

Romans 04 - Salvation by Faith, Not Works; Examples: Abraham, David; How Abraham Was Justified; Application to All Believers

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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. He's aiming these comments primarily at his Jewish readers.

— 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.

— Paul's readers could have understood faith as being a new method of salvation, since he has been contrasting faith with the Mosaic Law. But if Paul can show how the gospel he is teaching (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 throughout the ages 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. Justification by faith is NOT a new concept. It did not come to fruition in the NT or with the death/resurrection of Christ.

— God has always justified people by faith alone.

- "...flesh" - refers to Abraham's circumcision.

(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.

- "...if" - first class condition, the condition of assumed reality. It assumes the truth of the premise for the sake of argument, or it simply states a fact.

- What Paul will go on to explain is that Abraham was saved completely by faith, not by works at all.

— If Abraham was indeed saved by works, he would have bragging rights, but in 3:27-28 Paul taught that the gospel excludes boasting. Thus Abraham could not have been saved by works since 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.

— But James 2:21 says that Abraham was "justified by works" when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar. Paul is saying here that Abraham could not have been justified by works. How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction?

— We have to look at the original audience and what specifically each author is talking about. James is writing to Jewish believers in Christ. His purpose is to urge his readers to grow in their progressive sanctification by engaging in good works.

— Paul, on the other hand, is not talking about his reader's progressive sanctification. He's talking about their justification. Paul's audience was saved, but Paul is teaching them about their justification, grounding them in solid soteriology. James is not telling his readers how to get saved, or giving them a lesson in soteriology, he's describing to them the need to fulfill the purpose of their justification in their daily lives.

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 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. There is no way that 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 means 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 everyone today 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.

(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.

- "For" - provides the basis of the rejection of any thought that Abraham may have been justified by works.

- Paul quotes the key passage that he will 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. 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 (Cf. 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" - in Paul's day, many rabbis taught that Abraham was justified because of his obedience rather than because of his faith. They pointed to Gen 26:5.

— What exactly did Abraham believe? What Abraham believed is outlined in Gal 3:16 (see notes there). He believed in the promise of "seed" (*zera*, plural, referring to Isaac and innumerable descendants).

— The interesting thing about "seed" (*zera*) in this verse is that it is a collective singular (a word that remains the same in both the singular and the plural sense; i.e. sheep, hair). What this means is that there is a double promise here that Abram believed: the promise of "seed" (plural) meaning numerous descendants, and the promise of "seed" (singular), referring to the Messiah.

— *zera* denotes all of the descendants of an ancestor, but isn't normally used of one person. When it is used of one person, such as in this case, it points to the Person who is in some way outstanding; not one Descendant among many, but *the* Descendant.

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

- "...CREDITED" - *logizomai*, this word appears in both the LXX of Gen 15:6 and here in Rom 4:3. Paul uses this term a total of 11x in this chapter (4:3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,22,23,24). It means "to put on someone's account."

— God "credited" Abraham's faith "to him as righteousness" as a judicial act. Faith itself is not righteousness. Faith is not a work that earns righteousness. Faith is non-meritorious. It is not something we do that adds to God's work that results in justification. 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.

— Today, Reformed theology warns about "easy believism," a term they use for the teaching that faith alone is all that is necessary for salvation. And? Faith is the only thing that resulted in Abraham's justification.

— Abraham didn't simply acknowledge certain facts as true (give mental ascent to them), saving faith goes beyond that. It rests one's hope on the future on them, without adding anything else. Saving faith is trust in God and specifically in His promise to us. The object of faith, however, does not vary. It is always the Person of Jesus Christ.

(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.

- 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 and earned it. In fact, the employer is indebted to the employee until the wages are paid.

— Faith, on the other hand, 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), if you try to deserve it by doing something, your works cloud/overshadow the graciousness of my gift!

— Paul illustrates this concept in 11:6:

Rom 11:6: But if *it is* by grace, *it is* no longer on the basis of works, since *otherwise* grace is no longer grace.

— 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 (in this case justification) 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.

- "...a favor" - *charis*, grace; undeserved favor. If you're employed and you work at 40-hour work week, you have earned your agreed-upon wage. The paycheck you receive from your employer is not "undeserved favor"...you earned it!

- Today, there are so many perversions to the doctrine of justification that Paul is laying out here. Maybe the biggest perversion is Lordship Salvation, which effectively adds works to faith when they make total commitment to Jesus necessary for salvation.

— This is basically "front loading" the gospel. It's combining the first tense of salvation, justification, with the second tense, progressive sanctification, and stating that an unbeliever must include both faith (justification) and works (sanctification) in order to be saved.

— Lordship Salvation believes that an unbeliever must submit to Christ's lordship over every area of their life in order to be saved. They are essentially bringing in requirements that the Bible lays out for sanctification, and "front loading" those onto requirements for justification. Nowhere in this passage, or anywhere in Romans, or anywhere in the NT, is this requirement documented.

— Another more subtle form of works salvation is the Calvinist doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. This view says that if a professing Christian does not

continue in faith and in holiness all of their life, allowing for occasional lapses, they were never a "true" believer.

— This view "back loads" the gospel with works. Faithfulness to the Lord thus becomes a condition for salvation. This incorrect interpretation of perseverance goes hand in hand with Lordship Salvation. See [Calvinism: Perseverance of the Saints](#) for a complete refutation of this doctrine.

[Rom 11:6]

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." 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. They obviously have never read, or simply ignore, this verse. 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 everyone believes 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? In other words, how can God say, "My salvation is for the person who does not work, but assurance of My salvation is only for someone who does?"

— We need to stop thinking of faith as though believing in the Savior means somehow helping the Savior save you. This is the antithesis of what Paul says in this verse. The beggar who receives bread did not bake it. The Israelite who looked at the bronze serpent did not fashion its healing provision. And the sinner who believes in Christ did not shed Christ's blood, satisfy God's holiness, defeat death, or raise Jesus from the grave. Faith simply receives, Christ is the One who saves.

- "...justifies the ungodly" - it isn't that God is happy with our ungodly condition. We are not justified because of our ungodliness, but in spite of it.

- "...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," Cf. 1:12). Other references such as "your faith" or "their faith" are numerous in the NT:

- Matt 6:30 - "... *You of little faith!*"
- Matt 8:26 - "...*you men of little faith*"
- Matt 9:2,22,29 - "...seeing *their faith*"; "...*your faith has made you well*"; "...*according to your faith*"
- Matt 14:31 - "*You of little faith*"
- Matt 16:8 - "*You men of little faith*"
- Mark 2:5 - "...seeing *their faith*"
- Mark 4:40 - "...*Do you still have no 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 12:28 - "... *You of little faith!*"
- 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.

In their eyes, 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, somehow 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? No. If it appears that it does, 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,

- To answer the possible objection from his readers that Abraham lived before the Law was given, so the plan of salvation needed to be different for him than those who lived after the Law was given, Paul now cites another pillar of Jewish history, David, whose words harmonize with what Paul is teaching in this passage.

— Abraham lived about 600 years before the Mosaic Law; David lived under the Mosaic Law. Abraham was from the patriarchal period; David was from the monarchal period. Abraham appears in the Law section of Hebrew Bible (the OT); David appears in the Prophets.

— David was a strong advocate of the Mosaic Law, but he did not believe that observing it was the key/path to justification.

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.

- 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. The passage quoted does not state directly that David received justification by faith, but he did.

— The passage stresses that those to whom God "credits" righteousness (the justified) are blessed.

— 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 have been in place at the 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.

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.

- "...TAKE INTO ACCOUNT" - *logizesthai*, translated as "credits" in v6 but is translated here as "take into account."

— Paul's point is that, just like Abraham's example above, 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 that 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.

- David wrote Ps 32, one of his penitential psalms, after he had sinned with Bathsheba and Uriah. Paul not only proved that David believed in imputed rather than earned righteousness, but he also demonstrated that when a believer sins, it does not cancel his justification.

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.

- "...this blessing" - the blessing of the forgiveness of sins referred to by David in v7 (Cf. Ps 32:1).

- "...on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also?" - 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?

- Paul points out that Abraham was saved while he was uncircumcised. God gave promises to Abraham when he was 75 years old (Cf. Gen 12:1-4); he was saved in Gen 15:6; but he was not circumcised until he was 99 years old (Cf. Gen 17:1,11,24).

— Therefore, Abraham's righteousness could not have been based on circumcision. It could only be based on faith. So from Abraham's side, no work on his part was involved in this blessing.

— 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. It's easy to see through the chronology of Genesis that this could not be true.

— Paul's point is that circumcision (Gen 17) came after Abraham was saved (Gen 15). There was at least 13 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 believewithout 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:

- "...the sign of circumcision" - circumcision was the "sign" of the Abrahamic Covenant that God made with Abraham.

- "...a seal of the righteousness of the faith" - circumcision was also a "seal"—the outward evidence of the righteousness of faith, but was not the cause of it.

- 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.

- "...he had while uncircumcised" - Paul reiterates again that Abraham was saved by faith before circumcision was ever instituted by God.

- "...the father of all who believe" - Abraham is the father of every believer, and we are saved in 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).

- "...without being circumcised" - if Abraham was saved while he was not circumcised, how could anyone say (as some did in Paul's day) that Gentiles must be circumcised before God would declare them righteous?

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 in ~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 more than 13 years after he was saved (Gen 17); he also couldn't have

been saved by the Law because that didn't come into existence for about 550 years after Abraham was saved (Ex 20).

— Abraham will attain the promises he received from God in the same way he was justified: through the righteousness produced by faith (grace through faith). So not only are works useless for justification, but the Mosaic Law is useless to attain the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.

(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 keeping the Law was a condition for the fulfillment of the promises of God given to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant, there would be two effects:

- "...[faith is made] void" - *kenoō*, empty, without content. Faith would be irrelevant; faith is no longer necessary if justification is based on works.

- "...[the promise is] nullified" - *katargeō*, the promise would be rendered inoperative; it would no longer be a promise because it required something from the receiver that no man (except Christ) could keep perfectly.

— If God's promises to Israel—and particularly Abraham—could be obtained by works instead of by faith, those promises must be rendered null and void because no one would be able to keep the law.

(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 shows 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 in 3:20.

- "...the Law brings about wrath" - rather than bringing about blessing, which is what God promised Abraham (Gen 12:3), the law can only bring wrath, not blessing, because no one can keep the law perfectly. Our inability to keep the law means that it becomes a vehicle for God's wrath toward us, *especially* if we regard it as the principle by which we are justified before God.

— "brings about" - *katergazomai*, keeps on producing; present tense meaning continuous action.

— 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 willful 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.

- "...where there is no law, there also is no violation" - violation (or transgression) denotes overstepping a line or breaking a clearly defined commandment. But if there is no line to step over, or no commandment to break, there is no actual violation/transgression.

— The Greek word for "violation" (*parabasis*) means "overstepping" or "deviation." It's also translated as "transgression." It is a form of sin, but the terms "sin" (*hamartia*) and "transgression" are not synonymous.

— Sin is defined as anything that goes against God's revealed character. Sin is always present, even if there is no law. Transgression, on the other hand, implies that a specific

law was given that is now being broken. If there is no law, there is no transgression—there is no "line" to "overstep."

— This distinction between "transgression" and "sin" is important for understanding the actual purpose of the Mosaic Law: It was given to increase transgressions (Cf. 5:20; 7:7-11; Cf. Gal 3:19).

(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 since all believers, Jews and Gentiles, are saved in the same way that Abraham was: by grace through faith.

— 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" - *pistis*, faith is helplessness reaching out in total dependence upon God.

Faith is only as good as the person or object that faith is placed in. Abraham's faith was not in his own ability to believe or to act, it was in God's promises and His ability to keep those promises.

- "...so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants" - the promise could only be sure if it is according to grace. If the law was the basis of our salvation, then our salvation depends on our performance in keeping the law, and no one can keep the law good enough to be saved by it.

— If salvation depended in any way whatsoever on our performance—either to obtain salvation or maintain salvation—then we either couldn't obtain it or we'd be unable to

maintain it. A works-based salvation, to obtain or maintain, is impossible and leads either to no one being saved or a complete lack of assurance of salvation.

— This is precisely what Reformed Theology/Calvinism teaches with their doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. This doctrine teaches that believers are saved by grace through faith, but then must attain a certain level of good works in order to "prove" that they are "truly" saved.

— But Paul is saying here that a salvation that is based on works, either to obtain it or maintain it, is impossible.

(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.

- "...I HAVE MADE YOU A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS" - quoted from Gen 17:5c. God gave Abraham this promise when his reproductive system was dead.

— Paul's point in this verse is that when Abraham was old, after his reproductive system (and Sarah's) had died, God called into being uncreated nations who could come from Abraham. He did this for Abraham in the same way that during creation, He called into existence the yet uncreated universe.

— God created these nations with this phrase, but in this case, God's word was a promise (Cf. Heb 11:3; 2 Peter 3:5).

- Now leaving how Abraham *was not* 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: that he would father many nations.

- "...gives life to the dead and calls into being things that do not exist" - if this is true about God, which it is, 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 (Cf. Rom 1:16; 10:12; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). Yet, Israel and Church are distinct groups. Different origins, different destinies.

God has not abrogated His promises to Abraham about his physical, believing descendants, the regenerate nation Israel, inheriting the land (Cf. Gen 15:18-21; 22:17). These promises still stand, are still in force, and they will be fulfilled in the 1000-year millennial kingdom on the earth. This concept will be dealt with further 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.

- "...against hope he believed" - Abraham's "hope" rested solely on God's promise; he had no hope of obtaining descendants naturally. Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born. He proved his faith by believing against all hope.

— He believed God in the face of discouraging facts, all common sense, 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.

- "...SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE" - quoted from Gen 15:5

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.

- "...Without becoming weak in faith" - his circumstances, his age, his dead reproductive system, Sarah's dead reproductive system...Abraham could've looked at all of his negative circumstances and allowed his faith to waiver. There was not one thing Abraham could point to that was positive. Yet his faith never weakened.

(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;

- "...he did not waver in unbelief" - 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 **fully assured** 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" - *plērophoreō*, no room for doubt; fully persuaded. Abraham 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.

- "...He was able also to perform" - Abraham trusted/had faith/believed what God promised him, but he also knew God was *able* to do what He promised to do.

(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.

- "Therefore" - indicates that the subsequent statement is based on the previous content, which was that the object of Abraham's faith was God's promises, and Abraham knew that God was able to do what He promised to do.

— It was this faith in God that brought about the imputation of righteousness to Abraham.

- "...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 verse shows that what was true of Abraham is also true of all believers. 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;

- "but for our sake also" - this story applies not to Abraham only, but also for us today.

- 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 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!

— While the object of believer's faith today is also God, the content of our faith is different: it is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, who died to pay the penalty for our sins (Cf. 1 Cor 15:1-4). We are still saved by grace through faith, just like Abraham, but the content of our faith (what we believe in) differs from the content of Abraham's faith.

- Paul was not saying here that we need to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead in order to be saved. 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. His resurrection proves that God will justify any human being who meets the single condition of believing that the death of Christ paid the penalty for sin.

— 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, became a Man, and died 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 also part of it), but that He died on that cross to absorb the wrath of God against sin, to pay the penalty for all sin for all time, *in my place*. I deserved what He received, but He paid the price for me.

- "...justification" - *dikaiōsis*, the result of believing in the two things above. The simplest definition of justification is: God's pronouncement of a believer as righteous

(Cf. 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.

— 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

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.*

