

The Christian Manual: Study 5, Romans 4

Romans Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: How can Paul prove Christianity is not something completely new, something just made up? How can we do this?

Galatians 3:6-9

⁶So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” ⁷Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. ⁸Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” ⁹So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Chapter 4 Look At Abraham

Section 1: Romans 4: 1-8 How Abraham was Justified

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ²If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

⁴Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

⁷“Blessed are those
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

⁸Blessed is the one
whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”

Paul shows how Abraham is the perfect example of everything he has been saying—that everyone is justified by faith. Abraham was the most important person to the Jews. He was their father, the patriarch, the one from whom all Israelites sprang. Not only this, but Abraham’s seed was miraculous. Sarah, his wife, was too old to conceive (she was 90), and yet, she became pregnant. Israel (and by extension all the Jewish people) began with a miracle.

If anyone could have been justified by his own works, it would have been Abraham. But this is not what made Abraham righteous before God. The Scripture says Abraham was made righteous by his belief in God. “. . . Abraham’s righteousness consisted in the fact of his faith in God’s promise. If righteousness is conceived, as in modern Western society, as conformity to an abstract moral code, this equation is indeed hard to understand. However, righteousness in the Bible is not a norm-prescribing ethics, but faithfulness to a relationship.”¹ When God told Abraham that he would have a child—even though Abraham was elderly and Sarah was beyond childbearing, Abraham believed Him. He knew that God was true to His word, even if His word was extraordinary.

This faith, this trust, was credited to Abraham as righteousness. Paul points out that what we earn, we are entitled to. If I have a job and do a day’s work, I can expect a day’s pay. I have earned it. But

¹ William Sanford La Sor, *Old Testament Survey*, pg. 114-115

Abraham received righteousness, not by working for it and deserving it, but by having faith. This is justification by faith and not works.

Justification is an all-or-nothing thing. You either have it or you don’t. “. . . one cannot be more or less Christian. One is a Christian or not a Christian, on this basis. Just as one is born or not born, married in God’s sight or not married, so one has accepted Christ as Savior, and thus is declared justified by God, or not.”² John Westley said, “Justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of the Father whereby for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he ‘showeth forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of sins that are past.’”³

But justification by faith is not just found in Abraham’s example. David also teaches this. In the psalm, David says that those whose sins are not counted against them are blessed. Notice, they *do* sin. They *are* guilty. They are not perfect. But their sins are not counted against them. They are accepted by God apart from sinless performance. It is not that God accepts sin. There is another way.

² Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, pg. 73.

³ In Howard Snyder’s, *A Kingdom Manifesto*, pg. 54

Section 2: Abraham is the Father of All Who have Faith

⁹Is 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. ¹⁰Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹And 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. ¹²And 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.

Read through Genesis 17 for the background of this text.

Paul describes the condition of being forgiven, of being acceptable to God through faith, as blessedness. Blessedness is receiving great benefits from God. These benefits are overwhelming, amazing, beyond our comprehension.

So who gets this blessedness? Is it just the circumcised (as many Jews believed)? Could it be that the uncircumcised are also blessed?

Paul explains Abraham in simple, straight-forward language, bringing up things that were right in front of all the Jews. He uses the word, credited, or reckoned. To reckon is to consider a thing to be so. When scientists first discovered that the earth revolved around the sun, people had to change their thinking and believe it to be so. Here it is God who reckons us as righteous in Christ.

Paul asks, what was Abraham's life condition when he received this blessing—when his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness? The Jew would expect that Abraham was circumcised, but he was actually uncircumcised when he believed in the promise of God and was made righteous. If he was uncircumcised, then it makes perfect sense that God will accept other uncircumcised believers and also account righteousness to them.

What then of the circumcised? Are they left out? Not at all. God will accept them on the same basis as the Jews—by their faith.

Paul is saying that circumcision itself is no guarantee of acceptance by God. Circumcision was a sign of something else, of a righteousness received from God on the basis of faith. All Jews who are circumcised in this way will receive God's righteousness.

Section 3: Not Law, But Faith

¹³It 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. ¹⁴For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Let's unpack this and look at the parts. Firstly, Paul says that if perfect obedience to the law was the means of receiving the promise that God made to the people of Israel, then it is a failed promise. No one will receive it because no one is perfectly righteous in their works. No one can live up to the spirit of the law. No one can be completely loving and selfless. No one can perfectly show the character of God, as the Law requires. That is, no one except Jesus. Everyone else who clings to the Law for righteousness can only expect to receive God's wrath.

What was the promise? The promise was that Abraham's seed would inherit the earth. What does this mean? Does this mean that the actual earth will belong to Abraham's seed? It is more likely that this refers to the wondrous riches to those who are heirs of God and who share in His inheritance. We know that this world will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10) and that a new heaven and earth will be put in its place (Revelation 21). Also, our inheritance is in heaven (1 Peter 1:4). We have to remember that there are many things that are beyond our human comprehension in the Word.

The way to this inheritance is through the righteousness that comes through faith. It is this other way, that doesn't involve the Law, that the promise is fulfilled. This is amazingly liberating. Paul Tournier

wrote, "A man is much more soothed by an absolution pronounced over his real faults than by all the explanations he may be given to exonerate him from his imaginary guilt."⁴ Man is relieved when he admits he is guilty, but is pronounced clean by the blood of Jesus. He is not soothed if he feels his guilt, but tries to explain it away or believe that it is just a feeling with no basis in fact. All around us there are people who know they are guilty before a holy God—they feel it in the core of their being. They try to hide from this guilt, drowning out the voice with many diversions. But the only real cure, the only solution, is being cleansed in the blood of Christ.

Section 4: Abraham's Example of Faith

¹⁶Therefore, 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. ¹⁷As 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.

¹⁸Against 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." ¹⁹Without weakening in his faith, he faced the

⁴ Paul Tournier, *Guilt and Grace*, pg. 44

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. ²⁰Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²²This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” ²³The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, ²⁴but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Whenever we see a “therefore,” in the Scriptures, we need to ask, What it is there for? Paul has made a strong argument. He has demonstrated that Abraham was made righteous by his faith before being circumcised and before the Law had been given to Israel. Because this happened before he was an Israelite (in reality, he was just a pagan who God had called), he is the model of salvation to both the Jew and non-Jew.

The Jews would look to Abraham as their father. The promise to Abraham was that he would be the father of many nations. Even though he and Sarah were far beyond child bearing, God had promised. Abraham believed God more than everything he knew about life. God was more powerful than anything and could do

whatever He wanted to do. And Abraham and Sarah had a miracle child—Isaac. Isaac had Jacob who was the father of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Paul extends this label of father to include all who would come to God as Abraham did. He is the father of many nations because men and women from all nations will come to God as he did—by faith.

Notice what we learn about God through Abraham. God is the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. Abraham and Sarah’s bodies were dead with respect to child bearing. There was no physical possibility for a child. But God gave life to their bodies and called into being a child. This is what Abraham had faith in. We have the same thing in Christ. God calls Jesus, who was dead, to life. He brought into being a new life for Christ and for all who are in Him. Our faith in God’s ability to raise Christ is the same as Abraham’s faith in God’s ability to produce life in Sarah’s dead womb. We also were dead in our sins, but we believed that God could make us alive again in Christ.

Jesus died for our sins and was raised for our Justification. Although we will not attain to perfection in this life—we will always struggle with the flesh and with sin. We will fail and have to repent and be washed by Jesus again and again. Still, we have confidence that in the final judgement, God will declare us Justified. This will not be for any other reason than that we are covered by the blood of Christ. Amen!



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

The Jews claimed Abraham as their father. He was given a promise that his seed would be as many as the stars in the heavens and would bless all of mankind. Abraham believed the promise, and his faith was credited to him as righteousness. Abraham was given the miraculous child, Isaac, as a fulfillment of the promise.

Paul demonstrates that Abraham is really more than any of the Jews understood. He points out that Abraham was given this righteousness before he was circumcised and long before God gave Moses the Law (500 years before!). Paul is essentially saying that Abraham was actually a non-Jew when he had faith in God's promise. And, as a gentile, a man recently delivered from idolatry and polytheism, Abraham is not only the father of the Jews, but truly the father of the Gentiles as well. He is the father of both Jew and Gentile who put their faith in God's promise.

What Paul is trying to say is that there is only one way to God. It is not through perfect obedience to the Law—something that is impossible for humans to do. It is a way apart from the Law where sins are forgiven on the basis of faith in Jesus' death.

This is not something new. It has been God's plan from the beginning. From all eternity the Father and Son and Spirit planned salvation to be through Christ alone.

We need to learn this way, to know what God has provided for all men to be able to come to Him.



CONNECT: Icebreaker

Abraham connected God to his greatest need and desire—having an heir to carry his name and his lineage.

Hand out cards and ask the students to write down their greatest need and desire. They will pick numbers that will team them up with three other students to discuss how God can be connected to this need. After their discussion, they will pray for each other and their needs.



WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Section 1 Romans 4:1-8

Abraham is the perfect example of what Paul has been teaching in the first three chapters. Up to this point, the Jews would have been saying that Paul was crazy to believe in salvation by faith. But Paul shows conclusively that Abraham, the father of the Jews, the one who exemplified their religion, became righteous by his faith in God. David's words say the same thing. It is not that people will be perfect and then stand before God. No one can do this. It is that God has provided another way and Abraham came to God through this other way—righteousness credited by faith.

Section 2 Romans 4:9-15

Look at when Abraham was declared righteous by his faith—it was before he was circumcised. This means before he had received the sign that Jews believed set them apart, the sign of the covenant between them and God. In other words, before Abraham was a Jew, he was counted as righteous because of his faith.

Section 3 Romans 4:13-15

Paul explains that Abraham was not righteous because of his obedience to the Law. Firstly, the Law hadn't been given yet. Secondly, his righteousness was by faith.

Section 3 Romans 4:16-25

The conclusion is that Abraham is the father of both Jews and non-Jews because he received righteousness by faith as both also do.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Section 1 Read Romans 4:1-8

1. How was Abraham made righteous?
2. What is the difference between receiving something because you deserve it and receiving something by grace? How does this apply to Christianity?

Section 2 Read Romans 4:9-12

1. Was Abraham declared righteous before or after he was circumcised? Why is the timing of this so important?
2. Who is Abraham really the father of? Is he your father? Explain.

Section 3 Read Romans 4:13-15

1. What did the Jews think that the Law would bring them? What does the Law actually bring? Why is this?
2. Why is there no transgression where there is no Law?

Section 4 Read Romans 4:16-25

1. How is Abraham the father of many nations?
2. How did God give life to the lifeless and brings into being what is not in the case of both Abraham and in our case?
3. What made Abraham's faith in God's promise so amazing?
4. How are the words, "It was credited to him as righteousness" meant for us as well as Abraham?
5. What do we believe in? How is this similar to Abraham? Why was Jesus crucified and why was He raised?



HOW DOES IT APPLY?

This is a glorious message to all. It is great for those who are not part of the Jewish nation. This means that God had made provision before time to save us through the death of His Son. Whereas we are not part of His chosen people, we are now a chosen race in Christ. We receive salvation and righteousness the same way that the father of us all—Abraham—did. He received righteousness by faith in God’s Word, and we receive salvation and righteousness by faith in God’s Son—the Word.

This is also a wonderful message to the Jewish nation. Sensitive and honest Jews will admit that they have never felt like they had reached the standard of righteousness as it is written in the Law. And Jesus showed that living up to the letter of the Law was not sufficient. People also had to live up to spirit of the Law. They could not just not kill people. Jesus said they had to not hate people. When the Jews look at the spirit of the Law and the perfection it requires, they must feel a desperate realization that they do not measure up. They must feel condemned before the Law. Paul tells the Jews that they have misunderstood God’s real plan. God knew that people would not be able to live the Law. He knew that fallen flesh would fall short.

Because all are incapable of fulfilling the righteous of God on their own strength and goodness, God has provided another way apart for the Law—a way that satisfies the righteousness of God. The way is by His Son, crucified for Jews and for non-Jews. Jesus is the answer for all humanity. He is the only way that all mankind can come to God. Faith in Him, trust in the Father and His plan of salvation will give everyone forgiveness and righteousness.

