

- If the Jews could become heirs (attain righteousness) by the law, faith is of no value. And in that case, the promise is also worthless because it would be based on conditions that no one would be able to meet. If it is by keeping the law, we've already broken the law, and the curse of the law is our eternal damnation. Faith and law-keeping are mutually exclusive. The Law brings wrath because no one can keep it perfectly (James 2:10). The Jews thought they inherited blessing through having the law, but God gave the law so that sin might be seen in all its sinfulness. God has given the law that we might know of the violation, that the law might point us and take us to Christ who kept the law on our behalf.

#### 4. Justified by Faith Alone (4:16-25)

- Paul's conclusion is crystallized in v16: *"Therefore it is of faith...."* "It" refers to the promised inheritance to Abraham, which was not promised based on obedience to the Law, but rather through faith. The reason that this promised inheritance was by faith is so that it may be in accordance with grace. Grace emphasizes that this is a gift from God and is not based on merit. We are saved by God's grace, and grace is appropriated by faith (Eph 2:8-9). Faith is a gift from God, not because we deserve it, have earned it, or are worthy to have it.
- There is only one way of salvation. We must all come to God with *"the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."* This faith is rooted in God's gracious promise to declare righteous all who believe in Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for our sin. If you respond to God's gracious promise by faith, He will credit the righteousness of Christ to your account (Heb 11:6).
- Paul proves his point with an appeal to OT Scripture - Genesis 17:5. Abraham's faith was demonstrated by his faith in God's promise. Abraham's name was originally Abram, which meant "exalted father." God changed his name to Abraham which means "Father of many nations." God changed Abraham's name before Isaac was even conceived. And Abraham embraced that promise. Abraham changed his name while his body was still dead, and Sarah's womb was still closed. Abraham's faith moved him to action. V17b identifies God as the One Who performs the impossible – *"even God"*. The reason Abraham could believe in God's promise was because he factored God into the equation (Luke 1:37). When Sarah laughed (Gen 18:13), God said: *"Is any thing too hard for the LORD?"* (Gen 18:14)

#### *(i) Abraham believed in God's Promise, 4:19-20*

- God promised to make Abraham the *"father of many nations"* must have seemed incredible to a 99-year-old man. But somehow Abraham found it within himself to believe what God had said. Abraham believed despite humanly impossible circumstances. Hope and God go together (cf Eph 2:12). Abraham's hope was bounded up with his faith in God; Abraham looked away from the circumstances, and instead he went with the promise of God.

#### Abraham, The Example of Faith (4:1-25)

- The main object of Romans 4 is to show that justification by faith is found in the OT. Paul shows that Abraham and David were justified by faith alone.

#### 1. Not Justified by Works (4:1-8)

- If a man could be justified before God by his own efforts, it would give him a basis for boasting in himself. But such boasting is foolish, because what is the best of human righteousness when compared to God's absolute righteousness (Isa 64:6). When Abraham stood before God, he had no grounds for boasting at all. Abraham, like all other men, was sinful and not perfectly righteous in his conduct (Gen 12:11-20; 20:2; 16:1-4).
- Paul supports his argument by quoting from an incident recorded in Genesis 15.
  - *"Abraham believed God...."* God promised that Abraham's offspring would be like the stars in the sky - innumerable. Abraham trusted God's promise and believed He could do the impossible (Gen 15:5-6).
  - *".....and it was counted unto him for righteousness."* God accepted Abraham as righteous because Abraham trusted God to do what He had promised.
- 3 key words used in Romans 4 that mean virtually the same thing: "counted" (v3,5), "reckoned" (v9) and "imputed" (v22). The word "counted" in v3, also translated as "credited," comes from the Greek word, "logizomai". "Logizomai" appears 40X in the New Testament, 11X in Romans 4. It is an accounting term that means 'to post to the account of,' or 'to credit to the account of.' God takes the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ and transfers or credits it into the account of the sinner who believes (cf Philemon 1:18). God counted Abraham's faith as righteousness. By an act of "imputation," the righteousness of Christ is imputed or credited to believers. When a sinner repents and believes in Christ, God takes that sinner's moral, spiritual account and makes an entry. God writes "fully righteous" besides it.
- There are 2 methods of justification – by works and by faith and they rest on 2 contrary principles – merit & grace.
  - Justification by works rests on the principle that men earn their salvation by doing good. If salvation were based on one's own effort, God would "owe salvation" as a debt.
  - Justification by faith rests on the principle that God credits or imputes righteousness as a gift to the ungodly who believes in Him.
 The idea of grace stands opposite to the principle of works; grace has to do with *receiving* the freely given gift of God, works has to do with *earning* our merit before God.
- In v5 Paul gives us one of the clearest statements of the gospel in the NT: God justifies the ungodly! Not only do works not contribute to our salvation, but God also forbids them altogether. If salvation is due to good works, then we would

have grounds to boast about our own goodness as the reason for our salvation. And there would be no hope for wicked sinners (and we all are!). There would be no good news. To be justified, we must see ourselves as ungodly and deserving of God's righteous judgment (Luke 18:13-14).

- David was a law-breaker – he committed adultery and murder. If David were judged on works alone, the righteous God must condemn him. But David was saved the same way that Abraham was saved: By Grace Through Faith. Paul quotes Psalm 32:1-2 – the Psalm David penned after his sin with Bathsheba. David speaks of the blessedness, not of the one who is justified through works, but “*whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*” David is declaring the joy of God not holding his sin against him. David believed that. Being thus forgiven, David was treated as a righteous man. God will not impute sin to him.
- We are made righteousness before God by an act of imputation.
  - V6 speaks of God imputing righteousness on the believing sinner.
  - V8 speaks about God not imputing iniquity to the sinner. The reason the believer's sins are not imputed to him is that they are imputed to Christ (1 Pet 2:24; 2 Cor 5:21).

Imputation does not change one's nature; it only affects one's legal standing. David, as well as Abraham, gained spiritual standing apart from works.

- What happens to our sin when we trust Christ as Savior?
  - a. Sins are Forgiven (v7a): Forgiveness means that God has sent away all our sins. They are removed from us.
  - b. Sins are Covered (v7b): God will no more look and remember our sins; they were covered with the blood of Jesus.
  - c. Sins are Not Counted (v7c): The Lord will not charge our sins; we shall not be reckoned or regarded as guilty.
- If we belong to the Lord, then we are saved, forgiven, adopted into the family of God, and declared righteous. If we have not trusted the Lord by faith, then we are lost, no matter what we do! Nothing else will save (Acts 16:31).
  - The thief on the cross did nothing good but trusted Jesus for salvation and he was saved (Luke 23:39-43).
  - Judas Iscariot lived and walked with Jesus for over 3 years. He was active in our Lord's ministry. Yet, Jesus Himself looked at Judas and said that he was a lost sinner (John 6:70-71).

## 2. Not Justified by Circumcision (4:9-12)

- Justification is also not by ceremonial rites or rituals for Abraham was justified before he was circumcised. Abraham performed the rite of circumcision when he was 99 years old (Gen 17:1,17,24). But Abraham had been reckoned righteous before that – in Gen 15:6 – when he was 85 years old. Abraham was justified at least 13-14 years before he was circumcised.

- Abraham was declared righteous before God while he was still a Gentile! Abraham lived in Ur of Chaldees; his father Terah was an idol worshipper (Josh 24:2), and Abraham was uncircumcised. But Abraham believed God and he was made right before God – without any law, any ritual – but by just believing.
- Circumcision was not the means of Abraham's justification; it was the sign (external mark) and seal (authentication) of his justification, which had already taken place.
  - Circumcision was a physical sign that pointed to the fact that the Jews belonged to God, that they were in a covenant relationship with God. In what are you trusting – The sign? Or the Saviour?
  - Circumcision was a seal that attested to the reality of Abraham's faith. It was his faith that justified, not the act of circumcision.

The father of faith, Abraham was circumcised not because it added to his faith but because it attested to his faith. Circumcision didn't make Abraham right before God; it proved he was right before God. Abraham did it as an act of obedience – the outward sign of an inward change – just like our baptism.

- There is a divine purpose behind this - that Abraham might be the spiritual father of all believers, circumcised or uncircumcised (Gal 3:7,29). Faith, not circumcision, is the vital link to Abraham. The rituals follow as signs and seals, but the reality is through faith alone. The fact is that the Jews, if they wanted to call Abraham their father, must exercise faith and not depend on circumcision.

## 3. Not Justified by Law-Keeping (4:13-15)

- Justification is not by law-keeping. In fact, the promise given to Abraham was some 430 years before the law was given at Mt Sinai. The law did not annul the Abrahamic covenant. It was added alongside until Christ should come to fulfil it (Gal 3:16-19). It was not through keeping the law that Abraham and his descendants (including all true believers who are his spiritual descendants) received the promise that they would be heirs of the world. Rather, this promise came by faith.
- The promise made to Abraham was embodied in God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12,15,17).
  - First, God will give Abraham many descendants like the stars in the sky (Gen 13:16; 15:5). Abraham would become the “*father of many nations*” (Gen 17:5; cf. Rom 4:17).
  - Second, God will also give Abraham the land of Canaan (Gen 15:18, 19, 20, 21) in which Abraham would live but that would not be possessed until some five centuries later.
  - Third, the promise involved a blessing of the entire world through Abraham's descendants (Gen 12:3). It would be fulfilled in the giving of a Redeemer, who would be a descendant of Abraham through whom the whole world would be blessed by the provision of salvation (Gal 3:8).