

Romans 4:1-16 and 16-25

Abraham was considered by the Jews as having been obedient and so favored of God. This is what some of their writings say:

“Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life.” (Jubilee 23:10)

Abraham “did not sin against thee” (Prayer of Manasseh 8)

“No one has been found like him in glory.” (Sir. 44:19)

To the Jewish mind, Abraham was an example of perfect obedience to the Torah and thus was the father of the Jews.

Paul is going to use the father of the Jews instead as the Law’s example of the father of all who have faith.

In fact, Paul is going to leave his rabbinical training behind and use very little of the Jewish traditions to teach about Abraham.

Paul makes four points in 4:1-8 that give a commentary on his teaching of 3:27-28:

- a) 4:1-2 – Abraham is no exception to Paul’s teaching of 3:27-28
- b) 4:3 – Justification is by faith and so man cannot claim any work
- c) 4:4-5 – Righteousness is a gracious act by God who “justifies the ungodly.”
- d) 4:6-8 – God is able to credit righteousness because he has forgiven the man’s sins

4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?

Concerning the matter of 3:27-31:

- a) boasting and claiming to be responsible for your own righteousness
- b) the law
- c) faith
- d) justification

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

“If” is “ei” with the indicative in first-class condition.

This means “if and it is true” but as it is used here it is a true statement only because of the false foundation upon which it is based. It is like saying, “*Abraham made himself righteous and so ‘if’ and it is true, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about.*”

But, of course, he did not and so it is not true.

Paul adds to “boast about” the words “before God”.

Maybe Abraham could boast before other lesser men, but “not before God.”

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

Genesis 15:6 is the first time the word “believe” is found in scripture and it is used with the principle of being credited with righteousness.

Abraham’s faith in context is in God’s promise that he would have a son.

This promise details of Genesis 12:1-3

It does not work like this:

- Abraham's faith is not in itself a righteous act that God accepts.
- Abraham's faith is not considered a work.
- Abraham's faith does not replace good works or obedience.

The Jews would read this faith into the "faith of obedience" in Genesis 22.

To the Jews Abraham was credited as being righteous because he was obedient in Genesis 22

It is like this:

The "crediting" of Abraham with righteousness means to credit to his account something that is not really his.

"Credit" is the word "λογιζομαι" /logizomai/ and means the economic and legal crediting of something to another's account.

See examples in:

- a) 2 Samuel 19:20 when Shimei calls himself sinful but asks David not to credit his sin to his account.
- b) In Psalm 106:31 Phinehas is declared righteous for his actions in Numbers 25 but it is not as a reward for actually being righteous

Paul's interpretation of Genesis 15:6 is completely opposite the Jewish traditions but exactly in line with the scriptures.

4:4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.

4:5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

4:4,5 make two points:

- a) Works have no part in justification
- b) God's justifying verdict is not earned but given at no cost.

Work means there is a just reward

Trusting God is not a work

"wicked" or "ungodly" is "ασεβης" /asebes / and refers to a person who refuses to worship.

"wicked" is also used in these verses:

- Romans 5:6 – "Christ died for the **ungodly**"
- 1 Timothy 1:9- "We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the **ungodly** and sinful. . ."
- 1 Peter 4:18 – "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the **ungodly** and the sinner?"
- 2 Peter 2:6 – "if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the **ungodly**;"
- Jude 4 – "They are **ungodly** men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality. . ."
- Jude 15 – "to judge everyone, and to convict all the **ungodly** of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way and or all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

What is Faith then if not a Work?

- Paul makes it clear that faith is not a work. Or else, we could boast about it!
- Faith has no power to save. If it did then Jesus would not have to go to the cross.
- Faith is the channel that God brings his grace.
- Faith is the reaction of a man when he is confronted with the Word of God.
- Abraham believed a promise from God concerning a son.
- The opposite to faith is a hardened heart that rejects the Truth of God's promise.
- Faith is accepting God's plan of salvation, his free gift of grace.

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

**4:7 "Blessed are they
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.**

**4:8 Blessed is the man
whose sin the Lord will never count against him."**

This is Psalm 32:1-2

Notice the use of the word "count" or "credit" or "reckon"

How the Crediting Works and When it does not:

Forgiveness is the act of NOT COUNTING men's sins.

Righteousness is NOT the act of COUNTING men's good deeds

These words are not describing a moral change but instead a change in their relationship to God.

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.

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

4:11 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.

4:12 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.

See Galatians 3:5-25

4:13 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.

4:14 For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,

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

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

People who reject this are trying to be righteous by one of these methods:

- 1) Their own self-defined standard of righteousness
- 2) Their own self-established religious observances or commitments

Paul has defeated both of these hopes of self-righteousness or a religious act like circumcision.

Romans 4:16-25

“By Faith”

- To keep faith from being considered a work or man we can consider it like one of the senses: seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling.
- Jesus did this in John 3 when he compared faith to looking at the snake on pole.
- Faith makes real to us in our lives, in our world, what God has said (promised) in the spiritual world. By faith we can see, hear, taste, touch, smell the spiritual reality.

Hebrews 11:1

Rotherhams: But faith is, of things hoped for, a confidence, of facts, a conviction, when they are not seen;

NASB: Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

King James: Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Weymouth: Now faith is a well-grounded assurance of that for which we hope, and a conviction of the reality of things which we do not see.

Young: And faith is of things hoped for a confidence, of matters not seen a conviction,

Darby: Now faith is [the] substantiating of things hoped for, [the] conviction of things not seen.

“By Grace” because works will never be good enough for any one.

“Guaranteed”

- The believer can be sure of his salvation
- If a believer is doubting his “guaranteed” salvation or is not sure of it then he does not fully understand we are justified by faith.

“Abraham’s offsprings” include two groups:

- The natural seed of Abraham or Israel
- The spiritual seed of Abraham or those who have faith in the same God and the promises he has made. This can be Gentile or Jew.

Romans 4:17-22 Explains the Principle of Faith

- 1) Abraham received God’s word in verses 17-18.
- 2) Abraham believed God’s word in verses 19-20.
- 3) Abraham received the benefit of his faith in verses 21-22.

Romans 4:23-25 Applies the Principle of Faith to Us Today

- 1) God's **reason** for working with Abraham is the same reason he will work with us: to Credit Righteousness (verses 4:23-24)
- 2) God's **method** with Abraham is the same method he will use for us. Abraham believed God could bring to life that which was dead (4:19) We must believe that God brought Jesus back from the dead (verse 4:24)
 - a. Some intellectuals in Athens could not believe this in Acts 17:32
 - b. Romans 10:9 says, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."
- 3) God's **principle** for being able to justify us and credit us with righteousness is found in 4:25:
 - a. Christ was delivered for our sins
 - b. Christ was raised for our justification

4:17

"Father of many nations" connects Abraham as the spiritual father of many people in many nations

"Calls things that are not as though they were"

- In the OT this verb "call" refers to God's creative acts
 - Isaiah 41:4
 - Isaiah 48:13
- It is the process of bringing something into existence that did not exist before
- This refers to "creation ex nihilo" (creating out of nothing)
- This can clearly be seen when applied to the context of creating a righteous person out of the ungodly as in 4:5: "God who justifies the wicked."
- But, there is a problem when applied to the verse because in the act of creating when God speaks they exist. In our example in Genesis referring to the "many nations" and in Romans referring to the "ungodly" both are things that God speaks of but they do not yet exist. This is why Paul does not say that God "calls things into being" but instead says "calls things that are not as though they were."
 - In Genesis the nations will be descendants of Abraham's faith. Everyone member of the nations in all eternity will be descendants of Abraham.
 - Concerning the "ungodly" they are credited with righteousness, but will one day be righteous.

4:18 – deals with Abraham believing the promise of the spiritual seed from all nations

"against hope" could be translated "beyond hope"

Abraham went beyond the five senses & went with the 6th senses of God's word.

4:19 – Concerns the birth of Isaac

Abraham did not lose faith when he saw his body as old because he also saw the promise of God by faith.

This is easy to understand how this is possible when you consider faith as one of the senses.

If you are in your yard eating an apple that you can see, touch and taste but you smell mowed grass you do not think you are eating grass. The three senses over rule the fourth. Faith is a sense that overrules the first five. They are still true but there is something else to consider.