

Romans Chapter 4: Justified by Faith Alone

Paul uses both [Abraham and David](#), two hugely important Old Testament characters, to [prove that justification before God is by faith alone](#). Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation and David were given the promise that from one of their descendants the Messiah would come. God made a covenant with Abraham and repeated it with David. Why were these two men so favoured and blessed by God? Paul answers that it is [precisely the same way and method that God is now using to redeem and justify humanity](#).

Abram was born in Ur of the Chaldeans (in modern day Iraq) around 350 years after the flood in around 2000 B.C. (varies from 1996 – Ussher; 1992 – Calmet; 2153 – Hales; 2091 - narrative Bible) which was about 2 years after the death of Noah. His father was Terah who was 70 before he started his family with Haran (Lot's father). Terah had Abram at age 130 and Nahor (grandfather of Rebekah, who was Isaac's wife, and Laban – the father of Rachel and Leah). Terah first set out to migrate to Canaan, but never arrived as he settled with his family, including Abram, in Haran in modern day Syria. Whether God called Terah or Abram initially to migrate to Canaan with his family is not completely clear in the Genesis account (but it suggests Terah). However, Stephen in his account in Acts 7:2-4 suggests that Abram had the call from God while in Ur and took his family, including his father, with him and settled in Haran on the way to Canaan. He only moved to where God wanted him to be the year his father Terah died when Abram was 75 years old.

Abraham was called and blessed by God with a [promise given three times](#) that he would be the [father of a great nation and that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan which would later become the land of Israel](#). The third time God made his covenant with Abraham, He instituted the [rite of circumcision](#) with him. At the same time, God changed his name from [Abram meaning 'exalted father' to Abraham meaning 'father of many'](#) and his wife's name from Sarai (meaning unknown) to [Sarah meaning 'princess'](#). Even at age 90 she was able to turn heads (so maybe there is hope for us all).

Abraham offered the [first tithe](#) mentioned in the Bible to [Melchizedek king of Salem](#), priest of God Most High following his victory in battle and after Melchizedek blessed him and reminded Abram to whom the victory truly belonged. Abram also refused to take any spoils of battle for himself as he only wanted God to be credited for his riches and not the evil king of Sodom who was offering them.

Abraham was a mighty man of faith, but he [messed up](#). He took [Lot](#) his nephew with him from Haran to Canaan even though God [told him to leave his father's household](#). Later, he had disputes with Lot over grazing land, had to rescue Lot, and then Lot had children to his own daughters from whom the Moabites and Ammonites descended (these caused Abraham's descendants problems later). He twice

stretched the truth trying to [pass off his wife as his sister](#) and caused major suffering to those involved. Both times he also benefited financially from his lie. He also, with Sarah's encouragement, had a [child through his wife's handmaiden Hagar](#) which resulted in Ishmael whose descendants caused heaps of trouble throughout Israel's history. When Sarah died, Abraham had [another wife Keturah](#) and concubines and bore many other children whose descendants, like the Midianites, often caused Israel problems.

Although he had his bad points, Abraham was a [remarkable man](#) of God. He [undertook a journey with God in which his faith grew as God proved himself over and over again](#). Even when he was doing something foolish, God still blessed him and provided for him and protected him. He [obeyed God](#) when God asked something of him, perhaps with reservation and it took time at the start, but he did it eventually. The most amazing example of this was his [willingness to sacrifice his own son](#) at God's request. Abraham realised more and more as his life went on that he was a [man separated to God from the world](#). He became confident in the protection and provision of God and so his faith grew. He honoured God and gave Him the glory for all his achievements. [Even outsiders honoured Abraham because they saw that God was with him](#). He died aged 175.

Verse 1-3 Abraham believed God

[“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”](#) (Romans 4:1-3)

Why did Abraham have such favour with God? It was because he believed God. This resulted in good works, but the works were not the reason that he was justified before God and had God's favour. [Justified](#) is the Greek word 'dikaioo' (dik-ah-yoo-o) which means [‘to deem to be right’](#) and it describes [the legal and formal acquittal from guilt by God as judge allowing God to pronounce that the sinner or guilty person is righteous](#). [It wasn't Abraham's works that justified him](#), even though in worldly terms, Abraham had something to brag about. His life was full of amazing episodes, but this meant little to him especially as his life of faith progressed. He knew who enabled all these miraculous happenings in his life. [It was God who justified him because Abraham believed God](#).

[“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”](#)

This verse that is quoted from Genesis 15:6 is the first time in the Bible that the doctrine of justification by faith only is clearly stated, although it was implied before. Let's unpack this verse:

The word [‘believed’](#) is the Greek word [‘pisteuo’](#) (pist-yoo-o) which means [‘to believe, to be persuaded of and hence to place confidence in, to trust and place reliance on’](#).

The word translated as 'credited' in the NIV is the Greek word 'logizomai' (log-id-zom-ah-ee) (also used in verse 4 and 6). This word means 'to put something to somebody's account or to make up a deficiency in someone's account – it is the process of analysing and squaring accounts'.

The word translated 'righteousness' is the Greek word 'dikaiosune' (dik-ah-yos-oo-nay) which means 'the character or quality of being right or just'. It was formerly spelled 'rightwiseness' which more clearly expresses the meaning. God always acts in a right manner, i.e. He is consistent with His own nature and He always acts rightly, and so His will and nature defines what righteousness is. As far as we are concerned, righteousness is being in right relationship with God or right standing with God and, therefore, acting in this world as God would want us to both in terms of Him and other people. It is conforming to God's will.

So here the Lord entered a credit to Abram's account because of his belief and then stamped his account 'paid in full'. Abram was declared righteous, not because he earned or deserved it, but because the One to whom he owed everything – God – decided to credit this to him because he believed God.

Abram did believe God and did what God told him to do, but he went further than that. Abram believed in God's way of redemption even though he only saw it afar off and so it wasn't fully clear.

Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." (John 8:56)

"Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." (Galatians 3:6-9)

What Paul is saying here is that Abraham was saved by faith just as we are. He had works and merit, but these did not count. Abraham saw that his salvation lay entirely in the merits of the Son of God who was going to come and who was going to be one of his descendants.

"The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ." (Galatians 3:16)

He trusted himself to this means of salvation. He understood that the righteousness that God had credited to him came because of this, so boasting is entirely excluded. Abram did not believe in himself or his works, he believed in God. He trusted God and His character. He believed that God was willing and able to fulfil His promises despite the obvious natural difficulties. And the Lord responded to Abram's trust by declaring him just, as He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

How many here believe that God loves them more because of what they do? If I am good, He will love me more and if I am bad, He will love me less! No, God is love. It is His nature. Imagine the person you love the most. How do you feel about them, how protective and caring are you towards them? Well God loves us much more. He loves the people in His church, but He also loves the rest of humanity. He hates what they do, and what we do for that matter. God is love, but He is also holy. He cannot excuse all our sins just because He loves us as this would not be possible due to His holiness. His great mission throughout all of history is to be able to express His love for us on a personal level. He wants to take us back in His loving arms as it were, i.e. He wants us to be reconciled to Him. His chosen way for this to happen is something that He planned from the very beginning. He planned all along to send His Son into the world to die for our sin and make a way for us to be able to experience God's love. When God looks at Jesus, He is completely satisfied – His love and His holiness are satisfied. Jesus never let Him down, never turned His back on Him or went His own way. When God sees Jesus, He can love Him without reservation or restraint. And, praise God, when He looks at us who have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, He sees us in Jesus. In effect, He sees us through the filter of Jesus and that filter blots out the rubbish that is within us from God's sight. Now God can pour out His love to us like He once could do to His creation Adam and Eve before they sinned. Because God loves us, He is constantly looking for anyone with whom He can have a restored relationship. Both Abraham and David discovered the way – they were justified or made righteous by their belief and faith in Him.

Verse 4-5 Faith not Works

“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” (Romans 4:4,5)

If you are employed to do a job and you carry out what is asked of you, then your wage is not a gift. You have worked for and earned that money and you have a right to expect whatever you have coming. In effect, the **employer is indebted** to you until your wage is paid. The wages you receive are **just compensation, not a gift**.

The person who is **justified before God** has not achieved this position as a **result of their good works**. In fact, our good works have no value in terms of our justification before God. We certainly **cannot present an account or bill to God** and expect to be justified before Him as a result of our works, no matter how amazing they are. Our works are actions driven by our ungodly or wicked human nature and these will never even come close to enabling us to be justified before God and so be regarded as righteous before Him.

However, Paul states that it is such ungodly or wicked people that God justifies. What Paul is declaring here is that **what makes us righteous is our trust in God and our faith in Him**. We are recognising that **whatever we try to do to get right with God will not be enough**. Instead, we are trusting that **God has made a way for us to come into right relationship with Him**. We are **putting our faith in this and God looks at our**

faith in this and reckons or credits this to us as righteousness. Abraham was regarded by God as righteous and so can we by faith.

Paul though is **not saying that faith is just another form of payment**. Faith is not a virtue that simply has more power than other noble qualities such as honesty, kindness, humility or selflessness. Believing God and having faith in Him is good – even necessary – but it is **not a good deed** that makes us worthy enough to be regarded by God as righteous. **Having faith is something that we do, whereas being declared righteous is something that God does**. It is only by a Sovereign act of God that the unjust, wicked person is declared just and righteous by God. Why does God do this? It is because He sees the person's belief, trust and faith in the method He has chosen to have a right relationship with Him.

Ungodly or wicked is the label that Paul places on those who are regarded by God as righteous, because faith has done nothing to remove the depravity that is ours because of sin. Through faith, God is addressing the problem of sin and depravity which is incompatible with His holiness. However, our transformation is not instantaneous. We will continue to struggle with sin and failure until we die. That is why **we must carefully distinguish between one's position and one's condition. When we receive God's righteousness through faith, we are considered righteous (position) and treated as such despite our current behaviour (condition)**. Imagine a prisoner locked in a cell whose sentence has been commuted by a judge. Judicially and legally (position), he is free; however, experientially (condition), he remains confined. Eventually, his experience will match his judicial standing.

Verse 6-8 David's Agreement

“David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.” (Romans 4:6-8)

The Jews knew that David was a man after God's own heart so what he wrote was taken seriously. **David had committed a sin and was completely guilty before God**. However, David was blessed because God had forgiven him. **God no longer put David's sin to David's account in His heavenly ledgers**. He had every right to do so, but He no longer did. David, in Psalm 32:1-2 that is quoted here, is declaring that God had blotted out his sin from His record. He had covered them over and forgiven them; and more this, had enabled David to be reconciled to Him.

David had not worked to earn his position of righteousness before God. He **did not earn God's forgiveness**. God gifted it to him, because David repented before Him. **By faith he understood that God had a way to cover over his sin so that it would not count against him and he availed himself of that provision – that free gift of God**. No wonder he thought of himself as blessed. His sin was often horrendous, yet God wiped it out.

How is it possible for God not to reckon to our heavenly account the sins that we have committed and of which we are guilty? The answer is that He has reckoned them to His only begotten and beloved Son.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

God took our sins, and instead of reckoning them to our account, He put them to His Son's account. He put them on Him and punished them in Him. Christ deliberately came into the world to bear that. This is how we are saved and reconciled to God.

God then took Christ's righteousness and reckoned it to us. We had no righteousness at all and He had it in perfect measure and God reckons His righteousness to us. It is all done to us and we receive it passively from God. It is God who does it all and He does it in spite of our being what we are.

Did King David know Jesus Christ as a far off and what He would do for us (like Abraham)? Yes, the messianic Psalms that he wrote prove this (Psalm 16; Psalm 22; Psalm 110). David by faith believed God and what He would do for us in Jesus Christ and it was credited to him as righteousness. That is how he knew his sins would be forgiven, covered and never counted against him.

Verse 9-12 Circumcision is not the Vital Point

“Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.” (Romans 4:9-12)

At the time Abram believed God and put his faith in Him and it was credited to him as righteousness, he was uncircumcised. The Lord confirmed His covenant with Abraham no less than three times throughout his life and God did not connect the rite of circumcision with this covenant until the third time that He had confirmed His covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14) and 12 years after it was said of Abram that he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

God commanded that all men living in the community with Abraham were to be circumcised as a symbol of their participation in the covenant that God had made with Abraham. Refusing circumcision was tantamount to divorcing the community and rejecting God. Submitting to circumcision, by contrast, allowed a young man access to all the rights and privileges of Hebrew society once he came of age.

Through the centuries after Abraham, God's covenant people placed greater and greater emphasis on the outward symbol of circumcision and virtually forgot the

internal spiritual significance of their relationship with God. So Paul needs to clarify the original purpose for circumcision to demonstrate that participation in God's covenant with Abraham had always been a matter of the heart. The rite of circumcision did nothing to save a man from sin or credit him with righteousness.

Paul calls circumcision a seal – a seal of the righteousness that Abraham already had by faith. The Lord intended the rite of circumcision to be a seal of authenticity of the covenant between a man and his God. Circumcision was given by God to authenticate the fact that Abraham was justified before God.

God gave an oath through this covenant with Abraham to do what He promised regardless of the people's response, but He intended Hebrew participation in the agreement to include more than a mere outward sign. Circumcision was intended to be an outward indicator of a person who was walking in the footsteps of the faith that Abraham had before he was circumcised. For a baby boy, circumcision was given in trust. It was a sign that was to be performed on an infant boy with the expectation that one day he would walk the life of faith that his forefather Abraham had walked.

Because Abraham believed and received the 'righteousness of God' years before he was circumcised, Paul calls him the 'father of all who believe', both circumcised and uncircumcised. Many non-Hebrew men and women have received God's grace through faith. Abraham's faith gives him the role of patriarch over the whole family of genuine believers in the one true God.

As Christians, we must be careful not to take on board the same error the Jews made in terms of circumcision by replacing this rite with some other role, ritual or tradition within the church. For example, Jesus commanded His followers to be baptized as an external symbol of their inner transformation. Like circumcision for the Jew, baptism is a seal of authenticity that marks the individual as a recipient of God's grace. It does not guarantee salvation, nor does it do anything to change the heart of the person submitting to the rite.

Verses 13-15 The Law is not the Vital Point

"It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression."

(Romans 4:13-15)

It is a fact of history that when God made His promise to Abraham, He did not do it in any sense in terms of Law – it was sheer grace and pure promise. He did not lay down particular conditions as to what Abraham had to do or had not to do.

We cannot be declared righteous through obedience to God's Law. No one ever has and no one ever will be. The Law is always interested in works and deeds, whereas God is interested in faith. The Law worries about our actions, conduct and behaviour, whereas God worries about our heart's attitude towards Him.

Why then did God give us His law? It was not to suggest that we could be saved by it, but rather to make our disobedience obvious and to demonstrate how our fallen sinful nature runs contrary to His nature. It defines or codifies sin and brings out the character of sin. It brings knowledge of sin and takes away our excuse of ignorance.

There is nothing wrong with the Law, but there is something terribly wrong with us. Anyone who believes the Law was given as a means for one to prove their worth will soon be frustrated and ultimately fall into despair. Anyone who expects to be declared righteous through obedience to the Law will experience repeated failure. The Law means failure! Our only hope is to receive the righteousness of God as a gift by believing God and putting our trust in Him. Faith is the vital matter.

Verse 16-17 Grace through Faith

“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.” (Romans 4:16,17)

For centuries, the truth of God’s grace had been obscured by the clutter of Greek philosophy and Jewish traditions, both of which taught, essentially, that ‘God helps those who help themselves’. The Jews especially spent their lives trying to achieve the ‘righteousness of God’ by carefully obeying His laws and meticulously observing His rituals. Many thought that Christianity was merely a continuation of this pursuit. Paul here is trying to undo these errors and show that the grace of God that is extended to us in salvation is only possible by the doctrine of justification by faith alone. God wanted something more than an ‘obedience-in-exchange-for-blessing’ business arrangement.

Grace is ‘free unmerited favour’. It is kindness shown to someone who does not deserve it and who, in fact, deserves the exact opposite. God’s grace is the entirely free gift of God and it is received by faith. There is nothing we can do to merit it, or make a claim upon it, and certainly we cannot demand it because of anything that we have done. This is a free gift of God given, not because we are good, but because He is good. We are in effect, paroled criminals enjoying undeserved freedom, so why should we boast.

Faith requires a humble submission that we are helpless to redeem ourselves. No amount of our works or goodness can satisfy God. Salvation – being declared righteous before our Creator and Judge – is a gift to be received and not a wage to be earned. Salvation has to be by faith; otherwise it cannot be by grace. God’s gift of righteousness to us is based on His Don’t-Do-It-Yourself kit and the label on that kit is *grace*.

Salvation being based on faith alone guarantees that it is enabled entirely by God’s grace. This means that the glory for salvation should be God’s alone. If you introduce

works, or Law or circumcision, in fact anything but faith, you are detracting from His glory because you are, in effect, making a claim on God – you have done something that deserves His favour. **Salvation is altogether of God.** It is an act of God. Our salvation is sure because it is founded on God’s everlasting and abounding grace.

Abraham was given to understand that God’s way of justification is not by works or law or circumcision, but that it was God imputing His righteousness to him, and enabling him to participate in that by the instrument of faith. If we are of the faith of Abraham, then the same promise of God’s grace that was made to Abraham will be guaranteed or made firm to us. Abraham will be our spiritual father and, as God credited righteousness to him by faith and belief, so He will to us.

Verse 18-22 Abraham’s Faith and the Glory of God

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

(Romans 4:18-22)

Abraham was able to believe God based on the bare Word of God to him. Abraham, against all hope, believed in hope. In a natural sense, there was no hope whatsoever for this thing to happen – everything was against it. He was 99 and Sarah was barren and 90 and so way beyond the natural age of child bearing. But rather than put his faith in what he could see, feel, understand and reasonably argue (and even what his common sense shouted at him), Abraham chose to believe God and the hope that God was laying before him. Abraham’s faith gave him an assurance that what God had said would happen. He was so persuaded of this that he acted on it. Abraham looked at the facts surrounding God’s promise of a child by him through Sarah and it did not look possible, but this did not weaken his faith. Abraham’s faith was so great that he did not waver or stagger in spite of the greatest and impossibility of the promise. Abraham did not waver through unbelief because he kept his eyes on God and looked to God and saw that nothing was impossible with Him. He was strengthened in his faith by this and was able to give glory to God as He was fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He had promised and was going to act to fulfil His promise. God looks at such faith and credits or reckons it to Abraham as righteousness.

Verse 23-25 Delivered for our Sins and Raised for our Justification

“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. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” (Romans 4:23-25)

Jesus was delivered over to death by God the Father on account of our sins. Jesus was delivered up by God so that He could take the punishment that our sin deserves. God has taken our offences and put them on Him, and He punished them in Him. Our Lord volunteered to do this freely submitting Himself to His Father's will.

Faith believes in God, particularly in terms of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why?

1. The resurrection is a proclamation of the fact that Jesus is Lord! In other words, when God raised Him from the dead, He was making a proclamation that Jesus was His only begotten Son – He was God.
2. The resurrection is the proclamation of the fact that God is fully and completely satisfied with the work that His Son Jesus did upon the Cross. That is why Jesus could cry, 'It is finished!' In the resurrection, the Father is declaring that the Son has borne the full punishment of our sins and that He is fully satisfied and that His law and His holiness is fully and completely vindicated. God was declaring that the Son had completed the work that the Father had set for Him and that full expiation (pay the penalty of, make amends for sin) has been made, that He is propitiated (appeased) and completely satisfied. The resurrection declares that and it is in this sense that He 'was raised to life for our justification'. The work was done on the Cross, but the resurrection is declaring this it is enough.
3. The resurrection means that Christ is our great High Priest. He has entered into heaven, offering His own blood and there He remains. The fact that He remains there is a proof that God has fully accepted Him and His offering on our behalf. And He doesn't leave it at that, He is constantly interceding on our behalf. There He is ever proclaiming that He has borne our guilt and punishment. His very presence there makes intercession for us. But more than that. Having gone in, He has received on our behalf, all the great and rich gifts that God has for His people. Every grace we receive and possess is from Christ. All the gifts of God for His people are in Christ.

Conclusion

Justification is the declaration of God Himself from the throne of glory that all who put their faith in His Son Jesus Christ are freely forgiven. It is achieved by faith alone and cannot be achieved by our works, any rites or rituals or tradition, or by the Law. God takes all our sins and blots them out and then He clothes us with the righteousness of His Son. God is pleased to do so, because He can finally express His love for us.

So here we have nothing at all and God puts or reckons the righteousness of Jesus Christ into our account thus clearing our debt and guilt before God. Though we stand guilty and completely devoid of righteousness before God, we are declared just by means of a transfer of righteousness to our account from that of Jesus Christ. God pronounces that all His claims against us are satisfied. The judge as it were sees the righteousness of Christ when He judges us and declares that it is enough.

Justifying faith is faith that believes that in spite of my past sins, my present sinfulness, and the fact that I know that I still have an evil nature within me, and am weak and prone to fall and fail, I know I am righteous in Christ. When the devil says, 'Do you think you have the right to say that you are a Christian?' I can say, 'Yes, I do, because I have the righteousness of Christ.'