**Romans Chapter 4**

The Jews put a lot of confidence in their heritage. In fact, at one point in a conversation with Jesus, the Jewish leaders boasted that they had Abraham as their father (Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8). To a Jew, Abraham was the beginning of their race, the father of them all with whom God chose to establish His covenant – through which the Jews sought their own justification.

* Abraham's righteousness was apart from works - Rom. 4:1-8
* Abraham's righteousness was apart from circumcision - Rom 4:9-12
* Abraham's righteousness was apart from Mosaic Law - Rom 4:13-25

# What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

* 1. In chapter 3, Paul established that justification is a free gift that can only be had by faith. So now Paul deals with Abraham, someone in whom the Jews put a lot of confidence. He was called a "wandering Aramaean" (Deut. 26:5) and a friend of God (2 Chron. 20:7; James 2:23). The Lord appeared to him and established His covenant with him (Gen. 17:1-14; 18:1). Most scholars put him around 1900-2100 B.C.
  2. The Jews believed that Abraham was uniquely righteous and had better grounds than most to boast.

# For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

* 1. Justified by works
     1. Paul continues dismantling the works-righteousness mentality by stating that Abraham has nothing to boast about before God.
  2. But not before God
     1. This deals with the vertical, not the horizontal. The vertical is between God and man. The horizontal is between people.
  3. Note
     1. The order of occurrences in Abraham's life was first faith, then works, then circumcision.
     2. False religious people often say that Abraham proved his faith by his works and, therefore, works are necessary for salvation.
        1. **Islam** "Then when the Trumpet is blown, there will be no more relationships between them that Day, nor will one ask after another! 102 Then those whose balance (of good deeds) is heavy, they will attain salvation: 103 But those whose balance is light, will be those who have lost their souls, in Hell will they abide," (Surah 23:101-103).
        2. **JWs** "there are four requirements for salvation: "Many have found the second requirement more difficult. It is to obey God's laws, yes, to conform one's life to the moral requirements set out in the Bible. This includes refraining from a debauched, immoral way of life. 1 Cor. 6:9,10; 1 Pet. 4:3, 4." (*Watchtower*, Feb. 15, 1983, p. 12)
        3. **Mormonism**  "One of the most fallacious doctrines originated by Satan and propounded by man is that man is saved alone by the grace of God; that belief in Jesus Christ alone is all that is needed for salvation," (Miracle of Forgiveness, Spencer W. Kimball, p. 206)
        4. **Roman Catholicism** that which is necessary for salvation includes the church (CCC 846), baptism (CCC 1257), penance (CCC 980), sacraments (CCC 1129), service and witness to the faith (CCC 1816), keeping the ten commandments (CCC 2036 and 2070), and detachment from riches (CCC 2556).

# For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

* 1. Paul says works did not justify Abraham, but faith.
     1. Gen. 15:6, "Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."
  2. The Jews would react to this statement negatively because they were so entrenched in their works righteousness mentality.
  3. The Jews sought their justification through the 613 commandments found in the Old Testament.
  4. The 10 Commandments were a covenant document penned by the finger of God that was kept in the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle. It was proof to the Jews that God had chosen them to reveal his will and His Law. They were supposed to keep that Law, and so they learned to boast about their ability to keep it and achieve righteousness.
  5. But the justification Abraham had was by faith - before God revealed the Law through Moses.
  6. Justification/Righteousness
     1. The crediting of righteousness is by faith. To credit is a legal term, as is righteousness which is in relation to the Law.

# Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor but as what is due.

* 1. Paul is using simple logic. If you work, you are owed what is due.
  2. But Paul distinguishes between what is owed and what is a gift.
  3. Since the Jews looked to the Law to be justified, then their righteousness is something earned. But Paul contrasts the justification of Abraham with that in the previous verse by referencing Genesis 15:6, where Abraham was justified by faith before the Law was ever given.
  4. He is proving to the Jews (and to us) that justification is by faith.

# But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

* 1. This is a pivotal verse as it is a development of Gen. 15:6, "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."
  2. We have two options here, work and belief. When you only have two things, and one is negated, the other is by itself. It is alone. Therefore, this verse teaches justification by faith alone.
     1. Opponents of the doctrine that justification is by faith alone will often go to James 2:24, which says, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." They make mistakes.
        1. They set Scripture against Scripture.
        2. They failed to read the context.
           1. James 2 talks about true faith versus false faith that is demonstrated by your works before people (James 2:18). This is not talking about justification before God.
  3. Who does not work
     1. Paul has already stated that justification is apart from the works of the Law (Rom. 3:28).
        1. Rom. 3:28, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."
        2. Gal. 2:16, "nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified."
        3. Gal. 2:21, "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."
     2. It does not say "Law." It does not say "Levitical law." It says "works."
  4. Note
     1. When facing this verse, Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox often say that this refers to the priestly Law. This is ridiculous because nothing in the context supports that.
  5. His faith is credited as righteousness
     1. It is not works, nor is it works with faith, that are credited with righteousness. It is faith without works that is credited as righteousness.
  6. To continue the thought from verse 3 (f) above
     1. Justification/Righteousness
        1. The crediting of righteousness is by faith. To credit is a legal term, as is righteousness which is in relation to the Law. Therefore, in verse 5, the one who does NOT WORK is credited with righteousness. So, this is a legal declaration which relates to the Law, which relates to our works.
     2. We are justified by faith without any works of the Law.
  7. Matthew 22:37–40, "And He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.'"

# just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

* 1. Paul continues with the argument of righteousness by faith and turns his attention to David, another key figure in Jewish history.
  2. Paul is pulling in the heavyweights: Abraham, the father of the Israelite nation, and David, the father of the messianic line."

1. **Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered.**

# "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account."

* 1. Paul quotes from Psalm 31:1-2

# Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness."

* 1. It was said of Abraham that he was righteous before the covenant of circumcision was instituted.
     1. Gen. 15:6, "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."
     2. Acts 7:6, "But God spoke to this effect, that his descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years."
  2. To the Jews, circumcision was one of the rites that separated them from the rest of the world. It was a sign of the covenant relationship between God and His people.

# How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised

* 1. Paul is carefully pointing out that circumcision was *after* Abraham's justification (v. 10), apart from any works. This is critical in his theology and New Testament theology.
  2. This is a challenge to the Jews' understanding of covenant-keeping. They put a lot of emphasis on their ability to keep the Law.
  3. Col. 2:11-12 is sometimes referenced for the position that baptism is a possible covenant replacement of O.T. circumcision.
     1. Col. 2:11–12, "and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."
     2. Is baptism the thing that saves us? Is the ceremony of the application of water the means of our justification? Or is it faith
        1. Rom. 3:28, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."
        2. Rom. 4:5, "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness."
        3. Rom. 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"
  4. Note:
     1. In Hebrew “circumcise” is **מוּל**, **מוּל** [*muwl* /mool/]. It occurs 35 Times in the OT. "Circumcision" is **מוּלָה** [*muwlah* /moo·law/], and it occurs once in Ex. 4:26.
     2. In Greek, “circumcise” περιτέμνω peritémnō. It occurs 17 times. "Circumcision" is from the same word.

# and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them

* 1. The sign of circumcision
     1. Circumcision was a seal of the covenant God made with Abraham that he would be a father of a multitude (Gen. 17:1-14). Circumcision involved the shedding of blood – which points to federal headship and to the atonement of Christ.
     2. Abraham had faith in God, which is what justified him. This justification was before circumcision, before baptism, and before the Law. This proves that justification is by faith, something the law-keeping, ceremony-keeping Jews would reject since they assumed righteousness was partly due to their faith in God and their ability to keep His commands.
     3. Circumcision was not a meritorious act. But the Jews connected it with legal necessity in order to obtain salvation – the same as many do today regarding baptism. Circumcision did not induce favor from God. It did not bring salvation, justification, or sanctification. The entrance into the promissory covenant signified the distinction between God's people and the rest of the world and how God would provide Abraham land, descendants, and the blessing to all nations.
     4. It was a God-instituted ceremony whereby the participant entered into a covenant relationship with God. It is promisary – not salvific.
  2. Seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised
     1. Generally, a seal was an engraved item used to produce an image in soft clay or wax. There were different kinds: stamp seals, cylinder seals, scarab, jar handle seals, etc.
     2. It was a means to establish authenticity and legitimacy. Therefore, circumcision was the sign and a seal that signified the legitimacy of the covenant given to Abraham by God.
        1. It It included the shedding of blood - pointing to Christ's sacrifice.
        2. It included federal headship - where the male represents the descendants.
     3. The father of all who believe without being circumcised
        1. Paul is clever. Look how he says that Abraham is the father of the uncircumcised. Due to this, the Jews probably had legalistic convulsion.
           1. Gen. 12:3, "And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed."
           2. Gal. 3:8, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.'"

# and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

* 1. The father of circumcision
     1. Paul is showing how circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:28‑29) is of the gentiles and that justification is for them, too.
        1. Rom. 2:28-29, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."
  2. Our father Abraham
     1. Luke 16:24, "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'"
     2. John 8:53, "Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?"
     3. Acts 7:2, "And he said, 'Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.'"

# For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

* 1. Promise to Abraham
     1. Gen. 12:3, "And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."
        1. Gal. 3:8, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.'"
     2. Gen. 12:7, "The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him."
  2. He would be heir of the world
     1. This means that through Abraham's descendent, Jesus, he would be the Father of a multitude, throughout the whole world.
        1. Rom. 2:28–29, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."
  3. Not through the Law
     1. Paul's use of the term "the Law" refers to the Mosaic Law that came 400 years after Abraham. The Jews boasted in being descendants of Abraham as part of their righteousness. This became legalism, as does any material ceremony that a person keeps to be right with God.
        1. John 8:33 "They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that you say, 'You shall become free'?'"
     2. The Law came 400 years after circumcision which came after Abraham's justification. But, the Jews were putting their faith in their circumcision and their ability to be sanctified before God based on their ability to obey God.
     3. It follows then that the true children of Abraham are those who are such by faith, not by the deeds of the Law. That leaves the legalistic Jews out. What a blow!
  4. The righteousness of faith
     1. Righteousness is according to the Law.
     2. Faith is the means of righteousness.
        1. Rom. 3:28, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."
        2. Rom. 4:5, "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness."
        3. Rom. 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

# For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void, and the promise is nullified;

* 1. If those who are of the Law are heirs
     1. If the Law makes us righteous, then faith is made void.
  2. The promise is nullified
     1. What promise? The promise of justification, land, descendants, etc., as reflected in all the promises which Abraham received: Gen. 12:3, 7; 13:15; 15:1-5, 18; 17:8, 19, and mentioned in Acts 3:25 and Gal. 3:8.
        1. Gen. 12:3 – to bless all nations in Abraham
        2. Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:1-5, 18; 17:8, 19 – Abraham's descendants will be many and have land.
        3. Acts 3:25, "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"
        4. Gal. 3:8, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU."

# for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

* 1. The Law brings about wrath
     1. The Law requires perfection and condemns us when we fail it.
     2. God must be wrathful because He is just and holy. If God did not judge the sinner, then He is approving of evil.
     3. It is the Law that reveals sin.
        1. Rom. 3:20, "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.
        2. Rom. 7:7, "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet."
  2. Where there is no law, there also is no violation
     1. If the Law had never been given, then would there be any need of judgment upon mankind? Yes, because God is the standard of righteousness, whether we know/accept it or not.
        1. Col. 2:14, "having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.
        2. If the "certificate of debt" is the Law and the Law was cancelled, then without the Law there is no sin.
           1. Rom. 5:13, "for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

# For this reason, it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

* 1. Faith must be in accord with grace. Faith is not our work. It is the work of God (John 6:28-29).
  2. Faith is only as good as who it is in.
  3. It is an admission of trust in another, not ourselves. That is why salvation is by faith, not by faith and works.
  4. Grace is the undeserved favor of God. It is based on what God does, not on what we do.

# (as it is written, "A father of many nations have I made you") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

* 1. Who gives life to the dead
     1. Does this refer to the deadness of Sarah's womb, which God enabled to give birth to Isaac? Or, might it refer to the resurrection of Isaac once offered on the altar in Gen. 22?
     2. It seems to be the latter, life to the dead. If that is so, if God gives life to the dead, then how much more ought we to trust in Him, to justify whom He wills?
  2. Calls into being that which does not exist
     1. Doesn't God have the ability to create?
     2. Yes, then our faith in God should be strong in the sight of such great abilities as His.

# In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "So shall your descendants be."

* 1. Hope against hope he believed
     1. No ground for belief other than God's word.
     2. The focus is Abraham's faith. It is critical. Abraham "faithed." That is, he continually exercised deliberate faith and trust in God.
  2. Father of many nations
     1. Abraham is the father of all who faith in God. They are spread out among the nations.
        1. Rom. 2:28–29, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

# Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;

# yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

# and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

* 1. His faith was in God - that God would keep His word - produced a child of promise (Isaac). How else could the promise be kept since God had said to Abraham, "And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).

# Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness.

* 1. Rom. 4:1-5, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness."

# Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,

* 1. The conclusion to this segment is the reiteration of the main point: justification by faith apart from the works of the Law.

# but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,

* 1. Paul finishes the chapter with a statement of hope for all. You do not need to be a Jew and have the Law as a means of righteousness.
  2. Instead, it is by faith that we are justified, Jew and Gentile alike. Therefore, all can come to the throne of God through faith in Jesus.

# He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification."

* 1. Delivered over because of our transgressions
     1. Jesus was crucified because it was the only way to atone for our sins and have us cleansed by His blood.
  2. Raised because of our justification
     1. The resurrection of Jesus is the proof that His cleansing work of the cross was acceptable to God the Father.
     2. Therefore, since Jesus did everything necessary for our salvation, we can then be justified by faith in Him and what He did on the cross. The resurrection is the stamp of approval on His sacrifice.