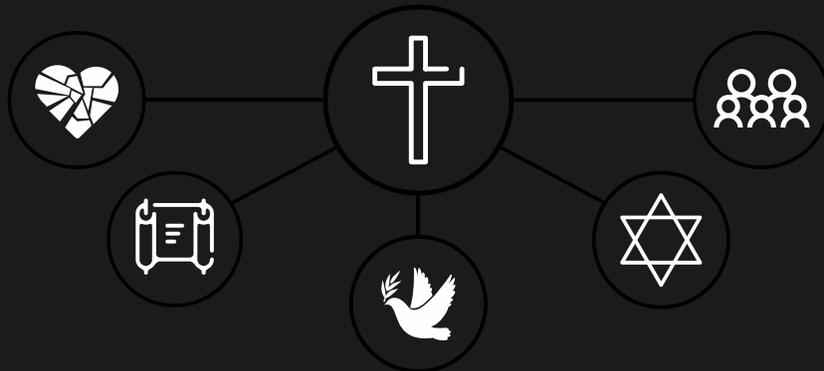




ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



Title: Abraham Justified by Faith

Text: Romans 4:1-12

Date: November 20, 2022

Main Idea: Prior to any works done by Abraham, he was justified by God due to his belief in Him.

Personal Study Guide

READ ROMANS 4:1-12

Highlight – What stands out?

Review: Paul spends the first part of Romans 4 giving a word picture to explain what he talks about in Romans 3. So the first two questions are a recap. It's good to review where we are at from time to time.

1. Why is Paul writing this letter specifically to the Roman people?
2. Paul asks a question in verse 1. What is that question? What is happening in the preceding verses that makes him ask this question?

Romans 4:1-12

1. What Old Testament references or words do you notice in these verses? (Hint: There are two specific references).
2. What are you learning about Old Testament law from this passage?
3. What ideas and words does Paul repeat that have come up often up to this point in Romans?
4. What questions does Paul ask in these verses and how does he answer them?

Explain – What does this mean?

Let's look at the Old Testament references to see how they prove his point:

- Genesis 12:1-3
- Genesis 15:1-6
- Genesis 17:1-14

1. What is the timeline of these events? Where does circumcision fall in the timeline?
2. What has Paul been saying up to this point about salvation? Why does Paul write about specifically about Abraham and how does that prove his point about salvation?
3. In verse 4, Paul brings up wages and a “paycheck” system. How is justification not a “paycheck” system?
4. Looking back at Romans 3:21-24, what is our only basis for obtaining justification?
5. Look at verses 11b-12. What is the purpose of Abraham receiving the sign of circumcision after faith?
6. How did this truth impact the audience of this letter? Both the Jew and the Gentile?

The truth of justification by faith does not change the justness of God's character. Because once God justifies the ungodly, then they are no longer ungodly. This paradox is championed by the death of Jesus Christ for the ungodly.

Apply – How does this change me?

1. Paul gives examples of things we are not to do because of faith through justification. How do you see these items affecting your own life?
 - a. Look at verse 2: In what ways are you boastful? How would you work to recenter yourself when you become boastful?
 - b. Look at verse 11: How do you use cultural practice as an ideal in comparison to the Word of God?

2. Think about this passage regarding your church family/community. The same is true for us all. How does knowing that God's grace extends to all who are willing to receive it change the way you look at others?

3. Circumcision was a sign of Abraham's faith, not the basis of his faith. Are there other examples of religious public examples of one's faith in Christ? What ways have you showed that you have faith in Christ and his work on your behalf?

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. Look up sanctification and justification in the dictionary—a Bible dictionary would have accurate definitions.

2. In your own words, how would you explain to justification by faith to someone who is not a believer?
 - a. In doing so, how would you explain that our works are part of sanctification not justification?

3. If you are a believer, this may have seemed like a straightforward lesson. BUT how will you use the case study of Abraham and justification in your call to create disciples?

4. As we focus on missions this month (Govenber), think back to verses 11-12. How is this a verse for missions and evangelism?

Commentary: Taken from F.F. Bruce

B. Two Old Testament precedents (4:1–8)

Paul has already said that this ‘righteousness of God ... apart from law’ is attested by the Law and the Prophets—i.e. by the Old Testament. This must now be shown more fully, and Paul undertakes to show it principally from the story of Abraham, with a side-glance at the experience of David.

Of all the righteous people in the Old Testament record, none could surpass Abraham—‘Abraham, my friend’, as God calls him in Isaiah 41:8. God’s own testimony to Abraham is recorded in Genesis 26:5, ‘Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.’ What about Abraham, then? If it is by works that a person is justified in God’s sight, Abraham would have a better title than most, and he would be entitled to take some credit for it. But that is not God’s way. God’s way is clearly indicated in the record of Genesis 15:6: when the divine promise came to Abraham, in spite of the extreme improbability of its fulfilment by all natural considerations, ‘he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.’ Paul had already made this statement the basis of an *ad hominem* argument to the churches of Galatia, when some of their members were disposed to abandon the principle of faith for that of legal works. Now he makes it the text for a more systematic exposition of the principle of faith.

Abraham’s acceptance with God was clearly not based on his works, good as they were. Paul’s argument is not merely textual and verbal, dependent on a selection of Genesis 15:6 in preference to other texts from the patriarchal narrative which might have pointed in another direction. For Abraham’s good works, his obedience to the divine commandments, were the fruit of his unquestioning faith in God; had he not first believed the promises of God he would never have set out for the promised land or conducted his life there in the light of what he knew of God’s will. No; when God gave Abraham a promise (in the fulfilment of which, incidentally, the whole gospel was bound up), he simply took God at his word, and acted accordingly.

Now mark the difference, Paul goes on. When a man works for some reward, that reward is his due; when he simply puts his trust in God, it is by pure grace that his faith is reckoned to him for righteousness.

Nor is Abraham an isolated instance of the principle of justification by faith: another Old Testament example lies ready to hand in the case of David. Paul now quotes the opening words of Psalm 32 in which the psalmist, in joyful relief at the assurance of divine pardon, celebrates the blessedness of one ‘whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered ... to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity’. Here, plainly, is someone else, of whose guilt there could be no question, who nevertheless has received God’s free pardon and been pronounced ‘Not guilty’ before the tribunal of heaven. And if we examine the remainder of the psalm to discover the ground on which he was acquitted, it appears that he simply acknowledged his guilt and cast himself in faith on the mercy of God.

Thus, in addition to the text from the Prophets (Hab. 2:4b) quoted already in 1:17, Paul now appeals to texts from the Law (Gen. 15:6) and from the Writings (Ps. 32:1–2), showing that God’s way of righteousness through faith is attested in all three divisions of the Hebrew Bible.

1. *What then shall we say about Abraham....?* Several other versions adopt the fuller (and preferable) reading, ‘What then shall we say that Abraham has

found?' To the question in this form the answer would be: justification by faith, through God's grace.

Our forefather according to the flesh. In view of the qualifying phrase 'according to the flesh' (cf. 1:3; 9:3, 5), 'our' means 'of us Jews'; in another sense (cf. verses 11–12, 16–17 below), Abraham is the father of all believers, whether they be Jews or Gentiles by birth.

3. *'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'* See Galatians 3:6 for Paul's earlier quotation and application of Genesis 15:6.

5. *To one who ... trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.* The God whose grace Paul proclaims is the God who alone does great wonders. He created the universe from nothing (1:19–20), he calls the dead to life (4:17), he *justifies the ungodly*. That is the greatest of all his wonders: creation and resurrection are manifestations of the power of the living and life-giving God, but the justifying of the ungodly is *prima facie* a contradiction of his character as the righteous judge of all.

Abraham was not ungodly; he was a man of outstanding piety and righteousness. But the principle on which Abraham was justified, being one that excludes the idea of accumulating merit by works of piety and righteousness, is one that is equally available to the ungodly, who have no such works to rely on. So the tax-collector in the parable went home 'justified' rather than the Pharisee, not because his merit was greater (it was much less) but because, realizing the futility of self-reliance, he cast himself entirely on God's grace (Luke 18:9–14). But the description of God as the one 'who justifies the ungodly' is so paradoxical as to be startling—not to say shocking. In the Old Testament the acquittal of the guilty and the condemnation of the innocent are alike repeatedly denounced as the acts of unjust judges. Indeed, for the better guidance of judges in the administration of justice the God of Israel offers himself as their example: 'I will not acquit the wicked', he says (Exod. 23:7)—or, as it might well be rendered, 'I will not justify the ungodly.' In the LXX version of those words the same Greek terms are used to convey what God forbids in the law as Paul here uses to declare what God in fact does in the gospel. No wonder that Paul thought it necessary above to maintain that God, in justifying sinners, nevertheless preserves his personal integrity. Once they are justified, indeed, the ungodly should cease to be ungodly, but it is not on the basis of any foreseen amendment of their ways that they are justified. If we fail to appreciate the moral problem involved in God's forgiving grace, it may be because we have 'not yet considered how serious a thing is sin'.¹⁴ The paradox of the justifying of the ungodly is resolved in 5:6, 'Christ died for the ungodly'.

6. *So also David ...* Psalm 32 is ascribed to David in the titles of both MT and LXX. There is a formal link between Psalm 32:1–2, quoted in verses 7–8, and Genesis 15:6, quoted in verse 3, in that the verb 'reckon' is common to both passages. In rabbinical exegesis such a link was held to encourage the interpretation of the one passage by the other, by the principle called *gězērâ*

šāwâ ('equal category'). Paul uses this principle here, but the link is not a merely formal one: the non-imputation of sin, in which the psalmist rejoices, amounts to the positive imputation of righteousness or pronouncement of acquittal, for there is no verdict of 'Not proven' in God's law-court.

C. The faith of Abraham (4:9–25)

To return now to Abraham: a further crucial question arises. What relation, if any, lies between Abraham's being justified by faith and the rite of circumcision? For a Jew, this was a matter of great importance: circumcision was the outward and visible sign of God's covenant with Abraham. No uncircumcised man could claim any share in that covenant; circumcision entitled Jews or Gentile proselytes to all the covenant privileges, apart from those who by wilful repudiation of the divine commandments cut themselves off from the covenant people. One might, therefore, think of a Jew as replying to Paul's argument here: 'Granted that Abraham's faith in God was credited to him for righteousness, this principle is applicable only to Abraham and his circumcised offspring.' But Paul has a ready answer to this. What was Abraham's condition when he was justified by faith? Was he circumcised, or uncircumcised? To this there could be only one answer. He was uncircumcised. The covenant of circumcision was not introduced until a later stage in Abraham's life (Gen. 17:10–14)—at least fourteen years later, according to the Genesis chronology. When at last Abraham was circumcised, his circumcision was but the external seal of that righteous status which God had granted him long before, by virtue of his faith. Quite plainly it was faith, not circumcision, that God required of him. Here then is hope for Gentiles: the example of Abraham shows that circumcision or uncircumcision is irrelevant to a man's status before God.

Abraham, accordingly, is the true father of all who, like him, believe in God and take him at his word. He is the father of uncircumcised believers, for he was himself uncircumcised when his faith was reckoned to him for righteousness; he is the father of circumcised believers too, not so much on the ground of their circumcision as on the ground of their faith.

If circumcision had nothing to do with Abraham's justification by God, with all the promised blessings that accompanied it, the law had even less to do with it. For, as Paul had pointed out to the Galatians, the law was given 430 years later than God's promise to Abraham and could not invalidate it or restrict its scope (Gal. 3:17). If, long after the promise was given, it had been made conditional on obedience to a law which was not mentioned in the original terms of the promise, the whole basis of the promise would have been nullified. The promise was a promise of blessing, and is fulfilled in the gospel. The Mosaic law does indeed pronounce a blessing on those who keep it, but at the same time it invokes a curse on those who break it. And in view of the universal failure to keep the law, the curse is more prominent and relevant

than the blessing: *the law brings wrath* (verse 15). A sinful tendency may indeed be present in the absence of any law; but it takes a legal enactment to crystallize that tendency into a positive transgression or breach of law. And for each such transgression the law fixes an appropriate penalty; this is inherent in the principle of retribution which is inseparable from the idea of law. The law does not fix rewards for those who keep it, but it does necessarily lay down penalties for those who break it. A gracious promise such as God made to Abraham belongs to a totally different realm from law.

No; Abraham's justification and attendant blessings were based on his faith in God; they were not earned by merit or effort on his part (as would have been the case had they been conditional on law-keeping) but conferred on him by God's grace. And the principle on which God thus dealt with Abraham extends to his descendants—not to his natural descendants as such, for they have become subject to the obligations of the law, but to his spiritual descendants, those who follow the precedent of Abraham's faith. This, says Paul, is what God meant when he gave him the name Abraham (in place of Abram, as he was formerly called), and said, 'I have made you the father of a multitude of nations' (Gen. 17:5). These comprise all who believe in God, Jews and Gentiles alike: Abraham is the father of all believers.

Consider, too, the quality of Abraham's faith. It was faith in the God who brings the dead to life, who calls non-existent things as though they really existed—and gives them real existence by doing so. When God told him that he would have a vast multitude of descendants, Abraham was still childless. Not only so, but he was beyond the age at which a man might reasonably hope to become a father, and Sarah his wife was even more certainly beyond the age of motherhood. Abraham did not shut his eyes to these unfavourable circumstances; he took them all into careful consideration. But, when he set over against them the promise of God, he found that the certainty of God's ability and will to fulfil his promise outweighed them all. Having nothing to rest upon but the bare word of God, he relied on that, in face of all the opposing indications which pressed on him from every side. In fact, his faith was strengthened by the very force of the obstacles which lay in its path. And his faith won him the favour of God.

Now, adds Paul, the statement that Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness does not apply to Abraham alone. The principle which it enshrines holds good for all believers in God, and especially for believers in God as he is revealed in the gospel—the God who raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus had been delivered up to death because of his people's sins; but God raised him up to secure their justification.

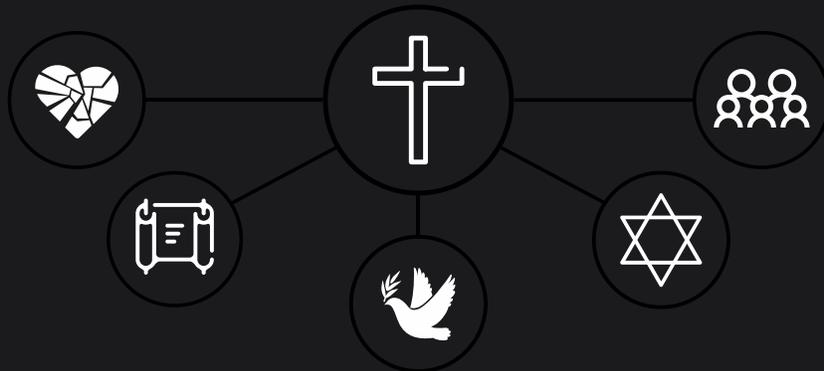
11. *He received circumcision as a sign or seal.* In Genesis 17:11 God tells Abraham that circumcision is to be 'a sign of the covenant between me and you'. Paul's exegesis identifies this covenant with that of Genesis 15:18, in which (fourteen years at least before Abraham was circumcised) God showed Abraham effectively how he counted his faith to him as righteousness.

Circumcision is thus treated as a subsequent and external seal of that righteous status which Abraham already possessed as God's free gift; it neither created nor enhanced that righteous status.¹

¹ F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 115–121.

ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



Group Study Guide

*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

Icebreaker Question:

What is your experience with justification? Do you feel confident in explaining it?

OR

What are signs of our faith (since we don't use circumcision anymore)?

READ ROMANS 4:1-12

Highlight – What stands out?

1. Why does Paul reference Abraham as our forefather in verse 1? How is verse 1 connected to Romans 3:21-31
2. Why is Paul writing this letter specifically to the Roman people?
3. What Old Testament references or words do you notice in these verses?
 - a. There are two specific verses.
4. What questions does Paul ask and how does he answer them?

Explain – What does this mean?

1. Why does Paul write about specifically about Abraham?

- a. Leading up to this passage, Paul is writing about justification by faith, but decides to give a well-known application of this truth. This begins the case study of Abrahams life and many actions he performed that did not lead to his justification through Christ.

For extra reference, you can have your class look up these Old Testament references to see how they prove his point:

- Genesis 12:1-3
- Genesis 15:1-6
- Genesis 17:1-14

2. How is justification not a “paycheck” system?

- a. As Paul states in v4 “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.”
 - i. When you work you expect to be reimbursed for that work? Work and wage go hand in hand...so if works are somehow involved in justification, then there is no room for grace.
 - ii. A further point of if we did no work, we have no grounds to boast. This gift is free.

3. How did this truth impact the audience of this letter?

- a. Paul is writing to both Jew and Gentile. To the Jewish person, this truth would be quite shocking to hear. Their belief system under Old Testament law interprets that circumcision is necessary for justification...whereas Paul says it is not. This would be thrilling for the Gentile person, who feels able to be justified in Christ

4. BUT does this make God still JUST?

- a. The truth of justification by faith does not change the justness of God’s character. Because once God justifies the ungodly, then they are no longer ungodly. This paradox is championed by the death of Jesus Christ for the ungodly.

5. Looking back at Romans 3:21-24, what is our only basis for obtaining justification?

- a. Justification is by faith alone, by grace alone.

6. Have someone read verses 11b-12. What is the purpose of Abraham receiving the sign of circumcision after faith?

Apply – How does this change me?

Looking back at Romans 3:21-24...no matter the ground on which we are acquitted, acknowledgement of our guilt and casting ourselves in faith on the mercy of God is the only way to achieve justification.

- a. Rom. 4:5...we can do nothing but believe
1. **Paul gives examples of things we are not to do because of faith through justification. How do you see these items effecting your own life?**
 - b. Look at verse 2: In what ways are you boastful? How would you work to recenter yourself when you become boastful?
 - c. Look at verse 11: How do you use cultural practice as an ideal in comparison to the Word of God?
2. **Group Time:** Think about this passage regarding your church family/community. The same is true for us all. How does knowing that God's grace extends to all who are willing to receive it change the way you look at others?
3. **Small Group Time:** Circumcision was a sign of Abraham's faith, not the basis of his faith. In what ways do you use cultural practice as an ideal in comparison to the Word of God?

Respond – What's my next step?

1. **Group Time:** Read Romans 4:1-12 again. Can you explain the difference of justification by works and justification by faith? Use your own words!
5. **Group Time:** If you are a believer, this may have seemed like a straightforward lesson. BUT how will you use the case study of Abraham and justification in your call to be a disciple maker?
2. **Prayer Time or Personal Reflection:** Think about a person in your Group or in our church family. How can you encourage someone who is doubting their worthiness of God's love with this passage?

Additional Resources:

Podcast: [Justified by Faith; Knowing Faith Podcast](#)

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

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