of God (Rom1:17; 3:22; 4:5,9,13)
 - q. *“...that it might be by grace”* not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph2:8,9)
 - r. *“to the end the promise might be sure”* based on the performance of God, not man (v. 21)
 - s. *“to all the seed”* the faithful throughout all time inherit whatever promise of God by grace
 - i. Israel’s promises: earthly kingdom of priests, worldwide blessing (Isa60:1-22)
 - ii. Gentile promises: blessed entrance into earthly kingdom (Gen12:3; Mt25:31-46)
 - iii. Body of Christ promises: heavenly places (Eph1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 2Tim4:18)
 - t. *“not only...of the law, but...of the faith of Abraham”* emphasizing the all-encompassing nature and applicability of this one man’s faith to those with and without the law
 - u. *“who is the father of us all”* circling back to v. 9-11 of how the blessedness of God comes
 - v. *“As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations”* gives a unique perspective and precedent regarding what God would pattern in Abraham and *who* would be counted as seed – the extent of which is altogether unknown in the passage quoted (Genesis 17:5)
4. **Abraham’s Testimony: God Quickening the Dead by His Word (v. 17-22)**
- a. *“before him whom he believed”* God, the object of our faith and affection
 - b. *“who quickeneth the dead”* speaking specifically of Abraham & Sarah’s inability (v. 19)
 - c. *“calleth those things which be not as though they were”* God has done from the beginning
 - i. Creation into existence, babies from dead wombs, regenerating dead spirits, etc.
 - ii. The very words of God bring forth that which was not (Gen1:1-3; Heb11:1-3)
 - d. *“against hope believed in hope”* he was dead, but God’s words breathed hope and life
 - e. *“that he might become the father...so shall thy seed be”* reinforces yet again that the seed of Abraham is defined by faith and hope in the face of death by the word of God (Gen15:5-6)
 - f. *“was strong in faith”*³ holds the following descriptions: (Cf. Gen15-17)
 - i. Belief in hope, despite the opposition
 - ii. Consideration of God’s strength, despite your weakness
 - iii. Stand firm believing God’s promise, despite not seeing the results
 - iv. Glory given to God, despite boasting in yourself
 - v. Full persuasion of mind in God’s ability to perform, despite your inability
 - g. *“And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness”* concluding the account of Abraham
5. **The Content of Our Faith: Christ Crucified & Resurrected According to the Mystery (v. 23-25)**
- a. *“it was not written for his sake alone”* moving application & imputation to Paul’s audience

³ When comparing this description with the testimony of Abraham in Genesis 15-17, one can find both faithful (Gen15:6) and unfaithful responses (Gen16:2; 17:17-18), which is a common testimony of the faithful in time past. Consideration should be given not to the man’s faith per se, but, rather, to the God that quickeneth the dead by his words. It is God’s choice and word that continually constrained the heart, mind and spirit of Abraham to respond faithfully to his promise. The testimony of Abraham, much like all the faithful of time past is one of God’s purpose, longsuffering, grace, and kindness toward man through Christ – nothing has changed. Thus, a reading of Romans 4 and Genesis 15-17 provides us with a character magnifying the weakness and sinfulness of man over which the strength and grace of God abounds and is perfected in (Rom5:20-21; 2Cor12:9).



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- b. *“But for us also...if we believe on him who raised up Jesus”* has now manifested his righteousness (Rom3:21)
- c. *“who was delivered for our offences”* power to save all through the gospel of Christ crucified according to the revelation of the mystery (Rom1:16-17; 1Tim2:4-6)
- d. *“raised...for our justification”* freely by grace according to the revelation of the mystery (Rom3:24; 16:25-26)
 - i. **Resurrection** is a critical component of the gospel that cannot be overlooked or discounted as the transaction or operation of God is the very quickening of the dead – Christ was made sin for us that we may be imputed his righteousness and that by resurrection – if there be no resurrection, faith is made void (1Cor15:17)