

# Romans 04 - Salvation by Faith, Not Works

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## **Romans 4**

### (2) Gospel illustrated (4:1-25)

#### (A) Introduction (4:1-3)

##### (a) Introductory question (4:1)

- 1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?
- 1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?
- 1 What, then, are we to say about Abraham, our human ancestor?
- 1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?
  - Paul will now illustrate the theological points he made in Rom 3 by giving us a picture in Abraham
  - Why does Paul develop a NT theology through Abraham? Well Abraham was a very important person in the Bible, the father of the nation of Israel. Because of God's work through Abraham, the nation of Israel came into existence.
  - So if Paul can show how his gospel (developed in Rom 3) is consistent with how God worked with Abraham, he can cement in truth his gospel because it is consistent with how God has worked since Abraham
  - It's proof that what Paul has unfolded thus far in Romans about the gospel is consistent with how God worked with the father of the Jews

##### (b) Logical inference (4:2)

- 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God.
- 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.
- 2 For if Abraham was justified by actions, he would have had something to boast about—though not before God.
- 2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.
  - What Paul will go on to explain is that Abraham was saved completely by faith, not by works at all
  - If Abraham was saved by works, he would have bragging rights, but in 3:27-28 Paul taught that the gospel excludes boasting. God has designed salvation in such a way that once you receive it, you can't brag about it because there's nothing you did to receive it or earn it.

## **Salvation in the OT**

In Rom 4, Paul makes it very clear that the OT way of salvation was the same as the NT way, which is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. To prove this, Paul points us to Abraham, who was saved by faith: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:3). Again, Paul quotes the OT to prove his point—Gen 15:6 this time. Abraham could not have been saved by keeping the Law, because he lived 400+ years before the Law was given!

Paul then shows that David was also saved by faith (Rom 4:6-8, quoting Ps 32:1-2). Paul continues to establish that the OT way of salvation was through faith alone. In Rom 4:23-24 he writes: "The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." In other words, righteousness is "credited" or given to those who have faith in God—Abraham, David, and we all share the same way of salvation.

The Bible's clear message is that the way of salvation has always been through faith. In the OT, it was faith in the promise that God would send a Savior someday (Cf. notes on Gal 3:16). Those who lived in the time of the OT looked forward to the Messiah and believed God's promise of the coming Servant of the Lord (Is 53). Those who exercised such faith were saved. Today we look back on the life, death and resurrection of the Savior and are saved by faith in Jesus Christ's atonement for our sins (Rom 10:9-10).

See note **Justification in the OT** on Gen 15:6; also see [Progressive Revelation](#) for additional details.

### **Genesis 15:6**

How are we to understand this verse? Many Jewish teachers in Paul's day taught that Abraham was an unusually good man and God chose him and justified him on that basis. When that verse says "it was credited to him as righteousness," they thought "it" referred to Abraham's goodness.

A second misunderstanding acknowledges Abraham did not possess righteousness. Because God wanted to save Abraham, God looked for something to accept in place of righteousness. In this interpretation, "it" refers to Abraham's faith. In other words, God decided to treat Abraham's faith as righteousness.

A more accurate understanding is to interpret "it" as referring to neither works or believing. Hermeneutically, "it" should refer back to a noun or verbal noun, but the text doesn't supply one. Thus, we can look at the word "credited" to lead us to the correct interpretation. "Credited" (Heb. *chashab*; Gr. *logizomai*) is a bookkeeping term. Credits must reflect the actual reality of finances. The same accuracy applies to justification. When God saved Abraham, God did not pretend something was true when it wasn't. God credited real righteousness to Abraham—the real righteousness of Jesus. Abraham received that righteousness through the channel of his faith.

(c) Key OT text (4:3)

3 For what does the Scripture say? "**ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.**"

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

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

3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

- Paul states the key passage, which he'll expound upon for the rest of this chapter...Gen 15:6

— To get the context of this passage, you have to understand the context of Gen 15:1-6: God had promised Abraham that he would have innumerable descendants, even at he and Sarah's old age. But Abraham trusted in God's promise, as illogical as it seemed.

— Abraham put aside human logic and simply trusted in the power (omnipotence) of God. He reasoned that if God is omnipotent, then He can make this happen. He also trusted in God's character, since God cannot lie (Num 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18).

— Beside trusting in God's power and His character, Abraham also trusted in something more (Gal 3:16): he believed the promise that he would have innumerable descendants, but he also believed that one of those descendants would be the promised Messiah

— The moment Abraham set aside his human rationale, set aside the world's way of thinking (common sense), and put his trust in God's promises was the moment Abraham was saved

— Thus, Abraham's salvation as outlined in Gen 15 becomes the paradigm for how all people are saved. This is why Paul is anchoring his case in Abraham. If Paul can show that what he has taught so far in Romans is consistent to how God dealt with Abraham, Paul will confirm that what he is teaching is truth.

- "...ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD" - what exactly did Abraham believe? This is outlined in Gal 3:16 (see notes there); also see Soteriology 15 Justification (Rom 5:16); Salvation in the OT (Gal 3:16) for more details about Salvation in the OT.

— According to Gal 3:16, Abraham believed in the promise of seed (plural, referring to Isaac and descendants), and he also believed in Seed (singular), referring to Jesus Christ.

— So what he believed is that from he and Sarah would come innumerable seed (plural) and from that innumerable seed would come one Seed (the Messiah)

— The Bible consistently puts the responsibility to believe on man, not on God (Cf. 1:12-13; 3:16,36; 5:24; 6:47; Acts 16:31; Rom 3:21-22,25-26; 4:3-6; Eph 2:8. The Bible also consistently puts the responsibility for not believing on man (Cf. 3:18; 5:40).

Trusting in God's promise is what constitutes faith and what results in justification. The promises of God vary. These promises constitute the content of faith. The object of faith, however, does not vary. It is always the Person of Jesus Christ.

Note that God "credited" Abraham's faith "to him as righteousness" (v3). Faith itself is not righteousness. Faith is not meritorious in itself. It is only the vehicle by which God's righteousness reaches us. The Bible never says people are saved because of their faith or on the basis of their faith. God saves people *by* or *through* faith. This means faith is necessary, but it is only a channel.

(B) Exposition of Gen 15:6 (4:4-25)

(a) How Abraham was not justified (4:4-16)

(i) Not by works (4:4-8)

(a) Proof from logic (4:4-5)

4 Now to the one who works, the wages are not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

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

4 Now to someone who works, wages are not considered a gift but an obligation.

4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

- Verses 4-5 contrast faith and works:

— Works result in wages that the person working deserves or earns; you don't thank your boss for the "gift" of your paycheck because you worked for it

— Faith receives a gift that the person believing does not deserve or earn. Incredibly, God justifies those who not only fail to deserve justification, but deserve condemnation.

— If I give you something you don't deserve or earn ("grace"); your "trying to deserve it" clouds the graciousness of my gift!

- Compare this verse with Rom 11:6, and you can see how Paul is saying that grace and works are mutually antithetical. Works are rewardable endeavors, their payout is a matter of obligation. SO to say that something is by grace is to either exclude works completely, or it is to change the nature of grace so that it is no longer grace at all.

[Rom 11:6]

## **Lordship Salvation**

Today, there are many subtle and obvious perversions of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Advocates of Lordship Salvation effectively add works to faith when they make commitment to Jesus Christ necessary for salvation. This essentially "front loads" the gospel with works to gain salvation. Some Lordship Salvation advocates believe that an

unbeliever only has to be willing to submit to Christ's Lordship to obtain justification. However, this is changing the human work from submitting to being willing to submit. Lordship Salvation adherents believe that to exclude submission to Christ's Lordship from the gospel message amounts to antinomianism. They define antinomianism as: the idea that behavior is unrelated to faith, or that Christians are not bound by any moral law. Antinomianism radically separates justification and sanctification, making practical holiness elective.

Clearly this is not the position of most Christians who believe that faith alone is what God requires, instead of faith plus commitment.

Another modern form of "works salvation" accompanies an incorrect interpretation of the doctrine of perseverance. This view says that if a Christian does not continue in the faith and in holiness their entire life, allowing for occasional lapses, they were not a true believer. This view "back loads" the gospel with works. Faithfulness to the Lord thus becomes a condition for salvation.

Some who hold these views try to get away from their connection with works by saying that it is God who produces submission and/or sanctification in the believer, not the believer himself. Nonetheless it is the professing Christian whom God holds responsible for their choices, not Himself.

*Indeed, every command to the believer implies the necessity of his involvement as part of the process of sanctification.* [Ryrie]

Another claim that those who hold these views give is that what the Bible affirms is that man cannot merit eternal life. This is not the same, they say, as doing something necessary to obtain it, such as submitting or remaining faithful. Yet the Bible uses the word "works," not just "merit" (Cf. v2,4,5; Eph 2:8-9). For more detail on Lordship Salvation, see:

[Soteriology 07 - Lordship Salvation \(Matt 16:24-25\)](#)

[Soteriology 08 - Lordship Salvation \(Matt 3:2\)](#)

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

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

5 However, to someone who does not work, but simply believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.

**5** But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

- This is the same point Paul made in v2...if Abraham could've worked for his salvation, he would've had reason to boast, but Paul has explained that God has designed salvation in such a way that it completely excludes the possibility human boasting

- "...does not work" - present tense, continuous action: "Who *keeps on* not working..."

— This verse demonstrates that belief in Christ for our salvation/justification is NOT a work in God's eyes. It is the only thing man can do before God that is non-meritorious.

— Scripture never considers faith a work. Instead, faith is always contrasted to works, as Paul makes clear in this passage. Human faith is a passive response that receives God's free gift of eternal life. Who would accuse a beggar of working by holding out his hand to receive a dollar bill?

— Calvinism goes to great lengths to make sure man does not have any role in believing because they say faith is a work. However, the Bible is clear that in God's eyes, faith is non-meritorious, it is NOT a work. It is the only thing required by God for a person to be justified before Him.

— If faith is a work, like Calvinism believes, then it's a work whether you do it before or after being regenerated. So for those Calvinists who insist faith is a work, they are teaching works salvation because we all believe that faith is a condition for salvation.

— But faith is not a work...it's simply putting your trust in the work of another, in this case God. Ceasing to work so as to depend on the works and merit of another isn't a work and merit of your own.

— With Paul's assertion here, how can anyone suppose that our works are the real grounds on which we can be assured of our salvation? How can good works be indispensable to my certainty that I am justified without works?

— ***How can God say, "My justification is for the person who does not work, but assurance of My justification is only for someone who does?"***

- "...his faith" - Paul repeatedly references Abraham's faith (Cf. 4:12,16) or "his faith" (here)

— There is no mention, however, that God gave Abraham his faith (Cf. Eph 2:8, see notes there)

— Paul also mentions his own personal faith without a reference to the fact that God gave it to him as a gift ("my faith," Rom 1:12). Other references such as "your faith" or "their faith" are numerous in the NT:

- Matt 9:2,22,29 - "...seeing ***their faith***"; "***...your faith*** has made you well"; "***...according to your faith***"
- Mark 2:5 - "...seeing ***their faith***"
- Mark 5:34 - "***...your faith*** has made you well"
- Mark 10:52 - "***...your faith*** has made you well"
- Luke 5:20 - "...seeing ***their faith***"
- Luke 7:50 - "***Your faith*** has saved you"
- Luke 8:25,48 - "***Where is your faith?***"; "***...your faith*** has made you well"
- Luke 17:19 - "***...your faith*** has made you well"
- Luke 18:42 - "***...your faith*** has made you well"

- Luke 22:32 - "...that **your faith** would not fail"
- Rom 1:8,12 - "...because **your faith** is being proclaimed"; "...each of us by the **other's faith, both yours and mine.**"
- Rom 4:5,12,16 - "...**his faith**"; "...the **faith of our father Abraham**"; "...of the **faith of Abraham**"
- 1 Cor 2:5 - "...so that **your faith**"
- 1 Cor 15:14,17 - "...**your faith** is also in vain"; "...**your faith** is worthless"
- 2 Cor 10:15 - "...that as **your faith** grows"
- Phil 2:17 - "...service of **your faith**"
- Col 1:4 - "...**your faith** in Christ Jesus"
- Col 2:5 - "...**your faith** in Christ"
- 1 Thess 1:8 - "...the news of **your faith** toward God"
- 1 Thess 3:2,5,10 - "...for the benefit of **your faith**"; "...find out about **your faith**"; "...lacking in **your faith**"
- 2 Thess 1:3 - "...**your faith** in increasing abundantly"
- Philemon 6 - "...the fellowship of **your faith**"
- 1 Peter 1:9,21 - "...the outcome of **your faith**"; "...so that **your faith**"
- 2 Peter 1:5 - "...in **your faith**"

In Calvinism, if you say that you were saved by the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, and based on that conviction, you exercised your own free will to place your faith in Jesus Christ, then you are preaching a "works" gospel (because to them faith is a work) and you just diminished the glory of God.

God has to do everything in order to receive glory. So if a person has free will and exercised that free will according to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, that free will exercise of faith, to Calvinism, diminishes the glory of God.

However, the Bible clearly teaches that God gives every person free will, and when His creatures use their free will against Him, God's will is accomplished through that (Cf. Gen 50:20), and that does not take away from God's glory...it maximizes it. Only God can use the free moral will of His enemies to achieve His purposes.

Can the Bible contradict itself? Interpret the obscure passages by the clear passages...  
*If the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense.* [Martin Luther]

(b) Proof from the OT (4:6-8)

6 just as David also speaks of the blessing of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:



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

6 Likewise, David also speaks of the blessedness of the person whom God regards as righteous apart from actions:

6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

7 "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.

7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered.

7 "How blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered!

7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

8 "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

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

8 How blessed is the person whose sins the Lord will never charge against him!"

8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

- Verses 7-8 are quoted from Ps 32:1-2...

— David lived and wrote this Psalm 1000 years after the time of Abraham, during the dispensation of the Law

— Paul's point is that even though David wrote this during a different dispensation, the reality of salvation by faith alone was still operative, no matter what other "house rules" may be in place at any given time

— Salvation by faith alone is how God has always worked...Paul's readers should not be shocked that God justifies by faith alone because this is what God has always done, no matter what dispensation they happen to be in

- It is not the reckoning of people's good works, but God's act in *not* reckoning their sins against them that constitutes forgiveness

— God keeps a record of our works, so He may reward us when Jesus comes; but He does not keep a record of our sin

— Since God is omniscient, He knows everything that has ever happened. By saying God "forgets" our sin means that He will never bring us into judgment for our sins or condemn us for them.

The words about Abraham early in this chapter are in a positive form—God credited Abraham with righteousness. David's words from Ps 32 are in a negative form. Paul repeated David's use of the same word—"credited" or "counted"—to speak of

unrighteousness. God has completely removed the sins of believers by placing them on His Son (Heb 9:28).

### **So Great a Salvation**

What a great salvation God has given us! On one hand, God imputes or credits His righteousness to us, a righteousness we do not have (and cannot obtain on our own). On the other hand, He imputes our sin to Jesus. This is the **"great exchange"** of the Gospel (2 Cor 5:21). Believers can look at the cross and know that God has punished our sin in Christ, completely and forever, with nothing left to pay.

(ii) Not by circumcision (4:9-12)

(a) Circumcision came later (4:9-10)

9 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

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

9 Now does this blessedness come to the circumcised alone, or also to the uncircumcised? For we say, "Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness."

9 Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

- The examples of Abraham and David, both Jews, led Paul to this question

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

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

10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was he circumcised or uncircumcised? He had not yet been circumcised, but was uncircumcised.

10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision?

- Jewish circumcision is described in Gen 17...the Jews circumcised their male children, usually on the eighth day after birth, as a sign that they belong to the covenant that God entered into with Abraham

— Paul is answering a possible question that would arise, that maybe Abraham was not saved by faith alone, but rather was saved by his circumcision

— Paul's point is that circumcision (Gen 17) came after Abraham was saved (Gen 15). There was at least 14 years between Abraham's salvation (Gen 15:6) and when God instituted circumcision (compare Gen 16:16 with 17:1). Abraham was saved during a time when

circumcision didn't exist, thus it's difficult to argue that Abraham was saved by circumcision since circumcision didn't exist at the time Abraham was saved.

(b) Circumcision is a sign (4:11a)

(c) Abraham is the father of all believing (4:11b-12)

11 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,

11 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,

11 Afterward he received the mark of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. Therefore, he is the ancestor of all who believe while uncircumcised, in order that righteousness may be credited to them.

11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

- Paul is saying that Jewish circumcision has no salvific power...it does not have the power to save anyone. It's simply a sign that a person is under the Abrahamic Covenant.

— In this way, circumcision is similar to water baptism today...it has no salvific power, but rather is a sign that a person is born again and has a new nature. A sign that we are now identified in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It is an outward symbol of an inward reality, just like circumcision.

- "...the father of all who believe" - Abraham is the father of every believer, and we are saved by the exact same way Abraham was saved. Thus, since Abraham was the first to be saved by faith alone, all who are saved after him can only be saved by faith alone.

— This includes the uncircumcised believers (v11b) and the circumcised believers (v12)

12 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.

12 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.

12 He is also the ancestor of the circumcised—those who are not only circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

- If Abraham was saved by circumcision, he could not be the father of all believers (because not all believers are circumcised), but only the father of the circumcised

— If Abraham was saved by his circumcision, then that would remove from him the role/title of the father of all believers. He is called the father of all believers because how he was saved was a prototype or design for the salvation of every single human being who followed him.

### **Salvation Not by Rituals**

We call Abraham our “father,” not because we “become Jewish” by coming to Christ. He is the Father of the faithful because he had faith prior to being circumcised. Abraham was justified as a *Gentile* before he was circumcised; his age when he was declared righteous is not stated (Gen 15:6), but when Hagar bore him Ishmael, he was 86 (Gen 16:16). After that, God instructed Abraham to circumcise all his male descendants as a sign of God’s covenant with him...This was done when Abraham was 99 (Gen 17:24). *Therefore the circumcision of Abraham followed his justification by faith by more than 13 years.*

(iii) Not by Law (4:13–16)

(a) Inheritance by faith and not Law (4:13)

**13** 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.

**13** 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.

**13** For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the Law, but through the righteousness produced by faith.

**13** For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

- The Law was given to Israel at Mount Sinai, which was ~1445 BC; the story of Abraham took place about 600 years earlier, ~2000 BC

— So it's obvious that Abraham was not saved by the Law because the Law was not given by God to Israel for 600 years after Abraham was saved (Gen 15)

— So Abraham could not have been saved by circumcision because that didn't come into existence for two chapters after he was saved (Gen 17); he also couldn't have been saved by the Law because that didn't come into existence for ~55 chapters after Abraham was saved (Ex 20).

(b) Law nullifies faith (4:14)

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

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

14 For if those who were given the Law are the heirs, then faith is useless and the promise is worthless,

14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

- Faith and the Law are polar opposites; you cannot get more opposite than faith and Law

— Faith comes through trust, which is non-meritorious; Law involves ritual and performance

— Paul says don't you dare mix faith and Law because they are like oil and water...they are naturally counter to one another

— If you could merit salvation through works of the Law, then faith is void and the promise is nullified

- If keeping the Law was a condition for the fulfillment of the promise, there would be two effects:

1. "...void" - *kenos*, empty, without content. Faith would be irrelevant; faith is no longer necessary if justification is based on works
2. "...nullified" - the promise would be worthless; it would no longer be a promise because it required something from the receiver

(c) Law cannot save (4:15)

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

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

15 for the Law produces wrath. Now where there is no Law, neither can there be any violation of it.

15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

- If the Law cannot save, why did God give the Law? He gave the Law to show us *our need* for salvation

— The Law tells me how I'm a failure spiritually

— If you can look at the 10 Commandments with pride, then you don't understand them.

But if you look at the 10 Commandments and are defeated and humiliated at your lack of keeping them, you rightly understand them.

— The 10 Commandments are not a ladder by which we climb our way to heaven. That is the pharisaical interpretation of the 10 Commandments, but Paul is saying that was never the intent of the 10 Commandments. The purpose was to reveal our failures, especially in light of Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount.

- My heart has committed sins that my hands have not gotten around to doing yet. The Law of God, especially Commandment #10 (thou shalt not covet) stands in judgment of what I think, not just what I do.
- God gave the Law as an instrument of condemnation. Paul will explain this further in 7:7, and he has already dealt with this issue on 3:20.
- "...the Law brings about wrath" - the law can only bring wrath, not blessing, because no one can keep the law perfectly
- "brings about" - keeps on producing; continuous action
- No one can keep the Law fully; therefore God, in wrath against sin, judges those who disobey
- The law can only curse. It cannot bless. It intensified sin by giving it the specific character of transgression, an overstepping of a prohibition (Cf. 5:13), making it the wilful violation of known law.
- Why is this so important to us? If we come to God on the basis of the law, the only result can be wrath. Then we must be perfect on the basis of our own merit. It's the same principle—the same basis—that is the same trap for us. We, too, fall into the trap of attempting to rely on our own merit, rather than His.
- The law cannot be the means of earning what was freely given

(d) Abraham the father of all believers (4:16)

- 16** 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,
- 16** 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,
- 16** Therefore, the promise is based on faith, so that it may be a matter of grace and may be guaranteed for all of Abraham's descendants—not only for those who were given the Law, but also for those who share the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.
- 16** Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,
- Inheritance by faith alone makes Abraham, spiritually speaking, the father of all believers
  - If Abraham was saved by the Law, he could not be the father of all believers, but only the father of the Law keepers. The problem with this is that there are no Law keepers, so he'd be the father of no one, including himself.
  - But Abraham has this role/title that he is the father of all believers because he was saved by faith alone, and this is the same way that every other member of the human race is

saved

- "...faith" - faith is only as good as its object. Abraham's faith was not in his own ability to believe or to act. Faith in God's promise is essential for two reasons:

1. Promise-based faith preserves the grace that makes salvation possible. No one will be saved by works. However, the opposite of working for your salvation is not inaction or passivity. True faith actively clings to God and His promise.
2. Promised-based faith opens the way for salvation to all. Regardless of spiritual advantages (Jews) or disadvantages (Gentiles), all who believe are God's children. This makes Abraham the father of Jewish and Gentile believers alike and fulfills God's promise to Abraham.

- "...promise" - God's promise to Abraham had many dimensions: personal blessing, a land God would give to him and his descendants, blessing on his descendants, and a Redeemer to come.

(b) How Abraham was justified (4:17-22)

(i) God as the object of faith (4:17)

17 (as it is written: "I HAVE MADE YOU A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS") in the presence of Him whom he believed, *that is*, God, who **gives life to the dead and calls into being things that do not exist.**

17 (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.

17 As it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations." Abraham acted in faith when he stood in the presence of God, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that don't yet exist.

17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, *even* God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

- Quoted from Gen 17:5...

— Paul supports his conclusion in v16 with scriptural authority, quoting God's covenantal promise from Gen 17:5

- Now leaving how Abraham *wasnot* justified (by works circumcision, or the Law), Paul now teaches us how Abraham *was* justified...

- Abraham was justified (made right before God) because God was the object of Abraham's faith

— Abraham set aside his human logic, he set aside his common sense, and he simply believed what God said to him

- "...gives life to the dead and calls into being things that do not exist" - if this is true about God, then how hard is it to believe that he can create descendants from a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman?

— It's not hard to believe a promise like this against the backdrop of God's omnipotence and character, and that is what Abraham trusted

### **Israel and the Church Are Distinct**

Don't make an eschatological mistake: Abraham is the father of all the faithful—but that is not a basis to equate the Church with Israel. The fact that believers in this Church Age are identified with Abraham and God's covenant with him does not mean that the physical and temporal promises to Abraham and his physical descendants are either spiritualized or abrogated. It simply means that God's covenant, and Abraham's response of faith to it, have spiritual dimensions as well as physical and temporal aspects.

The Jew is still a Jew and the Gentile is a still Gentile. Within the Church there is no distinction; the Church is a 3rd category which can include both (Rom 1:16; 10:12; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). Yet, Israel and Church are distinct. Different origins, different destinies.

God has not abrogated His promises to Abraham about his physical, believing descendants, the regenerate nation Israel, inheriting the land [Gen 15:18-21; 22:17]. These promises still stand, and they will be fulfilled in the Millennium. This will be dealt with in Rom 9-11.

#### **(ii) Obstacles to Abraham's faith overcome (4:18-22)**

##### **(a) Abraham believed despite impossibilities (4:18-19)**

18 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."

18 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."

18 Hoping in spite of hopeless circumstances, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," just as he had been told: "This is how many descendants you will have."

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

- Quoted from Gen 15:5...

- "...against hope he believed" - Abraham's "hope" rested solely on God's promise; he had no hope of obtaining descendants naturally; it was a hopeless situation: Abraham was 100; Sarah was 90 (when Isaac was born).

— He believed God in the face of discouraging facts, and despite the knowledge that what God had promised could not happen naturally. He believed God when the evidence and



circumstances were sharply pointed against God's promise.

— All physical evidence contradicted God's promise. Faith does not ignore circumstances; it faces circumstances and sees beyond them to God.

— However, faith is not irrational—nothing is more rational than to believe God's Word. True faith stands with God and His Word, even when doing so appears foolish from a human perspective.

— Abraham's faith was not a condition for the reception of the promise, but he believed with the intention of receiving it

19 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;

19 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;

19 His faith did not weaken when he thought about his own body (which was already *as good as* dead now that he was about a hundred years old) or about Sarah's inability to have children,

19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb:

- There were numerous logical, valid reasons that Abraham could've cited to not believe God, but Abraham put aside all of the perceived impossibilities and simply trusted in God's promise

(b) Abraham trusted in God's character and power (4:20-21)

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

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

20 nor did he doubt God's promise out of a lack of faith. Instead, his faith became stronger and he gave glory to God,

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

- When Paul says that Abraham did not doubt because of unbelief, he doesn't mean that Abraham never had momentary hesitations, but rather that he avoided a deep-seated and permanent attitude of distrust and inconsistency in his relationship to God and His promises

21 and being **fullyassured** that what *God* had promised, He was able also to perform.

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

21 being absolutely convinced that God would do what he had promised.

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

- "...fully assured" - brimful; no room for doubt. He relied on the character of God. He knew that God cannot lie. He knew that God was also omnipotent.

— Abraham understood God's character enough that he knew that God cannot lie, so if God said something, Abraham knew (however improbable or illogical it might have seemed) that God would make it come true

— Abraham knew that God and His character are so powerful that there is no promise He can make that He cannot fulfill. What God orders, He pays for.

— Abraham gave glory to God by believing Him, in that what God had promised, He was able to perform

(c) Outcome of Abraham's faith = justification (4:22)

22 Therefore IT WAS ALSO **CREDITED** TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

22 Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness.

22 This is why it was credited to him as righteousness."

22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

- "...CREDITED" - righteousness was given on credit because it had not been paid for yet

— It was paid for when the second member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, was crucified on a Roman cross 2000 years later

— It is similar to how we use a credit card today...we get a benefit now (purchase) but don't have to pay for it until later

— This is true of every OT believer (Noah, Job, David, etc.)...they all gained the righteousness of God on credit

(c) Application to all believers (4:23-25)

(i) Not for Abraham's sake alone (4:23)

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

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

23 Now the words "it was credited to him" were written not only for him

**23** Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

- This is not just some OT story from ~4000 years ago that has no bearing on us today...in fact, there is no more relevant or pertinent story that you can read than this one

(ii) We must also believe the promise (4:24a)

(iii) Promise (4:24b-25)

(a) Father raised Christ (4:24b)

24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, to *us* who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,

24 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,

24 but also for us. Our faith will be regarded in the same way, if we believe in the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

- This story applies not to Abraham only, but also for us...

- Abraham believed a promise of God and consequently received salvation; conversely, God holds out a promise to every human being alive today, but the promise is of no value unless you believe it (trust the promise)

- We must trust the promise just like father Abraham trusted the promise 4000 years ago. The method of salvation is the same for Abraham and for all time: God gives us a promise, we trust the promise, then we are saved. That's it!

- The content of our faith is not specific, but the object of our faith is always Jesus

- Paul was not saying here that we need to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. That is important, as he says elsewhere (1 Cor 15), not as a condition of salvation—but because it is a fact of history.

- ***The resurrection was not part of the saving work of Christ, but was the consequence of it. Having paid the debt of man's sin, death had no claim on Him because He had not sinned Himself*** (Cf. 6:23).

- Paul intended his mention of God raising Jesus here to help the reader remember that He is the same God who brings life out of death as the God Abraham believed.

(b) Christ died for our sins (4:25a)

(c) Christ's resurrection (4:25b)

(d) Our justification (4:25c)

25 *He* who was delivered over because of our wrongdoings, **and was raised** because of our **justification**.

25 *He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

25 He was sentenced to death because of our sins and raised to life to justify us.

25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

- So we believe what the Scripture says: that God the Son died on a cruel Roman wooden cross 2000 years ago to pay the punishment for the sins of every single person who has ever lived. The penalty for sin that I deserved and should've had to endure was instead borne by Him in my place.

- "...and was raised" - God validated/authenticated that sin transaction through the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and His subsequent ascension to heaven
- There are many plausible and compelling arguments that prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ
- Simon Greenleaf, a Harvard Law professor, was a master in the rules of evidence. He was challenged by his students to take the rules of evidence to disprove the resurrection of Christ. So he set out to disprove the resurrection using the rules of evidence and discovered that the resurrection could not be disproved. In fact, it was completely provable, which brought Simon Greenleaf to faith in Christ.
- We can all make these arguments, but they don't help at all unless you take God at His Word. Argumentation or persuasion does not get you the righteousness of God. There has to be a point in one's life where they trust God's character and God's power to keep His promises, however implausible or illogical they might seem on the surface, and simply believe. That is when the righteousness of Christ is transferred to you.
- What must one believe to be saved?
- I must believe that God stepped out of eternity into time through the Incarnation, to die on a Roman cross 2000 years ago
- I must believe that He died on that cross not to show me how much He loved me (although He did demonstrate that), and not to show me how to live a sacrificial life (although that's part of it), but that He died on that cross to absorb the wrath of God against sin, in my place.
- "...justification" - the result of believing in the two things above. Justification is the forensic legal declaration of innocence that a person receives the moment that person puts their trust in Christ
- The moment one trusts in Christ, there is a verbal announcement of the verdict of not guilty because the righteousness of God has been transferred (imputed) to you, in the same exact way the righteousness of God was credited to Abraham at the point of personal faith

The simplest definition of justification is: God's pronouncement of a believer as righteous (Cf. Rom 4:25; 5:16,18). A more lengthy definition might be: The act of God by which a sinner who believes in Christ is declared righteous on the basis of what Christ has done for them on the cross.

Justification is a declarative act, external to the sinner, distinguished from an act within a sinner's nature and changing that nature; a judicial act, as distinguished from a sovereign act; an act based upon and logically presupposing the sinner's union with Christ, as distinguished from an act which causes and is followed by that union with Christ.

Augustus H. Strong defines justification as the following: *By justification we mean that judicial act of God by which, on account of Christ, to Whom the sinner is united by faith, He declares that sinner to be no longer exposed to the penalty of the law, but to be restored to His favor. Or, to give an alternative definition from which all metaphor is excluded: Justification is the reversal of God's attitude toward the sinner, because of the sinner's new relation to Christ. God did condemn; He now acquits. He did repel; He now admits to favor.*

## **Application**

In Rom 4, Paul presented several irrefutable reasons why justification is by faith alone in Christ alone:

1. Since justification is a gift, it cannot be earned by works (v1-8)
2. Since Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, circumcision has no relationship to justification (v9-12)
3. Since Abraham was justified centuries before the Law, justification is not based on the Law (v13-17)
4. Abraham was justified because of his faith in God, not because of his works (v18-25)
  - Jesus' resurrection validates the adequacy of the payment for us all
  - "It is finished" - Gr. *Tetelestai* - "Paid in full!" (John 19:30)
  - The ransom has been paid. The divine justice has been appeased. The holiness of God has been vindicated. ...And the believing sinner is declared justified from all things. Such is the testimony of Rom 4.
  - We can't add to it. *It is blasphemy to even try.*