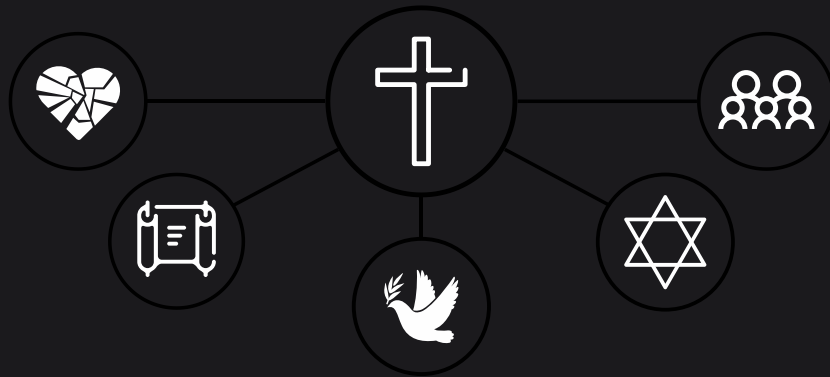




# ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



**Title:** Romans and the Future Gospel

**Text:** Romans 4:13-25

**Date:** November 27, 2022

**Main Idea:** Paul sets forward that Abraham is the father for ALL who believe by faith.

## Personal Study Guide

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READ ROMANS 4:13-25

## **Highlight – What stands out?**

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1. What is not included in God's promise to Abraham in verse 13? What requirements, if any, would his descendants have to fulfill?
2. According to Paul in verses 13-15, what is the purpose of the law?
3. What Old Testament passage(s) is referenced in these verses?
4. In verse 17, Abraham believed two things about God that convinced him that God could keep His promise. What two things?
5. How would you describe Abraham's hope in verses 18-19?
6. How many times do you find the word "promise" in these verses? What is the "promise" referring to?

## **Explain – What does this mean?**

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1. Let's recap previous lessons for better understanding in this section by reading Romans 4. When did God declare Abraham righteous, before or after he was circumcised? Explain this as you review other Old Testament passages (Genesis 15:6; 17:24-26)
  
2. God's promise is considered worthless if the only people who can inherit it are those persons who have perfect obedience (Romans 4:14-15). Why would this requirement make the promise worthless?
  
3. Compare and contrast Romans 4:16 and Romans 4:18. How would you describe the difference between faith and hope?
  
4. How does the law bring wrath (Romans 4:15)? Paul goes on to explain this further in Romans 7:7-11, reference this or other verses as you give an explanation.
  
5. In Romans 4:17, Paul describes God as He who "gives life to the dead". In what ways do these verses reference this:
  - Romans 4:24-25
  
  - Romans 8:13
  
  - Luke 9:23-24

- 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

- Ephesians 2:4-5

6. Abraham's faith supersedes human reason and emotion. Romans 4:18 states that, "In hope he believed against hope". In reviewing Genesis 15, 17, and 22, what insights do these passages bring?

7. Read vv. 21-25 In addition to Abraham, for whom were the words "it was credited to him" written? What must we believe for God to include us in His promise?

## **Apply – How does this change me?**

1. How does the knowledge that Abraham is the "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5) and that you are a child of Abraham affect the way you view your faith? What does it mean for Christians to call themselves children of Abraham today?

2. In what ways did Abraham live by faith rather than sight (4:17-25)? Review Genesis 15, 17 and 22.

3. How was Abraham able to resist the temptation to doubt God's promise (Romans 4:20)? What lesson does this offer us?
4. Read Romans 4:19-21. In reading this passage, what makes you as a believer fully convinced that God will do as He promises?

## **Respond – What's my next step?**

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1. **Group Response:** How can you give "glory to God" in your current circumstances similar to Abraham in Romans 4:20?
2. **Group Response:** One author notes that "even when his reality didn't match his theology, he (Abraham) believed anyway". How is God asking you to trust in His Word despite a backdrop of challenging or difficult circumstances?
3. **Personal Response:** As Dr. Smith discussed, the ***law*** serves as a mirror that shows us how dirty we are, yet cannot clean us. It can't redeem us, but shows us our awareness of sin and our need for Christ to cleanse us from our sins. As we meditate upon this truth, is there sin in your life that you need to privately confess?

## Commentary: Romans 4:13-25 by John Stott

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**Note to Group Leaders:** This commentary as well as the resources can help give you insight as you teach the lesson. Group Leaders should have the F.F. Bruce commentary that you were given at Team Night as well.

*c. Abraham was not justified by the law (13–17a)*

Paul begins this new paragraph with a sharp *not ... but* antithesis, in which the negative is emphatic. There are no questions and answers now, as there have been in the continuing diatribe. There is just an uncompromising assertion that if justification is neither by works nor by circumcision, it is not by law either. For how did God's promise come to *Abraham and his offspring*? Answer: *not through law ... but through the righteousness that comes by faith* (13). The promise in mind must still be Genesis 15:5, that Abraham's posterity would be as numerous as the stars. It was a promise without any conditions or requirements attached to it. God's word came to Abraham as gratuitous promise, not as law. He simply believed God and was justified.

To our initial astonishment, Paul portrays God's promise as being that Abraham *would be heir of the world* (13). Yet in the Genesis text Abraham was promised Canaan, 'north, south, east and west' of where he was standing, whose boundaries were later delineated. How then did 'the land' become 'the world'? It is partly that, as a general principle, the fulfilment of biblical prophecy has always transcended the categories in which it was originally given. It is partly that God made the subsidiary promise that through Abraham's innumerable posterity 'all nations on earth' would be blessed.<sup>85</sup> This promised multiplication of Abraham's descendants led the Rabbis to the conclusion that God would 'cause them to inherit from sea to sea, and from the River unto the utmost part of the earth'. The third reason for Paul's statement that Abraham would inherit 'the world' is surely messianic. As soon as Abraham's seed was identified as the Messiah,<sup>87</sup> it was further acknowledged that he would exercise a universal dominion. Further, his people are his fellow heirs, which is why the meek will inherit the earth<sup>89</sup> and why in and through Christ 'all things are ours', including 'the world'.

Having clarified what the promise is, why does Paul assert so strongly that it is received and inherited by faith, not law? He gives three reasons. The first is an argument from history. He has already stated it clearly in Galatians 3:17, namely that 'the covenant previously established by God' could not possibly be annulled by the law which was given 430 years later. The same truth is implicit in Romans 4, even though it is not developed. Secondly, there is the argument from language. In these verses the apostle uses a profusion of words—law, promise, faith, wrath, transgression and grace. These terms all have their own

logic, and we must not be guilty of a confusion of categories. Thus, *if those who live by law are heirs*, that is, if the inheritance depends on our obedience, then *faith has no value* (*kekenōtai*; literally, 'has been emptied', i.e. of its validity) *and the promise is worthless* (*katērgētai*; literally, 'has been destroyed' or 'rendered ineffective'; 14). Something can be given to us either by law or by promise, since God is the author of both, but they cannot be in operation simultaneously. As Paul has written in Galatians, 'if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise'. Law and promise belong to different categories of thought, which are incompatible. Law-language ('you shall') demands our obedience, but promise-language ('I will') demands our faith. What God said to Abraham was not 'Obey this law and I will bless you', but 'I will bless you; believe my promise'.

Verse 15 develops this rationale, showing why law and promise exclude each other. It is *because law brings wrath*, and because *where there is no law there is no transgression*. The words 'law', 'transgression' and 'wrath' belong to the same category of thought and language. For the law turns sin into transgression (a deliberate trespass), and transgression provokes God's wrath. Conversely, 'where there is no law there can be no breach of law' (REB), and so no wrath.

Verse 16 is a further example of the logic of language, as it brings together *grace* and *faith*. The Greek sentence is much more dramatic than the English, since in the original there are neither verbs nor the noun 'promise'. It reads literally: 'therefore by faith in order that according to grace'. The fixed point is that God is gracious, and that salvation originates in his sheer grace alone. But in order that this may be so, our human response can only be faith. For grace gives and faith takes. Faith's exclusive function is humbly to receive what grace offers. Otherwise 'grace would no longer be grace' (11:6).

Paul's antithesis in verses 13–16 is similar to his work-trust and wage-gift antithesis of verses 4–5. It may be summarized as follows: God's law makes demands which we transgress, and so we incur wrath (15); God's grace makes promises which we believe, and so we receive blessing (14, 16). Thus law, obedience, transgression and wrath belong to one category of thinking, while grace, promise, faith and blessing belong to another. This is the argument from language and logic.

In addition to his arguments from history and language, Paul now develops an argument from theology, especially the doctrine of Jewish-Gentile unity in the family of Abraham. The reason justification is by grace through faith, or by faith according to grace (16a), is not only to preserve linguistic and logical consistency, but also so that *the promise ... may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law* (meaning Jews who trace their physical descent from Abraham) *but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham*, that is, all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, who belong to the spiritual lineage of faith (16b; cf. 11b–12). The law (not least its cultural and ceremonial provisions) divides. Only the gospel of grace and faith can unite, by

opening the door to the Gentiles and levelling everybody at the foot of Christ's cross (cf. 3:29f.). Hence the importance of faith. All believers belong to Abraham's seed and so inherit Abraham's promise. The fatherhood of Abraham is a theme which runs right through this chapter. In the first verse Paul calls him 'our forefather according to the flesh', that is, Israel's national ancestor. But after this he makes three affirmations: 'he is the father of all who believe', whether circumcised or uncircumcised (11–12); *he is the father of us all* (16); and *he is our father in the sight of God* (17). Thus the Scripture has been fulfilled which says: '*I have made you a father of many nations*' (17a). Only justification by faith could have secured this.

Much of Romans 4 has so far been negative. It has been necessary for Paul to demonstrate that Abraham was justified neither by works (since it is written that he believed God and was justified), nor by circumcision (since he was justified first and circumcised later), nor by law (since the law was given centuries later, and in any case Abraham was responding to a promise, not a law). In each case, Paul has affirmed the priority of Abraham's faith. His faith came first; works, circumcision and law all came later. It has been a process of systematic elimination. But now at last the apostle reaches his positive conclusion.

#### *d. Abraham was justified by faith (17b–22)*

Paul moves on from the priority of Abraham's faith to its reasonableness. The description of faith as 'reasonable' comes as a surprise to many people, since they have always supposed that faith and reason were alternative means of grasping reality, and mutually incompatible. Is not faith a synonym for credulity and even superstition? Is it not an excuse for irrationality, for what Bertrand Russell called 'a conviction which cannot be shaken by contrary evidence'?

No. Although, to be sure, faith goes beyond reason, it always has a firmly rational basis. In particular, faith is believing or trusting a person, and its reasonableness depends on the reliability of the person being trusted. It is always reasonable to trust the trustworthy. And there is nobody more trustworthy than God, as Abraham knew, and as we are privileged to know more confidently than Abraham because we live after the death and resurrection of Jesus through which God has fully disclosed himself and his dependability. In particular, before we are in a position to believe God's promises, we need to be sure both of his power (that he is able to keep them) and of his faithfulness (that he can be relied on to do so). It is these two attributes of God which were the foundations of Abraham's faith, and on which Paul reflects in this passage.

Take God's power first. Two evidences of it are brought together at the end of verse 17, where God, the object of Abraham's (and our) faith, is called *the God who gives life to the dead*, which is resurrection, *and calls things that are not*



*as though they were*, or, perhaps better, ‘calls into being things that are not’ (REB), which is creation. Nothing baffles us human beings more than nothingness and death. The ‘angst’ of twentieth-century existentialists, is, at its most acute, their dread of the abyss of nothingness. And death is the one event over which (in the end) we have no control, and from which we cannot escape. Woody Allen epitomizes for many modern people this inability to cope with the prospect of death. ‘It’s not that I’m afraid to die,’ he quips; ‘I just don’t want to be there when it happens.’ But nothingness and death are no problem to God. On the contrary, it is out of nothing that he created the universe, and out of death that he raised Jesus. The creation and the resurrection were and remain the two major manifestations of the power of God. It was in prayer to the sovereign Creator, who had made the world by his ‘great power and outstretched arm’, that Jeremiah added, ‘Nothing is too hard for you.’<sup>95</sup> It was also in prayer that Paul asked that the Ephesians might know God’s ‘incomparably great power’ which he had displayed in Christ ‘when he raised him from the dead’.

This firm conviction about the power of God was what enabled Abraham to believe, both *against all hope* and *in hope* (18a) at the same time, when God promised him that his descendants would be as many as the stars, although at that time he and Sarah did not have even a single child. He *became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be’* (18b). It is not that he ran away from the realities of his situation into a world of fantasy. On the contrary, *without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact*, indeed the two painful, stubborn facts, that he could not beget a child and that Sarah could not conceive one. For the facts were *that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead* (19). Yet out of that double death God brought a new life. It was at one and the same time an act of creation and of resurrection. For this is the kind of God Abraham believed in. Indeed later, when facing the supreme test of his faith, whether to sacrifice his one and only son Isaac, through whom God had said his promises would be fulfilled, Abraham even ‘reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death’.<sup>99</sup> Hence Abraham *did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in (or, better, ‘by’) his faith and gave glory to God* (20). The alternative responses to God’s promise are here contrasted: *unbelief (apistia)* and *faith (pistis)*. If Abraham had given in to unbelief, he would have ‘wavered’ or been ‘at odds with himself’ (*diakrinō*, BAGD). Instead, he strengthened himself by means of his faith. In this way *he gave glory to God* (20). That is to say, he glorified God by letting God be God, and by trusting him to be true to himself as the God of creation and resurrection.

It is this concept of ‘letting God be God’ which forms a natural transition from his power to his faithfulness. There is a fundamental correspondence between our faith and God’s faithfulness, so much so that Jesus’ command,

‘Have faith in God,’ has sometimes been roughly but justly paraphrased, ‘Reckon on the faithfulness of God.’ For whether people keep their promises or not depends not only on their power, but also on their will, to do so. Put differently, behind all promises lies the character of the person who makes them. Abraham knew this. As he contemplated his own senility and Sarah’s barrenness, he neither turned a blind eye to these problems, nor underestimated them. But he reminded himself of God’s power and faithfulness. Faith always looks at the problems in the light of the promises. ‘By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.’ He knew that God could keep his promises (because of his power) and he knew that he would do so (because of his faithfulness). He was *fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised* (21). *This is why*, Paul adds, namely because he believed God’s promise, *‘it (sc. his faith) was credited to him as righteousness’* (22).

*e. Conclusion: Abraham’s faith and ours (23–25)*

Paul concludes this chapter by applying lessons from Abraham’s faith to us, his readers. He writes that the biblical words *‘it was credited to him’* were written *not for him alone* (23), *but also for us* today. For the whole Abraham story, like the rest of Scripture, was written for our instruction (15:4). So the same God, who credited faith to Abraham as righteousness, *will credit righteousness* to us also if we *believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead* (24). Abraham was not unique in his experience of being justified by faith. For this is God’s way of salvation for everybody.

But the God we are to trust in is not only the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who *was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification* (25). ‘This verse’, writes Hodge, ‘is a comprehensive statement of the gospel.’ It is indeed. Its parallelism is so well honed that some think it was an early Christian aphorism or credal fragment. The verb *delivered over* (*paradidōmi*), although it is used in the gospels of Jesus being ‘handed over’ by Judas, the priests and Pilate, here evidently refers to the Father who ‘did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all’ (8:32). Thus both the death and the resurrection of Jesus are attributed to the Father’s initiative: he ‘delivered him over to death’, and he ‘raised him up to life’.

Although there is little difficulty in understanding these references to the death and resurrection of Jesus, the second part of each clause presents a problem: *for our sins* and *for our justification*. The preposition *dia* with the accusative normally means ‘because of’ or ‘on account of’. It gives a reason for something having happened, and so has a retrospective look. In this case the meaning would be that Jesus was delivered to death ‘because of our sins’, dying the death which we deserved, and then was resurrected ‘because of our

justification', which he had accomplished by his death. More briefly, in the words of Bishop Handley Moule, 'we sinned, therefore he suffered: we were justified, therefore he rose'. The difficulty with this rendering is with the second clause, for Paul regards justification as happening when we believe, not as having taken place before the resurrection.

So other commentators understand *dia* as meaning 'for the sake of' and having a prospective reference. Thus John Murray translates: 'He was delivered up in order to atone for our sins and was raised in order that we might be justified.' The difficulty here is with the first clause. 'In order to atone for' is an elaborate paraphrase of the simple preposition 'for'.

The third possibility is to abandon the consistency which insists that *dia* must have the same meaning in both clauses. It could be causal or retrospective in the first (he was delivered 'because of our sins'), and final or prospective in the second (he was raised 'with a view to our justification').

In this chapter the apostle gives us instruction about the nature of faith. He indicates that there are degrees in faith. For faith can be weak (19) or strong (20). How then does it grow? Above all through the use of our minds. Faith is not burying our heads in the sand, or screwing ourselves up to believe what we know is not true, or even whistling in the dark to keep our spirits up. On the contrary, faith is a reasoning trust. There can be no believing without thinking.

On the one hand we have to think about the problems which face us. Faith is not closing our eyes to them. Abraham 'considered his own body, which was as good as dead ... and the deadness of Sarah's womb' (19, REB). Better, *he faced the fact* (NIV) that he and Sarah were both infertile. But on the other hand Abraham reflected on the promises of God, and on the character of the God who had made them, especially that he is *the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were* (17). And as his mind played on the promises, the problems shrank accordingly, for he was *fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised* (21).

We today are much more fortunate than Abraham, and have little or no excuse for unbelief. For we live on this side of the resurrection. Moreover, we have a complete Bible in which both the creation of the universe and the resurrection of Jesus are recorded. It is therefore more reasonable for us to believe than it was for Abraham. Of course we have to make sure that the promises we are seeking to inherit are neither wrenched out of their biblical context nor the product of our own subjective fancy, but truly apply to us. Then we can lay hold of them, even *against all human hope, yet in hope* (18), that is, in the confidence of God's faithfulness and power. Only so shall we prove to be genuine children of our great spiritual forefather Abraham.

In hope, against all human hope,  
Self-desperate, I believe ...

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,

And looks to that alone;  
Laughs at impossibilities  
And cries: It shall be done!<sup>1</sup>

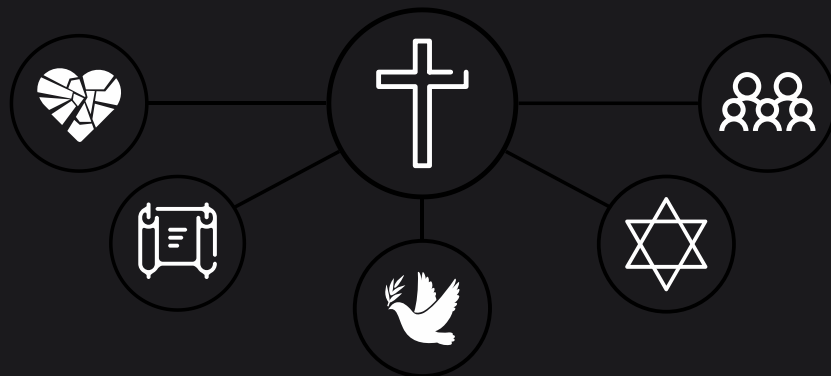
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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, [\*The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World\*](#), *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 130–137.



# ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



## Group Study Guide

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\*This lesson is for the Group Leader to use to teach the lesson and facilitate the discussion. It is not intended that you will use every question in this guide during your group time. You will likely only be able to cover 4-5 questions, depending on how discussion goes. This guide is longer than what you will need but provides the freedom and flexibility to pull questions out for discussion that will best serve your group time.

**Tip:** You may want to pull one question from each section for discussion or spend more time on a particular section than another on. It's totally up to your discretion.

# Introduction

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## Icebreaker Question:

What are some of God's promises that you have chosen to stand upon, even when they did not currently feel true in your life or circumstances?

OR

Why is faith a better basis for God's promises than law?

## **RECAP:**

N.T. Wright states that one can imagine this passage of Romans 4 was very controversial in Paul's day because in it, Paul is redefining the family of Abraham. How has the family of Abraham been redefined both in regard to Gentiles and in regard to Jews (verses 9-12)?

**READ ROMANS 4: 13-25**

## Highlight – What stands out?

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1. What is not included in God's promise to Abraham in verse 13? What requirements, if any, would his descendants have to fulfill?
2. According to Paul in verses 13-15, what is the purpose of the law?
3. What Old Testament passage(s) is referenced in these verses?
4. In verse 17, Abraham believed two things about God that convinced him that God could keep His promise. What two things?
5. How would you describe Abraham's hope in verses 18-19?

6. How many times do you find the word “promise” in these verses? To what is the “promise” referring to?

## **Explain – What does this mean?**

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1. Let's recap previous lesson for better understanding in this section by reading Romans 4. When did God declare Abraham righteous, before or after he was circumcised? Explain this as you review other OT passages (Genesis 15:6; 17:24-26)
2. God's promise is considered worthless if the only people who can inherit it are those persons who have perfect obedience (Romans 4:14-15). Why would this requirement make the promise worthless?
3. Compare and contrast Romans 4: 16 and Romans 4: 18. How would you describe the difference between faith and hope?
4. How does the law bring wrath (Romans 4:15)? Paul goes on to explain this further in Romans 7:7-11, reference this or other verses as you give an explanation.
5. In Romans 4:17, Paul describes God as He who “gives life to the dead”. In what ways do these verses reference this:
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  - 1 Corinthians 15:20-22
  - Ephesians 2:4-5
6. Abraham's faith supersedes human reason and emotion. Romans 4:18 states that, “In hope he believed against hope”. In reviewing Genesis 15, 17, and 22, what insights do these passages bring?
7. Read vv. 21-25 In addition to Abraham, for whom were the words “it was credited to him” written? What must we believe for God to include us in His promise?

## Apply – How does this change me?

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1. How does the knowledge that Abraham is the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5) and that you are a child of Abraham affect the way you view your faith? What does it mean for Christians to call themselves children of Abraham today?
2. In what ways did Abraham live by faith rather than sight (4:17-25)? Review Genesis 15, 17 and 22.
3. How was Abraham able to resist the temptation to doubt God’s promise (Romans 4:20)? What lesson does this offer us?
4. Read Romans 4:19-21. In reading this passage, what makes you as a believer fully convinced that God will do as He promises?

## Respond – What’s my next step?

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1. **Group Response:** How can you give “glory to God” in your current circumstances similar to Abraham in Romans 4:20?
2. **Group Response:** One author notes that “even when his reality didn’t match his theology, he (Abraham) believed anyway”. How is God asking you to trust in His Word despite a backdrop of challenging or difficult circumstances?
3. **Personal Response:** As Dr. Smith discussed, the **law** serves as a mirror that shows us how dirty we are, yet cannot clean us. It can’t redeem us, but shows us our awareness of sin and our need for Christ to cleanse us from our sins. As we meditate upon this truth, is there sin in your life that you need to privately confess?

## Additional Resources:

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**Podcast:** [Naked Bible 420: Paul’s Use of the OT Series: Romans 4](#)



**Podcast:** [Help Me Teach the Bible with Michael Kruger on Romans 1-7](#)

**Video:** [Romans 1-4, the Bible Project](#)

**Commentary:** *Romans*, N.T. Wright

**Commentary:** *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Colin Kruse

**Book:** *Rereading Romans from the Perspective of Paul's Gospel*, Yung Suk Kim

**Book:** *Romans: Encountering the Gospel's Power*, John Stott