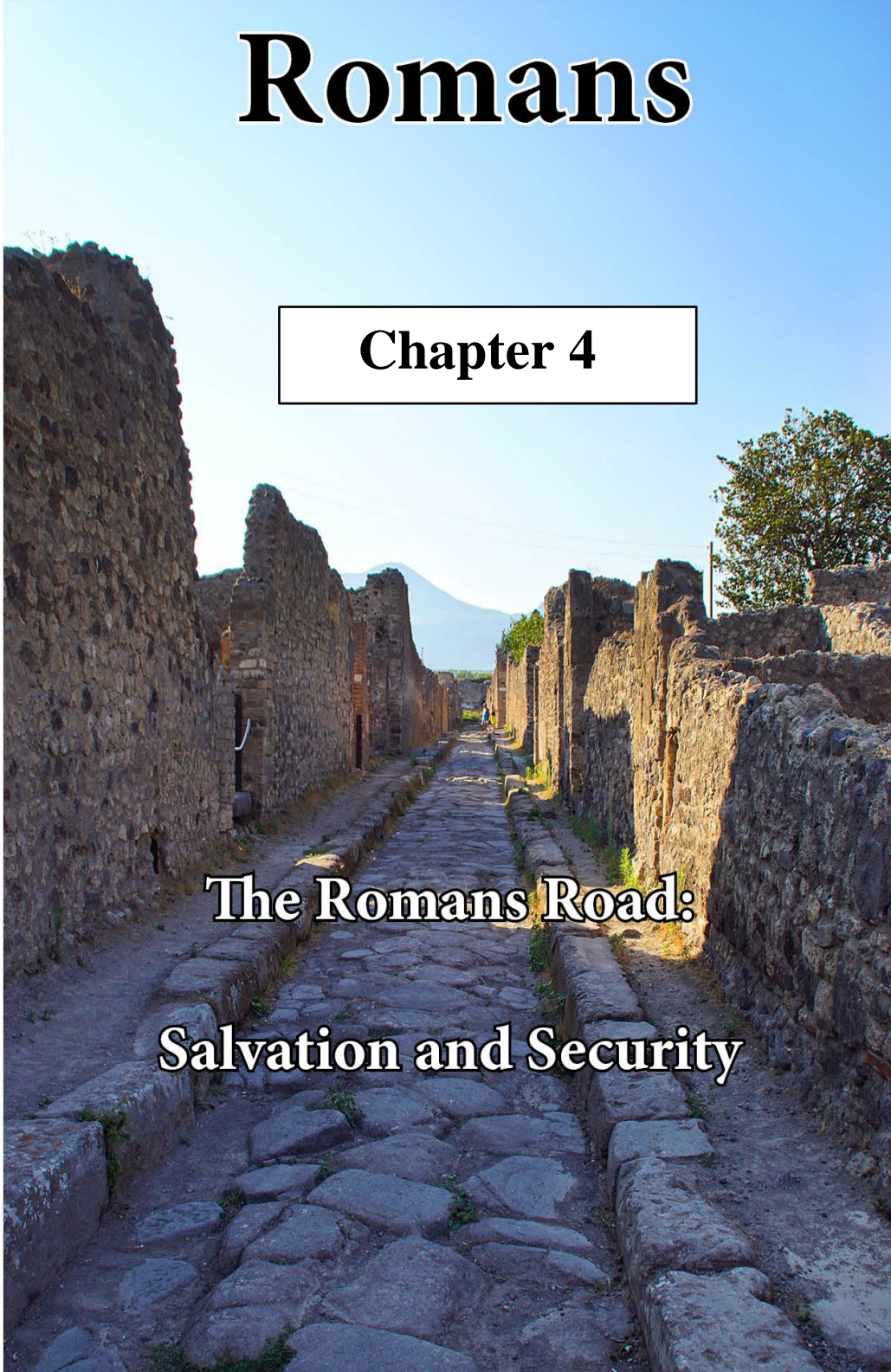


*Journeys With God*

# Romans

## Chapter 4

**The Romans Road:  
Salvation and Security**



**Romans**

**Chapter 4 Summary**

## Romans 4:1 - Righteousness by Faith Demonstrated

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to *the flesh*?

### Truth to Learn

The Old Testament has examples of justification by faith.

### Behind the Words

“What then shall we say” is a rhetorical question that Paul uses often in this letter to the Roman Christians (**Romans 4:1; Romans 6:1; Romans 7:7; Romans 8:31; Romans 9:14; Romans 9:30**). He uses this question when he anticipates an objection from his readers or when he is proposing a truth to be understood by the reader.

The Greek word translated “father” differs depending on which manuscript we look at. Some manuscripts have this as *patēr*, meaning “father,” though it is often used to indicate “ancestor.” Other manuscripts use the word *propatōr*, which is made up of *pro*, meaning “before, in time or position,” and a form of *patēr*, meaning “father.” Hence, *propatōr* means “forefather.”

“Has found” is the translation of the verb *heuriskō*, meaning “to find something.” It is expressed here in the Greek perfect tense, indicating a past completed action with an ongoing effect, with the emphasis on the ongoing effect. One form of this word, *heureka*, is what Archimedes is supposed to have exclaimed when, after a lengthy search, he discovered a method of detecting the amount of alloy mixed with the gold in the crown of the king of Syracuse. Subsequently, when prospectors in the Western US found the gold for which they had been diligently seeking, they often exclaimed “Eureka!”

### Meaning Explained

Paul is now going to use Abraham, the father of all the Jews, to show how justification has always been by faith. Since Abraham lived before the giving of the Law, Paul will lead his readers to see that he was justified by faith, not by obedience to the Law. This becomes a particularly potent argument since all Jews trace back their ancestral lineage, as well as their spiritual heritage, to Abraham.

The main object of this chapter is to demonstrate that the doctrine of justification by faith, which the apostle Paul is defending, was taught in the Old Testament. The argument is addressed to the Jewish Christians in Rome, but it would apply to any Jew. The argument is derived from the fact that Abraham was justified by faith rather than works, as we will see in **Romans 4:1-5**. It was not the merit of his works but his faith (Abraham believed God). Then, in this same chapter, Paul will show that even David, the greatest of all Jewish kings, declared that righteousness results from faith rather than works, as we will see in **Romans 4:6-8**.

The expression “according to *the flesh*” which is found at the end of this verse has been much debated over the centuries. It could mean that Abraham was the father of the Jews according to flesh. The other interpretation of this expression is that it refers to what Abraham has found. If such is the case, then “flesh” could refer to external privileges and advantages, or to his own strength and power, or possibly to circumcision itself. The last of these seems the most reasonable interpretation; that Paul is referring to what Abraham has found as pertaining to circumcision since this is what much of this chapter is about.

## **Application**

Christians are often prone to ignore the Old Testament teachings because “they only apply to the Jews.” As we will see from Romans chapter four, there is much common teaching between the Old and New Testaments.

## Romans 4:2 - No Bragging

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has a boast, but not before God.

### Truth to Learn

Abraham was not saved by doing good works.

### Behind the Words

“Boast” is translated from *kauchēma*, which is derived from the verb *kauchaomai*, meaning “to brag” or “to boast.” *Kauchēma* refers to the object of bragging or “something worthy of bragging.”

The word translated “before” is *pros*, which relates the object “toward” which something is directed. In this case, Paul is saying that Abraham has nothing about which he can brag toward God.

### Meaning Explained

Paul is continuing on with the rhetorical question that he posed in the previous verse. These few verses are where he is demonstrating to the Jewish Christians in Rome the truth about what he has been saying for most of this letter, namely that justification comes by faith, not works.

Although it might look like circular reasoning at first glance, here’s what John Calvin said about the sense of this verse,

If Abraham was justified by his works, he might boast of his own merits. But he has no ground of boasting before God. Therefore he was not justified by works.

You see, if Abraham did have some grounds for boasting, he would have boasted about them to God. But he never did because by his own acts he knew he was not worthy of justification. Hence, he was not justified by works. If you read **Genesis 11:27 – Genesis 25:10** you will see that, although Abraham did some amazing and faith-full things in his life, he had a problem with lying, especially concerning Sarah his wife. This is not the sort of thing that would qualify someone to be justified by works, is it?

On the surface it may appear that Paul’s and James’ teachings with regard to faith and works are at odds, for James said:

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. (**James 2:23-24**)

This is the problem with quoting Scripture out of context. For you see, James is not teaching that righteousness is achieved by works. On the contrary, he is teaching that works are the proof of faith and its resultant righteousness. If a person has genuine faith in the blood of Jesus Christ then his or her works will give evidence of saving faith. I’m sure that we all can think of someone who claims to be a Christian but doesn’t act like one. James would say that this person has no faith because they have no works to prove it, and Paul would agree.

## **Application**

All Christians should be doing good works. Not to gain salvation, or to receive complete sanctification, and certainly not to keep from losing salvation. We should be doing good works because it's what our Heavenly Father does and it's what He wants us to be doing. It demonstrates our family resemblance. It's part of the family business!

## Romans 4:3 - Righteous Abraham

For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

### Truth to Learn

Righteousness comes by believing God's message.

### Behind the Words

The Greek word translated "accounted" is *logizomai*, which is an accounting term meaning "to count out as one would count out money when payment is being made." By interpretation, however, it means "to put to one's account" or "to credit to someone."

### Meaning Explained

Paul is quoting here from **Genesis 15:6**. Let's set the scene in order to understand the context of this verse. Abraham and Lot have separated and Lot has taken his flocks and has moved to Sodom. Meanwhile a confederacy of kings from the East has come and defeated Sodom and several other cities, carrying off the people of Sodom (including Lot) as captives. Upon hearing this, Abraham gathered the men of his own household along with a couple of his friends and pursued the conquering kings. Taking them by surprise at night, Abraham and his forces defeated the kings and brought all the people and goods of Sodom back with him.

He was met just outside Salem (now Jerusalem) by the king of Sodom. The king of Sodom demanded that Abraham give him his people back but told him that he could keep the plunder. Abraham not only gave back the people but nearly all the plunder as well (he offered 10% of it to the King and Priest of Salem and allowed his two friends to take their share). He did this so that no one could ever claim that they had made Abraham rich. He wanted God and God alone to have that distinction.

Immediately afterwards, God recognized Abraham's selfless actions and promised him a son. Here's what it says:

But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am going childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." And He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him as righteousness. (**Genesis 15:2-6**)

Abraham believed that God would provide him a son and it was because of this faith that God "accounted it" to him as righteousness. In other words, in God's record book He wrote down the word "justified" next to Abraham's name. Because of Abraham's faith, God declared him to be righteous!

This is precisely what happens to us when we believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. When we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ we are declared as righteous in God's record book.

## **Application**

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord through faith, then you are recorded in God's record book as having the righteousness of Christ himself. This means that you are now completely saved from your sins.

## Romans 4:4 - Unearned Gift

Now to him who is working, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

### Truth to Learn

Abraham did not earn his righteousness and neither can we.

### Behind the Words

The words “who is working” are translated from *ergodzomai*, which means “to work or labor.”

“Wages” is from the Greek word *mythos*, meaning “that which is given in exchange for actions done.” It can mean payment, reward, or retribution.

The word translated “counted” is the same as the one translated “accounted” in the previous verse (*logidzomai*).

“Grace” is translated from *charis*, which refers to “a favor done without expectation of anything in return.”

The word translated “debt” is *opheilēma*, meaning “a debt; that which is owed to someone else.”

### Meaning Explained

In the previous verse Paul told us that according to scripture, Abraham’s belief in God’s promise of a future son was accounted to him as righteousness. Abraham was not declared righteous (justified) by God because of any works, but because of faith. Paul now continues on with his logical argument.

If Abraham was justified by a work of righteousness, then he earned his righteousness. If he earned that righteousness by doing something, then God owed the righteousness to him for doing the righteous act. That is, God owed him a debt. If God owed him that righteousness for doing a righteous act then Abraham earned it; it wasn’t freely given to him.

But that’s not the way it happened according to Paul. Abraham didn’t receive his righteousness because God owed it to him. Abraham received his reckoning of righteousness from God by God’s grace, not because God was obliged to, but because in His great love and by His marvelous grace, God chose to credit it to him.

In yesterday’s study we revealed the background of Abraham’s faith. We noted that Abraham returned to the king of Sodom all his people and all the plunder except the tithe given to the King and Priest of Salem and the portion earned by his two friends. Abraham did not keep any of the “reward.” Notice that it was perfectly lawful for Abraham to keep it because he earned it, but he gave it back to the king of Sodom. In the opening verse of Genesis chapter fifteen, God then said to Abraham:

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am a shield to you, your exceedingly great reward." (**Genesis 15:1b**)

Do you see that? God said that He was Abraham’s reward. The Hebrew word translated “reward” has the same meaning as the Greek word *mythos*, translated as “wages” in this verse. Abraham refused the reward

that was due him because he wanted to give God all the credit. Then, when he believed God's promise, God credited him with the righteousness that he couldn't possibly have earned. That's grace!

### **Application**

No matter how heroic our actions and no matter how much we give away of what is rightfully ours, we can't earn our own righteousness. It only comes as a gift from God when we believe His promise.

## Romans 4:5 - Gift of Righteousness

**But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness,**

### Truth to Learn

It is our faith that God reckons as righteousness, not our works.

### Behind the Words

“Believes” is from *pisteuō*. This is the verb form of the word *pistis* (the word translated “faith” in this verse), meaning “persuasion” or “faith.” Hence *pisteuō* refers to the act of being persuaded or believing.

The Greek word translated “ungodly” is *asebēs*. This is a compound word made up of the privative *a*, meaning “not” or “without” and a form of *sebomai*, meaning “to worship” or “to give reverence.” Hence, *asebēs* refers to one who does not worship or someone who does not revere any god. According to *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, “It does not mean irreligious, but one who actively practices the opposite of what the fear of God demands ... one characterized by immoral and impious behavior.”

### Meaning Explained

Remember what Paul has just said? If Abraham earned his righteousness, then God had to give it to him because He owed it to Abraham. But God doesn't justify those who have earned righteousness! Why? Paul told us earlier that there is no one who is righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks after God. In other words, there is no one who has earned righteousness. We are what Paul calls “ungodly” in this verse. Apart from His grace we are opposed to God, we are immoral and impious. That's how righteous we are based on our works.

He now says that for the one who does not obtain righteousness by working (that's all of us) but who believes God's promises, He reckons that faith as righteousness. Again, it is not because He has to, but because He wants to.

Do you see? It was God's choice to credit Abraham with righteousness as a result of his faith just as it is God's choice to credit us with righteousness because we believe His promise to us. It was God's choice that Abraham is saved, not Abraham's, and it is God's choice that we are saved, not ours. God did not have to declare Abraham righteous when he believed, and He does not have to declare us righteous when we believe the gospel message. God did it for Abraham, and He does it for us because he chooses to. That's why it is by grace and not by debt. We don't earn our salvation by believing in the gospel, God freely gives it to us!

That's what Paul is talking about in the book of Ephesians where he said:

For by grace you are saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, that no one may boast. (**Ephesians 2:8, 9**)

Salvation is God's gift to us, not by any deed that we have done, but because He chose to give it to us.

## **Application**

This truth should not make us proud. On the contrary, it should humble us. Thank you, Lord, for crediting me with righteousness. I didn't deserve it and I don't deserve it, but you gave it to me nonetheless!

## Romans 4:6 - Righteousness Without Works

exactly as David says *of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:*

### Truth to Learn

David also talked about those who are blessed due to God's declaring them righteous without having done good works.

### Behind the Words

"Exactly as" is translated from *kathaper*, which is made up of *katha*, meaning "as" or "just as" and *per*, which is an article indicating abundance. So, we could translate this as "exactly as" or "very much as." In other words, Paul is showing a very strong relationship between the example of Abraham's justification by faith and the things that David said, as quoted in the following verses.

The word translated "blessedness" is *makarismos*, which refers to someone who has been declared as fortunate, or happy. A very similar word is used in the following two verses where it is translated as "blessed." Paul is using the word here to describe someone who "possesses the fullness of God's favor." Another way of saying it is "one of God's favorites."

The word "credits" is translated from the Greek word *logidzomai*, which we looked at back in verse three, meaning "to credit to someone's account."

"Apart from" is the translation of the word *chōris*, which we looked at in the previous chapter. This word indicates separation of two things in space or time. Therefore, it could be translated here as "separate from" or "without."

### Meaning Explained

Paul has already shown that Abraham is an example of God's crediting righteousness apart from works of the Law. He now cites another example from the Old Testament. This time it is a quote from David, who obviously understood that God considers a person righteous without the works of the Law. In fact, David declares the person "blessed" to whom God imputes righteousness through faith. It may seem strange to think of God as having favorites, but in a very real sense that's what David says about those who believe God's good news.

And this favoritism comes, not from works of righteousness, but as a free gift from God. It is not granted to us because we have kept a set of rules or followed all the requirements of a particular church or even because we have been obedient. God's favoritism comes simply because He has chosen to grant it to those who believe.

If you believe that you are a sinner in need of salvation and you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for all of your sins, Paul says because of that belief (faith), God has declared you to be as if you had never committed a single sin. You are declared "righteous" and your name is written in the Book of Life. It also means that you will not appear at the Great White Throne Judgment spoken of in **Revelation 20:11-15**. Instead, you will appear at the Bema Seat Judgment spoken of in **2Corinthians 5:10** where you will receive rewards for those things which you have done for the glory of God.

## **Application**

Because of this gracious truth, let's commit ourselves to living the remainder of our lives for the sole purpose of glorifying God. It's the least we can do! Don't you agree?

## Romans 4:7 - Thrown-away and Covered

**"Blessed are those whose lawless acts have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered;**

### Truth to Learn

God has separated our sins us from and has covered them with the blood of Christ.

### Behind the Words

The word translated, “lawless acts” is the Greek word, *anomia*, which is made up of *a*, meaning “not” and a form of *nomos*, which means “law.” So literally, it means “not legal.” By interpretation, then, it means “those things which are not legal” or “those things which are in violation of the Law.”

“Have been forgiven” is from the Greek word *aphiēmi*. This is made up of *apo*, meaning “from” or “away from” and *hiēmi*, meaning “to send.” Hence, this literally means “to send away.” The verb is expressed here in the aorist tense and passive voice. The aorist tense indicates action that was performed at a point in time in the past and the passive voice indicates action done to the subject (lawless acts). So Paul is saying that the lawless deeds were sent away at some point in the past.

“Sins” is from *hamartia*, which is from the verb *hamartanō*, meaning “to miss the mark.” *Hamartia*, therefore, describes a situation where we have not met God’s expectation of us.

The word translated “have been covered” is *epikaluptō*, which is made up of *epi*, meaning “upon” or “over” and *kaluptō*, meaning “to cover.” This is also expressed as an aorist passive, indicating that the sins were covered over at some point in the past.

### Meaning Explained

Remember that Paul is quoting King David here, from **Psalms 32:1**. David is describing a condition of blessedness, when God demonstrates His favor toward us. This blessedness is the result of God forgiving, or “sending away,” our illegal actions, which is also what it says in **Psalms 103:12**:

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

God actually separates us from our sins (our acts of lawlessness) when they are forgiven. Otherwise, He would not be able to fellowship with us because sin cannot remain in His presence. Therefore, when God forgives our sins, he sends them away (as far from us as the east is from the west!)

This verse also says blessed is the man whose sins are covered over by God. In the previous chapter of Romans we learned that Christ is our mercy seat. The mercy seat was a covering of the Ark of the Covenant on which the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled, covering sins so God can “pass them by.”

Hence, in this verse David is saying that the man whose acts of lawlessness and sins are sent away and covered over possesses the fullness of God’s favor. And, as we have just learned, this blessedness does not come because we earned it in any way. We are blessed because God has chosen to bless us.

## **Application**

My Christian brother or sister, do you realize just how blessed you are? You and I can have fellowship with our Holy God because He has removed our sins from us and covered them with the blood of Christ. Why not take a few minutes to get on your knees and thank Him for everything He has done for you!

## Romans 4:8 - Blessed Through Faith

**Blessed is the man whose sin the lord will no way take into account."**

### Truth to Learn

God considers those who believe His promises as sinless. As a result, He shows His favor to them.

### Behind the Words

The word translated "Blessed" is *makarios*. We looked at the verb form of this word two verses back. It refers to one who possesses the fullness of God's favor. Aristotle contrasted this word with *endeēs*, meaning "one who is lacking or in need."

Another translation element that we want to look at are the words "no way." This is the translation of the two Greek words *ou me*. The word *me* indicates relative negation and the word *ou* indicates absolute negation. In English, a double negative is not proper, but in Greek it is a form of emphasis. So the expression *ou me* means "absolutely not" or "no way."

"Take into account" is from a Greek word that we have looked at before. It is the word *logidzomai*, which means, "to put to one's account." It is sometimes translated as "impute, reckon, credit or count unto." It is an accounting term meaning that someone's account has been (or hasn't been) credited as having something. In this verse it says that the person unto whom God will not credit sin is full of God's favor.

### Meaning Explained

This verse is directly tied to the previous verse and it contains the crux of what Paul is trying to demonstrate. These two verses are quoted from **Psalms 32:1, 2**. In both these verses David describes the person as blessed. This is different from one who is happy because happy implies good luck (the root *hap* means "luck as a favorable circumstance"). A blessed person is one who is in the world but not of the world. That is, his or her satisfaction comes from God, not favorable circumstances. A person who is blessed of God is someone who experiences peace with or without pleasure.

What David is saying is that the person whose sins and acts of lawlessness are forgiven and the person unto whom God will absolutely not credit with sin is a recipient of God's greatest favor. What is just as interesting is what David said at the end of this particular Psalm:

Many sorrows are to the wicked; but he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall embrace him. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; and shout for joy, all *you* upright in heart!  
**(Psalms 32:10-11)**

David tells us to be glad, to rejoice, and to shout for joy because we have not been credited with sin.

What Paul is getting to is this: the person who does not earn (or deserve) salvation but believes God, not only **does not** have sin credited to his or her account but **does** have righteousness credited to his or her account. Let's see, do I want God to see me as a sinner or as sinless? Hmmm. That's not very hard to decide, is it?

## **Application**

Deep down inside we all know that we are sinners and God knows us even better than we know ourselves. But through faith, the blood of Christ covers our sins and God sees us as righteous and without sin. That's God's grace, that's God's supreme favor, that's blessedness!

## Romans 4:9 - Righteous Without Surgery

**Is this blessedness then on the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was credited to Abraham for righteousness.**

### Truth to Learn

We can receive the same blessedness that Abraham enjoyed through faith.

### Behind the Words

“Blessedness” is from *makarismos*, which we looked at in verse six, meaning “possessing the fullness of God’s favor.”

“Circumcised” is from the Greek word *peritomē*, which is a compound word made up of *peri*, meaning “around” and a form of the verb *temnō*, meaning “to cut or to cut off.” Hence, this word refers to a circular cutting off of the foreskin.

The word “uncircumcised” is translated from *akrobestia*, which is made up of *akron*, meaning “the tip” and a form of the verb *buō*, meaning “to cover.” Therefore, this word refers to someone who has not had his foreskin cut off.

We can see from these two words, that a literal interpretation would be “round cuts” for those who are circumcised and “tip covers” to refer to those who are not. Though this sounds peculiar to us, it is much the same type of imagery that was used to describe American Indians as “red skins” because of the reddish color of their skin. Given that Paul is specifically talking about the practice of keeping the law with regard to circumcision as it relates to salvation, however, “circumcised” and “uncircumcised” are the best translations of these words.

### Meaning Explained

Paul has been quoting from the book of Psalms where David declared the blessedness of the person to whom God will not impute (mark to his account) sin. This blessedness is a characteristic of every person who has saving faith. In Noah’s case it was the belief that God was going to bring a flood. In Abraham’s case it was belief that God was going to give him a son in his old age. In our case it is the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and He died on the cross to pay for our sins. In each of these examples, it is faith that is accounted for righteousness in God’s record book.

Paul, referring to the blessedness described by David, now asks the (predominantly) Jewish Christians in Rome a pivotal question. Remember, the Jews of the early church still believed that you had to keep the law and be a devout Jew before you could become a Christian. They believed that all Christian males had to be circumcised and keep the Law, even after salvation. There are many churches today that have established laws, ordinances, and rules for their constituents. They teach that obedience to these rules is necessary to be a Christian and to be a member of their church. Paul doesn’t think so!

He asks, “*Does this blessedness (that God will not impute sin) apply to those of the circumcision (keepers of the Law) only? Or, does this blessedness also apply to those who don’t keep the Law (or obey the ordinances of the Church) but who simply believe. After all, in Abraham’s case it was his faith that was accounted to him as righteousness.*”

## **Application**

It doesn't matter who your ancestors are, what church you go to, or even if you occasionally break some of the rules. If you believe the gospel message you are righteous according to God.

## Romans 4:10 - Before or After

**How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.**

### Truth to Learn

Obedience to God is the result of faith, not the cause of it.

### Behind the Words

“**While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised?**” could more literally be translated as “Being in circumcision or uncircumcision?”

### Meaning Explained

Remember Paul’s question? “Is the blessedness of God, who does not impute sin, something that only those who keep the law can experience, or is it something that those who don’t keep the Law but simply believe in God’s promise can obtain?”

He now asks another rhetorical question with a potentially startling answer. “When was the righteousness imputed to Abraham? Was it imputed to him while he was circumcised or was it before he was circumcised?”

Do you see why this is such an important question? If Abraham was declared righteous after he obeyed God by circumcising himself and his household, then it can be argued that he was declared righteous as a result of being obedient, that is, by works of righteousness. But... if Abraham was declared righteous before he was obedient, then his circumcision had nothing to do with his being declared righteous. That’s why Paul asks, “Was this crediting of righteousness to Abraham done while he was circumcised or uncircumcised?” Let’s look and see. In Genesis fifteen God declared Abraham (then called Abram) righteous. He was about 84 years old at the time:

And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. (**Genesis 15: 6**)

Then in Genesis chapter seventeen Abraham was circumcised:

Abraham *was* ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. (**Genesis 17:24**)

The answer is that Abraham was declared righteous about thirteen years before he was circumcised. He was declared righteous as a result of faith, not as a result of obedience! He didn’t earn it; it was freely given to him.

Likewise, we are saved by faith and by faith alone. It has nothing to do with any act or deed on our part. We don’t have to obey any laws or rules or set of standards to be saved. In fact, we don’t do anything ourselves. We simply believe God’s promise! That’s what Paul meant in **Ephesians 2:8, 9** when he said,

For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Obedience comes after salvation as a result of our freedom; it is not the cause of our salvation or our freedom!

### **Application**

If you believe that you're a Christian because you belong to a church and have gone through their "process," then you may not be saved. However, if you believe that you are a sinner and that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross to pay for your sins, then you definitely are saved.

## Romans 4:11 - Signed and Sealed

And he received a sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still in uncircumcision*, resulting in his being the father of all those who believe *being in uncircumcision*, and righteousness being imputed to them also,

### Truth to Learn

Abraham's circumcision was a seal of his righteousness.

### Behind the Words

The Greek word translated “sign” is *sēmeion*, which means “a sign, a mark, or a token.” The same word is used of Jesus who performed many signs in the form of miracles which “marked” Him as the true Messiah.

“Seal” is translated from the Greek word *sphragis*, which means, “a signet or a seal which is used as an indication of genuineness.”

### Meaning Explained

In the previous two verses we learned that faith was imputed to Abraham for righteousness while he was still uncircumcised. As noted in the previous verse, it was probably about 15 years after his experience of faith that God reaffirmed His covenant with Abram (meaning exalted father), renamed him Abraham (meaning father of a multitude), and commanded him to circumcise himself and every male in his household who was at least 8 days old (read **Genesis 17** for the details).

Why was there such a lengthy period between Abram's being declared righteous and Abraham receiving the sign of circumcision? Perhaps God did this so that there would be no doubt that faith was imputed well before circumcision. And, according to this verse, circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign that he had a special covenant relationship with God.

In the current verse we see that it was also given to Abraham as a “seal.” It was God's guarantee that He had proclaimed Abraham righteous through faith. That makes Abraham the spiritual father of everyone who believes whether or not he is circumcised.

This righteousness, which God declares for a person as a result of faith, comes regardless of whether a person is circumcised or not. Based on Paul's line of reasoning and the carefully laid argument and evidence that he has just placed before the predominantly Jewish Christians in Rome, there is no way they could ever again insist that a person had to become a Jew and be circumcised in order to become a Christian.

One more thing to notice from **Genesis 17:1**: when God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision, he also commanded Abraham to be “perfect” (“blameless” in some translations). The Hebrew word *tamiym* means “to be without blemish” or “to be morally clean.” He was not given the commandment to be righteous until well after he was declared righteous. In other words, Abraham didn't earn his righteousness by being morally pure; it was commanded of him after he was declared righteous. This is another piece of evidence that we don't earn our salvation (righteousness), it is given to us!

## **Application**

Righteousness and moral purity are things that God expects of us. But, as long as we have this sin nature we will never be completely righteous or morally pure by ourselves. Praise God that He declares us righteous when we believe the good news about Christ's sacrifice for us. And He gets all the glory!

## Romans 4:12 - Abraham's Faithful Footsteps

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

### Truth to Learn

Circumcision doesn't matter. Faith matters.

### Behind the Words

The word translated “father” is *patēr*, which means “father, ancestor, mentor, or model.” Hence, it can be used in a literal sense or it can be used in a figurative sense as it is in this verse.

“Walking” is the Greek verb *stoicheō*. It is based on the noun *stoichos*, which is a military term meaning “a row, a rank, or a line.” Hence, *stoicheō* means “to advance in rows or ranks” or “to walk in an orderly manner.”

The word translated “steps” is *ichmos*, which refers to “the sole of the foot.” By application it refers to a footstep or the impression left by the sole of the foot. Figuratively, it refers to the example that someone else has set for us to follow.

### Meaning Explained

In the previous verse Paul said that Abraham, through his righteousness of faith, became the father of those who believe even though they are uncircumcised. What Paul means is that Abraham became a father figure to them; that is, an example to all non-Jews. In this way, all non-Jewish people can share in the fatherhood of Abraham, figuratively speaking, through the same kind of faith.

In the current verse the wording of the translation makes it a little hard to understand. Here's another way of wording what Paul is saying in this verse:

And the father of circumcision to those who are not just circumcised but who are also walking in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham while (he was still) in uncircumcision.

You can see from this wording that Paul is making the point that Abraham also is a father figure to the circumcised. Not to all the circumcised, just to those who (like the uncircumcised of the previous verse) have a saving faith like Abraham did. Paul is not talking about the literal fatherhood (ancestor) of Abraham, but the figurative fatherhood. And he's not the figurative father of those who simply follow his example of circumcision, but of those who follow his example of faith.

In other words, it is not obedience to the Law or to any other set of rules that produces righteousness. It is the faith that produces righteousness. And, as we said in the previous verse, the point is that faith came well before obedience and as a result of that faith, we all (Jews and Gentiles) can look to Abraham as our spiritual father figure.

### Application

It doesn't matter what color your skin is, whether you are male or female, tattooed or not. It doesn't matter whether your parents are rich or poor and it doesn't matter whether you are Asian, African, Caucasian, Baltic, Australian, Indo-European, or Inuit. What matters is that you are following in Abraham's footsteps, in that you believe Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for your sins! Period!

## Romans 4:13 - Promise Received through Faith

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

### Truth to Learn

God's promise of salvation is based on faith, not obedience.

### Behind the Words

The word translated “promise” is *epangelia*, which is made up of *epi*, used as an intensifier, and *angelō*, meaning “to tell” or “to declare.” Hence, *epangelia* refers to “a message, a summons, or a promise.”

“Heir” is from the Greek word *klēronomos*, which is made up of *klēros*, meaning “a lot” or “a die” and a form of *nemō*, meaning “to have in one’s possession” or “to distribute.” This word is a reference to the person who possesses the right to receive an inheritance.

### Meaning Explained

Paul is covering all the bases, making sure that the Christians in Rome who were predominantly Jewish had no way to twist what he was saying into anything resembling “righteousness through obedience.” This verse says something a little bit different from what we found back in verse 10. That verse had to do with righteousness being imputed as a result of faith. This verse is talking about the promises that God made to Abraham. These promises include:

- **Gen 12:2** – that God would make of Abraham a great nation
- **Gen 12:3** – that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed
- **Gen 15:5** – that his descendants should be as numerous as the stars
- **Gen 17:5** – that he should be the father of many nations

It is probably this last promise to which Paul is specifically referring when he says that “... he would be the heir of the world.”

His point is that this promise was made to Abraham through the righteousness that comes from faith, not from obedience to the Law. In fact, if you read the Old Testament carefully you will discover that the Law of Moses came some 300 years after Abraham died. Hence, not only was he declared righteous through faith (just as we are declared righteous through faith) but the great promises that were made to Abraham (like the promises that are made to us) were given to him in faith, not obedience. That is, Abraham didn’t have to be obedient in order to receive the promises, he simply had to believe.

In a similar manner, the promises made to us concerning our salvation are not dependent on us being obedient before or after we are saved, they are based solely on our “once for all time” saving faith. In other words, there is no sin that we can commit that will prevent God’s promises from being fulfilled if we have truly accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior!

These promises are based on faith, not obedience! Hallelujah!

## **Application**

Perhaps you are convinced now that you can't earn your salvation. But do you realize that you can't keep your salvation (receive God's promise to you) by obedience either? In other words, once you are saved you can't do anything to undo that salvation.

## Romans 4:14 - Precious Promise

For if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith has been made of no effect and the promise been made useless,

### Truth to Learn

Righteousness comes either by faith or by works, not both.

### Behind the Words

The word translated “of no effect” is *kenoō*, which means “to make empty, to neutralize, or to make false.” It is expressed here in the passive voice indicating what is done to faith.

“Made useless” is translated from the Greek word *katargeō*. This is made up of *kata*, used as an intensifier and *argeō*, meaning “to be idle.” Hence it means “to render totally inactive, to be completely idle, or to become absolutely useless.” It is expressed here in the passive voice indicating what is done to the promise.

### Meaning Explained

Paul now argues the other side of the fence. Having shown that it is through faith that God reckons righteousness, he now makes a counter statement regarding righteousness through obedience.

He says that if righteousness, being an heir of the world (which was promised to Abraham), is achieved by obedience (obeying the law or any other set of rules), then nothing is accomplished by faith, and God’s promise is useless. After all, what value is there in a promised gift to someone if someone else can attain the same thing by working for it?

Do you understand? What value is there in a promise regarding any unearned future gift if that same thing can be earned? Paul says it makes faith “of no effect.” That is, faith would become void of any meaning, hollow, and empty if righteousness can be earned by works. Not only that, but Paul says that the promise that God made to Abraham would be “made useless.” It would become absolutely useless and serve no purpose at all.

What Paul is demonstrating is how righteousness by faith and righteousness by obedience are complete opposites. You can’t have both and you can’t have a combination of the two, it has to be one or the other. Either a person is made righteous by obedience or he is made righteous by faith. This is particularly significant when you consider what Paul told us previously:

As it is written: “There is none righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one seeking God. They all turned away; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, not even one.” (Romans 3:10-12)

Faith is a matter of *believing*, while obedience to the law is a matter of *doing*. Since none of us is righteous based on our doing (works), our only hope for righteousness (and salvation) is through faith. This renders that righteousness very precious because it can’t be earned; it can only be given to us:

For by grace you are saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God,  
(**Ephesians 2:8**)

Let's thank God for this precious righteousness by faith!

### **Application**

If you believe that Christ's death on the cross paid for your sins, then God has declared you to be righteous; you are saved from your sins. How precious does that salvation feel now?

## Romans 4:15 - Legal Wrath

for the law brings about wrath; but where there is no law there is no transgression.

### Truth to Learn

Trying to keep the law causes God's wrath to come against us.

### Behind the Words

The words “brings about” are from the verb *katergadzomai*, which is a compound word made up of *kata*, used as an intensifier and *ergadzomai*, meaning “to work.” Hence, this word means “to completely bring about” or “to carry out a task until it is finished.”

“Wrath” is translated from the Greek word *orgē*, which is based on the verb *orgēomai*, meaning “reaching forth with the mind or excitement of the mind.” Hence, *orgē* expresses a violent passion either for or against something. However, it is most often used to express extreme anger or wrath.

The word translated “transgression” is the Greek word *parabasis*, which is made up of *para*, meaning “beside” or “beyond” and a form of *baino*, which means “to go.” So this word means “to go beyond, to cross over, or to overstep.” It is most often used to indicate an overstepping of a legal limit. Hence, it usually means “to violate a law or regulation.”

### Meaning Explained

Paul has just been talking about the fact that God credited righteousness to Abraham based on his faith, not on his keeping the Law. He even pointed out that Abraham's righteousness came well before the Law of Moses (more than three hundred years before) and about fifteen years before he was circumcised. So, it is very clear that his righteousness had nothing to do with obedience to the Law. Now he makes another observation about trying to obtain righteousness by obeying a set of rules or laws. He says that the Law brings about the wrath of God because the Law actually produces transgression (the overstepping of a rule or a law).

Paul even goes on to say that where there is no law there can be no transgressing of the law. Adam and Eve are the perfect example. Before they were told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were free to eat of it, and doing so would not have caused them any consequence. But, as soon as God commanded them not to eat of it, not only was it now wrong for them to do so, but it became something that they suddenly wanted to do.

As a result of transgression (violating or overstepping the boundaries of the law) God's wrath is produced because He cannot stand sin. Sin, and therefore anyone possessing sin, cannot remain in God's presence because as a Holy God He must judge sin.

That's what Paul is saying in this verse; that without law there is no transgression and therefore, none of God's wrath. It's actually the Law that produces God's wrath.

But why would God give something to mankind (the Law) that would cause His wrath against mankind? That doesn't seem to make sense, does it? Paul will answer this difficult question later in this letter.

## **Application**

It should be getting very clear by now that we cannot be right in God's eyes by obeying a set of rules. In fact, the mere attempt to do so creates sin in our lives, which brings about God's wrath. We can only stand in God's presence as his righteous children through faith.

## Romans 4:16 - Foundational Promises

**Because of this *it is* of faith according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, 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**

### Truth to Learn

God's promises to you are there for you to build on.

### Behind the Words

The word translated “sure” is *bebaios*, which means “fixed, sure, or certain.” Figuratively it refers to that upon which one may build, rely, or trust. In the New Testament it is never used of people, only objects or ideas.

### Meaning Explained

This verse starts off with a connecting clause, “Because of this it is of faith ...” The natural question is, “What is of faith?” By backtracking over the previous verses we see that this clause refers to verse 13 which reads:

For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was* not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. (**Romans 4:13**)

Therefore, Paul is saying that righteousness is the result of faith, according to God's gracious gift and not the result of works. The point we made several verses ago was that Abraham was declared righteous as a result of his believing God's promise regarding his future son. God's declaration of Abraham's righteousness occurred a number of years before Abraham obediently circumcised himself and his household. Therefore it can't have been because of works of obedience, it must be the result of faith.

Now, Paul reiterates the statement that he has made in the past couple of verses, that since Abraham was declared righteous as a result of faith, he has become the father figure to all who believe. He says in today's verse that the promise was made sure to all Abraham's seed, whether they are children of his flesh or children (through faith) by his example. The promise is not conditional, it is not partial, and it is not questionable. It is sure and firm just like a building's foundation.

### Application

Where are you putting your confidence? Are you still trying to keep all the rules and ordinances of your church in order to please God? Or, do you trust in God's promises for your eternal future? In order to trust in the promises, you have to know what those promises are, and in order to know what those promises are you have to read the Bible, repeatedly and consistently.

Let me encourage you to set aside one half hour every day whether at the beginning of the day, in the middle of the day, or at the end of the day. It doesn't matter when it is, as long as you are consistent about it. In the first 20 minutes, read your Bible and in the other 10 minutes pray about what you just read. If

you don't know where to begin reading, I would suggest that you start with 1st John (the 5<sup>th</sup> from the last book in the Bible) or perhaps the book of James or one of the Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John).

Try it for a week and see if you don't begin to feel like God is actually talking directly to you as you read. The more you read your Bible, the better you will understand God's message for you and His promises to you.

## Romans 4:17 - Children by Faith

just as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations" in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;

### Truth to Learn

God's promise to Abraham referred to both his physical descendants and to his spiritual descendants.

### Behind the Words

The words "I have made" are translated from the Greek verb *tithēmi*, meaning "to place" or "to put." The Hebrew word in the passage Paul is quoting (**Genesis 17:15**) is *nathan*, which can have several shades of meaning, one of them being "to give or to grant." The Greek word is expressed here in the perfect tense indicating past completed action with an ongoing effect.

"In the presence" is from *katenanti*, which literally means "down over against." It is used to indicate being "in the sight of" or "in a place in front of" someone or something.

### Meaning Explained

Like a number of verses we have looked at in the past, this verse must be looked at in connection with the previous verse in order to get its full meaning. Connecting the first part of this verse (a quote from **Genesis 17:15**) with the previous verse gives us:

... so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, 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, just as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations"

The point is that Abraham is the father of all who are saved through faith. In other words, at the time that God said this to Abraham, because of Abraham's faith, God had already granted to Abraham that he would be a father of many nations.

If we look at the descendants of Abraham, we see that he is the father of the Jews through Isaac (from his wife Sarah), the father of the Arabs through Ishmael (from Sarah's handmaid Hagar), and the father of numerous other tribes through the six sons with his second wife, Keturah. However, the Apostle Paul evidently understood the promise as referring, not to the physical descendants of Abraham, but to the spiritual descendants (all those who believe in God's message).

The next phrase, "in the presence of Him" refers back to the first part of the previous verse. Hence, "Because of this *it is* of faith according to grace, ... in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, ..." In other words, the faith is demonstrated in the presence of God. It's not just some ethereal "Yeah, I believe in God" type of experience. Rather, it is a belief in what God says, in His presence, so that there is no doubt either in what is believed or in the reality of that belief.

Paul then says of God that He both has the ability to give life and to call things which do not yet exist as if they already did exist. In other words, this God of ours neither has any bounds on his power nor is he

bound by time. He is without limit in both time and space. We will see the significance of this in the next verse.

### **Application**

If you believe the promise that your sins are paid for through the blood of Jesus Christ, then God has declared you as righteous and you are a son or daughter of Abraham through faith.

## Romans 4:18 - Faithful Expectation

who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be."

### Truth to Learn

Abraham's faith was an unwavering, fully-expectant faith.

### Behind the Words

The word translated "hope" is the Greek word *elpis*, which means "hope" or "anticipation." In English when we think of "hope," we think of desiring something but not really expecting it to happen, or at best, thinking that there is a chance of it happening. This Greek word, however, means, "the desire of something with the expectation that it **will** happen." It is more than just "simple hope," it is "expectant hope." For this reason, this word is often translated as "faith."

"Believed" is translated from the Greek word *pisteuō*, which means "to believe in something to the point of having complete trust in it." Again, the concept is not "yeah, I suppose I believe," but "I know because I absolutely believe!"

The word "nations" is translated from the Greek word *ethnos*, which means "a race, a nation, or a group of people belonging and living together." When contrasted to Jews, it is often translated as "Gentiles." Here it is appropriately translated "nations."

### Meaning Explained

Paul now makes a reference again to the events surrounding Abraham's moment of salvation, the point in time when God declared him as righteous. Here's how Moses recorded it back in the book of Genesis:

Then He brought him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens, and count the stars if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. (**Genesis 15:5-6**)

Today's verse is a dramatic statement of the type of faith that Abraham showed when he believed God's promise that he would be the father of many nations. It says, "Who, contrary to hope ..." meaning that it was beyond reason for him to expect it. And yet he, "... in hope believed ..." That is, Abraham had complete trust in the fact that this thing would happen without a doubt!

The thing that he believed was that he would be the father of many nations just as God had told him. So why should this be considered beyond expectation? Because Abraham was about 80 years old and Sarah, his wife, was about 70 when the promise was made. They were both beyond child producing years, and yet Abraham fully believed that not only was God capable of doing it, he believed without a doubt that God would do it. Now that's faith!

What we sometimes overlook here is that Sarah lived thirty-seven years after Isaac was born. And, after Sarah's death Abraham remarried (at the age of about 140) and had six more sons by his second wife, Keturah (See **Genesis 23:1; 25:1,2**).

## **Application**

Is the faith of Abraham the kind of faith that you had when you believed that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for your sins, thus saving you for all eternity?

## Romans 4:19 - Faith, Long and Strong

**And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb.**

### Truth to Learn

Abraham's faith was strong, even after having waited 20 years.

### Behind the Words

The Greek word translated “weak” is *astheneō*, which is a compound word made up of the privative *a*, meaning “not” or “without” and *sthenos*, which refers to “bodily vigor or bodily strength.” Hence, this word means “without bodily strength.”

“Consider” is translated from the verb *katanoeō*. This is also a compound word which is made up of *kata*, used as an intensifier, and *noeō*, meaning “to think.” This word refers to more than just a passing thought. It means “to observe, to contemplate, or to have regard to.” We could paraphrase this part of the verse as “he didn’t give thought to the fact that he was no longer able to father children.”

### Meaning Explained

There is a subtlety in this verse that you may not have seen before. In the previous verse we talked about Abraham's absolute certainty that God would fulfill His promise to him. He was about 80 years old when God promised him that he would have as many descendants as the stars in the sky. This is talked about in **Genesis 15:5,6**.

The current verse says that Abraham was not weak in his faith, which was proved by the fact that Abraham didn't even consider the fact that his own body was already dead. Now, this doesn't mean that Abraham was dead; it means that his body was past the point of fathering children. This verse (along with **Genesis 21:5**) says that he was about 100 years old when Isaac was born.

But wait a minute! Didn't we just say that Abraham was about 80 when the promise was made? That means Abraham's faith was strong even after having waited for about 20 years. Think about it! Abraham was 80 when the promise was made, and he was probably already past child producing years, yet 20 years later he still believed that God would give him a son. That's faith that doesn't give up!

Paul uses a bit of a play on words in this verse as well. He could have said, “And having a strong faith ...” Instead, he says that Abraham was not “weak in faith.” The word translated “weak” is normally used to describe a physical condition, but Paul applies it to Abraham's faith. In other words, he is saying, “Abraham may have had a body that was weak with regard to fathering children, but his faith was not weak like his body.”

What is even more amazing is what was pointed out in yesterday's verse. Abraham was about 100 when Isaac was born (Sarah was about 90). Sarah died when she was 127 years old, which would make Abraham about 137 years old (**Genesis 23:1,2**). After Sarah died, Abraham married a woman named Keturah (**Genesis 25:1,2**), and he fathered at least six more children with her! Abraham didn't consider the fact that he was too old to father children; neither did God!

## **Application**

Have you been waiting for God to fulfill a promise to you? Are you willing to wait for 20 years? Are you willing to wait for the rest of your life?

## Romans 4:20 - Wait Training

**He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,**

### Truth to Learn

While waiting for God to fulfill His promise, Abraham's faith got stronger, and he gave glory to God.

### Behind the Words

The Greek word translated “**waver**” is *diakrinō*. This word is made up of *dia*, meaning “through,” though it is occasionally used to indicate “separation” and *krinō*, meaning “to distinguish, to judge, or to decide.” So, *diakrinō* in the passive voice, as it is used in this verse, implies being separated from oneself or to be in conflict with oneself. Hence it is often translated as “to doubt, to hesitate, or to waver.” This is the sense in which this word is used in today's verse.

“**Unbelief**” is translated from *apistia*, which is made up of the privative *a*, meaning “not” or “without” and a form of *pistis*, meaning “a conviction or belief in a truth.” Hence, *apistia* refers to “the lack of faith or lack of belief.”

The word “**strengthened**” is from the Greek word *endunamoō*, which is made up of *en*, meaning “in” and *dunamoō* (from which we get our English word dynamite), meaning “to strengthen or to empower.” Therefore, *endunamoō* means “to make strong or vigorous” or “to strengthen.”

“**Glory**” is translated from the Greek word *doxan*, which primarily means “thought or opinion, especially favorable human opinion,” and thus in a secondary sense it means reputation, praise, honor.

### Meaning Explained

This verse simply summarizes what has been said about Abraham in the previous few verses. In spite of his having to wait 20 years, Abraham did not stagger in his faith. The Greek actually says that “**he did not waver in unbelief regarding God's promise.**” His faith was so sure and so strong that his faith did not weaken over time, and he apparently never doubted God once he accepted and believed the promise God made to him regarding his descendants.

I find the next phrase quite interesting. Paul says, “**but (he) was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God.**” If we look at Abraham's life we see that he had many direct interactions with God. In each case he learned a little bit more about God, and each situation served to reaffirm his belief in God and in His promise to Abraham. So, instead of Abraham's faith getting weaker over the course of time as he waited for God to fulfill His promise, his faith was unwavering and it actually was strengthened. As a result of his strengthening faith, Abraham gave glory to God. Do you see what that says? Abraham's strong, unwavering faith actually enabled him to give glory to God while he waited. In a similar way, when we believe God's promise and act on faith, we give honor to God. Also, as we learn to depend on God's promises, which we must accept by faith alone, we become a testimony to his greatness.

## **Application**

Are you going through a time of testing? Does God seem to be ignoring your prayers? If you remain firm in your faith and wait patiently for God, your faith will be strengthened and in time you will be able to praise God and give Him glory. Time won't make your faith weaker, it will make it stronger!

## Romans 4:21 - Timeless Performance

and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to do.

### Truth to Learn

God's ability to keep His promises never changes.

### Behind the Words

The Greek word translated “being fully convinced” is *plērophoreō*, which is a compound made up of *plērēs*, meaning “full,” and a form of *phoreō*, which means “to fill.” Hence, in its root meaning this word implies that something is “fully filled” or “completely full.” By implication it means “to fulfill, to thoroughly accomplish, or to be completely convinced.” In this case it means that Abraham’s faith was as complete and solid as humanly possible. There was no room for doubt.

“Able” is translated from *dunatos*, which is the noun form of the verb *dunamai*, meaning “to be strong” or “to be able;” that is, to have the power to do something. Hence, *dunatos* means “having the power or ability.”

The word translated “is” is the verb *eimi*, which is the verb of being (“to be”). It is expressed here in the present tense, active voice, indicative mood which implies current action. In other words, it should be translated “He is.”

“To do” is from the Greek verb *poieō*, meaning “to make” or “to do.”

### Meaning Explained

You will recall that in the previous verse we noted Abraham’s faith was consistent and strong (not wavering at all) and his faith glorified God. This verse adds some further definition to that faith which Abraham had. The first thing that Paul says in this verse is that Abraham was fully convinced. This is another way of saying that he had no doubts at all. This may sound like a repetition of what was said in the previous verse, but there is a subtle difference. Not only was Abraham’s faith not wavering (growing stronger and weaker over time), but it was as fully filled-up as it could possibly be.

The thing that Abraham was fully convinced about was that God is able to do what He had promised (that Abraham would be the father of many nations). You will notice that I said “is able to do” not “was able to do.” As noted in “Behind the Words,” the form of this verb indicates current action (He is able to do). So what’s the significance of this? It is as significant as what Jesus said when He was discussing with the Jews about what it really means to be a son of Abraham. When the Jews asked Him if He was greater than Abraham, He said:

Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham was, I AM! (**John 8:58**)

He did not say “before Abraham was, I was” because Jesus, being God, is eternal. He never ceases to exist and, in fact, He exists simultaneously at all points in time past, present, and future. Likewise in the verse we are looking at today, the Apostle Paul says, “what He had promised, He is also able to do.”

## **Application**

God's ability to perform his promise to Abraham, and His ability to fulfill the promises that He makes to us today through his Word, never ceases to exist. He is always able to fulfill them. In other words, His power and His commitment to us are eternal and they never change. Hallelujah!

## Romans 4:22 - Unearned Credit

And therefore "It was accounted to him for righteousness."

### Truth to Learn

Salvation is a gift which is credited to our account when we believe God's message in the Bible.

### Behind the Words

The word translated "therefore" is *dio*. This is made up of *dia*, meaning "through, either positionally or instrumentally" and the personal pronoun *hos*, meaning "who, which, or what." Hence, *dio* literally means "through which." It can be translated as "therefore, wherefore, or consequently."

"Accounted" is a word that we looked at back in verse three of this chapter. It is the word *logidzomai*, which means "to count out as one would count out money when payment is being made" or "the crediting to someone's account based on the payment made." The Hebrew word used in **Genesis 15:6**, which this verse quotes, is *khashab*, meaning "to think, to reckon, to regard, to consider, or to be accounted." Therefore, based on the Hebrew word it is translating, *logidzomai* means "to put to one's account" or "to credit to someone." One way to think of this is that it is something which God permanently marks in His record book.

### Meaning Explained

Remember the therefore rule? Whenever you see a "therefore" or a "wherefore," you need to see what it's **there for**. In this case "therefore" is in reference to the fact that Abraham was fully persuaded. That is, his faith was strong and unwavering. He completely believed God. And, because Abraham had a firm conviction that God would do what He promised He would do (make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars of the heavens and make Abraham the father of many nations), God credited that faith to him as righteousness. That is, it was marked in God's record book next to Abraham's name giving him credit for being righteous. He didn't earn it; it was simply credited to him as a gift.

This is the crux of what we call salvation. God tells us that we are sinners condemned to suffer eternally in Hell. He tells us that we need salvation and that the only way for us to obtain salvation is to accept the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross in payment for our sins. So, first a person has to believe that he or she is a sinner. Next, we have to believe that we are going to be judged for our sins and that the punishment for our sins is eternity in hell. But how do we know these things? We know them because that's what God tells us in the Bible. If we don't believe the Bible is God's word, then we don't believe what God tells us in the Bible and there's no reason to believe in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

However, if we believe that we are sinners who are going to hell, then we must believe that Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. How do we know that He is the Son of God who died on the cross to pay for our sins? We know this because God tells us in His message to mankind, the Bible. When we believe that we are sinners and that Jesus' blood was shed on the cross as payment for our sins, as a result of our faith God credits righteousness to our account.

## **Application**

We don't earn salvation by believing; God simply gives us credit for it when we believe His message. That is, He credits us with righteousness. He doesn't owe it to us. It's His gift to us. That's grace!

## Romans 4:23 - Old Truths for Us

Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was accounted to him,

### Truth to Learn

The Old Testament declares important truths for Christians.

### Behind the Words

In Greek there are two different words translated “not.” One is *ou* and the other is *mē*. The second of these, *mē*, indicates a conditional negation or when denial is a matter of thought, not fact. The word *ou*, on the other hand, indicates absolute negation as a matter of fact. In the current verse, the word “not” is translated from the Greek word *ou*. Hence, it is a matter of fact, not opinion, that “it was not written for his sake alone.”

### Meaning Explained

Since the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the predominantly Jewish Christians in Rome, they certainly were familiar with their ancestor, the patriarch Abraham. Paul has been demonstrating in a series of logical arguments that justification (God’s declaration of our righteousness) does not come from obeying a series of laws or church ordinances. Rather, justification comes of God’s free will (not our free will) to those who believe the promise(s) made by God as recorded in the Bible.

In Abraham’s case God promised that he would be the father of many nations and that he would have descendants as numerous as the sand of the sea or as numerous as the stars of the heaven, and Abraham believed God. As we have seen in the past few verses, this belief occurred even when Abraham was past child producing years, and he held firm to this belief for more than 20 years even as his body was getting older and less able to produce children.

Moses documented all of this in the book of Genesis, chronicling the life of Abraham in chapters 12 through 25. The specific reference in the current verse is to **Genesis 15:5,6** where it says:

And He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your seed be.” And he believed in Jehovah. And He counted it to him for righteousness.

What Paul now tells us in the current verse is that Moses’ documentation of this event absolutely was not for Abraham’s sake alone (the fact that Abraham was declared righteous because of his faith). In fact, it was not written for Abraham’s sake at all, given the fact that Abraham had been dead more than 300 years when Moses wrote it. When this was written about Abraham, it clearly elevated Abraham in the eyes of all who read about this, more so than if it had simply been handed down as an oral tradition. So, in a sense, it may have had some benefit to Abraham but more so to his descendants who now had “bragging rights” about their ancestor.

Paul’s point, however, is that there is another (more important) reason that this was written about, and he will state that in the next verse.

## **Application**

The things written in the Old Testament were not written just for the Jews. These things were also written for Christians who are the spiritual descendants of Abraham.

## Romans 4:24 - Imputed Permanently

but also for us, to whom it is about to be accounted - to those believing on the one who raised up Jesus our Lord out of the dead,

### Truth to Learn

Righteousness is imputed to everyone who believes in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### Behind the Words

“Out of” is the translation of *ek*, which means “out” or “out of.” In some translations this is written as “from.”

The word translated “the dead” is *nekros*, which is derived from *nekus*, meaning “a corpse.” Hence, *nekros* means “a dead one.” It is expressed here in the plural. Therefore Paul is saying that Jesus was raised out of (from) the dead ones.

### Meaning Explained

In the previous verse Paul told us that Moses’ writing about Abraham’s believing faith, and his subsequently being declared righteous by God, was not done for Abraham’s sake alone. It was also written for those of us who have also believed God’s promise and have been declared righteous because of our faith.

Having taken each of these verses and having slowly dissected them one at a time as we have, we may also have lost a little of the impact that this verse would have had on the predominantly Jewish Christians in Rome. You see, Paul has been very carefully showing these believers in the Law that it is not obedience to the Law or their being Jewish that has saved them. Rather, it is their faith. He has just proved to them that they did not earn their salvation in any way. Instead, he has shown them that their salvation, that is, their righteousness, came about only because God chose to declare them righteous when they believed in the resurrection of Jesus. This verse and the following verse are the ones that complete the irrefutable argument that Paul has been delivering. This salvation is completely God’s doing!

Also, according to **Ephesians 1:13,14** Paul told the believers at Ephesus that upon believing (and being declared righteous by God) we were sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation. Here’s what it says:

“... hearing the Word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance ...”

This is a significant point. Think about it. If God is the one who declared us righteous and as a result sealed us with the Holy Spirit who has been given to us as an earnest (a guarantee), then we can never lose our salvation because He can never take the Holy Spirit back from us. It’s like earnest money you put down when you offer to purchase a house; if you decide to remove your purchase offer, you don’t get your earnest money back because that was your guarantee. The Holy Spirit is our guarantee that God will complete our salvation as He promised. Even if He were to take back your righteousness (which He won’t), He couldn’t take back His Holy Spirit; that’s your guarantee! This means no matter what you do you can’t lose your salvation.

## **Application**

If you are a born again Christian then you have been declared righteous by God. You didn't do anything to earn it in the first place, and you can't lose it no matter what you do! You can't even give it back without God's permission (which He won't give).

That's security! And it's eternal!

## Romans 4:25 - Resurrection Justification

who was delivered for of our transgressions, and was raised for our justification.

### Truth to Learn

Salvation is only through faith in the sacrificial death and bodily resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

### Behind the Words

“Delivered” is translated from *paradidōmi*, which is made up of *para*, meaning “beside, to the side of, or over to” and *didōmi*, meaning “to give.” Hence, it means “to give over to” or “to surrender to.”

The word “transgressions” is from *paraptōma*, which is derived from *parapiptō*, meaning “to fall by the side” or “to slip-up.”

“Justification” is from the word *dikaiōsis*, from the verb *dikaioō*, which means “to justify” or “to declare righteous.”

### Meaning Explained

Abraham believed that God would raise up a son from the deadness of his own body and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. Abraham also believed that God would raise Isaac again from the dead after he was to offer him as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah (see **Genesis 22:1-19**). In the same way we are to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and that he will raise us from the dead unto eternal life. Though it is different subject matter in each case, it is still faith that God responds to with His declaration of righteousness.

We are not to believe in just anything. It’s not just blind faith in “a deity” or simply believing that there is a God. In order for us to be declared righteous by God, we have to believe in what He tells us about ourselves and about Jesus. We are sinners, and we deserve the punishment of Hell for our sins; therefore, we need salvation that we can’t provide for ourselves. The worst part of the punishment of Hell is not the torment of the fire; rather, it is the separation from God, the inability to fellowship with Him, the fact that He has sentenced us to a place of loneliness and emptiness. That’s the real agony Hell induces.

As Paul states in this verse, Jesus was delivered for our transgressions. Jesus took on our transgressions and suffered our punishment for us. We must believe this. While Jesus was hanging on the cross, there was darkness for three hours. Toward the end of this time of darkness, Jesus cried out, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (**Matthew 27:46**). Why? It was during these three hours that Jesus was separated from God the Father for the only time ever. It was during this time that Jesus suffered the loneliness of Hell for us. It was during this time that He suffered in our place and paid the penalty for our sins!

Paul then states that He was raised for our justification. We are justified because Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God. This is according to His promise just as Isaac was raised from the deadness of Abraham and of Sarah’s womb, and Isaac would have been raised from the dead if Abraham had been allowed to sacrifice him on Mount Moriah. Because we believe in the resurrection of Christ and believe

God's promise that He will raise us up to eternal life, He has imputed righteousness to us and has given us the seal of the Holy Spirit to keep until He fulfills His promise.

### **Application**

Paul has been teaching us that eternally secure salvation is by the grace of God through faith and faith alone. Hallelujah!