



## Lesson 8

### Abraham's Righteousness

#### Romans 4

**"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."**

**Romans 4.3**

## Background

1. Abraham was revered by the Jews, as both the physical and spiritual father of their nation. While Abraham was a great servant of God and a godly example to be imitated (Paul's exact point in Romans 4), the Jews had turned their physical descent from Abraham into another cause for boasting. So, John the Baptist warned the Jews, "do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham," (Luke 3.8). Similarly, in showing why they were rejecting Him, the Jews told Jesus, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone..." (John 8.33).
2. Paul's focus beginning with Romans 2 has been Jewish grounds for boasting. The Jews had boasted in "works of the Law" believing that justification before God came through circumcision and having the Law. Paul has already cast that argument down, showing that only those who kept the Law could be justified by the Law. Since no one keeps that Law, no one could be justified on basis of the Law! (see 2.12-29; 3.9-20). Justification can only come through faith in Christ, not by works of the Law (3.21-30). AGAIN, Paul was not speaking of obedience to God's will vs. having faith in Christ, for having faith in Christ will promote obedience (1.5). Rather, Paul was contrasting two systems of justification: justification via circumcision and Law vs. justification via Christ. Paul summed up his argument by saying that justification via faith in Christ did not nullify the Law, but established the Law.
3. But what about Abraham? Paul turns his attention to this final pillar of Jewish boasting. Abraham was righteous before God and circumcision was a right given to Abraham. So, why shouldn't the Jew boast in circumcision? Why shouldn't Gentile converts be compelled to keep circumcision? As Paul will show, Abraham was justified by God by faith, not by circumcision (works of Law). And so, Abraham is the father of all the faithful... of the circumcised and uncircumcised.
4. Before we look at the text, let's note a few things about Abraham.
  - Paul's argument is based on a quotation found in Genesis 15.6, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."
  - As best we can tell, Genesis 15 occurs ~ 10 years after Abraham was originally called by God in Genesis 12.1-3 and 14 years before the sign of circumcision was given to Abraham (Genesis 17.9-14).
  - It should also be noted that both Genesis 15 and 17 deal with God's promise to Abraham that he would have many descendants (15.5), the father of many nations (17.5-6).

- Promises that seemed unrealistic because Abraham did not yet have the promised heir.
- We should also note James' use of Genesis 15.6 in James 2.23 in making the point that Abraham was justified by faith AND works (James 2.21-24).
  - Looking at the complete life of Abraham we see what was involved in Abraham's faith. First, Abraham trusted God. That is the main point of Genesis 15.6, that Abraham trusted that God would keep his promises even though they would not have seemed possible. Second, Abraham followed God in obedience. That was first seen in Genesis 12 when Abraham followed God's command to leave his home and country and go to Canaan. It was further seen in Genesis 26 when Abraham was willing to offer Isaac, trusting that God could even raise him from the dead (see Hebrews 11.17-19). So, while God's promises to Abraham were not dependent on "works of Law" (i.e. circumcision which came 14 years after Abraham was counted righteous), Abraham's faith was only complete in that it followed God's commands.

## What Abraham Found (Vss. 1-8)

Romans 4:1-8 (NASB95)

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?  
 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.  
 3 For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."  
 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.  
 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,  
 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:  
 7 "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.  
 8 "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

1. Paul begins his discussion of Abraham with an interesting question, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?" The idea behind "found" is that of justification, in other words "how did Abraham find justification before God?" He was the forefather of the Jews, so if he found justification by works of the Law (circumcision), then the Jews have something to boast of. But if he was found justified by faith, then the Jews have no boasting!
2. Paul quickly points out that Abraham's works gave him no reason for boasting before God. Yes, among men Abraham could boast about his works, but since Abraham found himself in the position of all other men (having sinned and fallen short of God's glory, 3.23), he could not boast before God!
3. But Abraham was justified by his faith! (Vs. 3) This verse is key to Paul's argument, so

before moving on let's note a few things.

- The term “credited” is important as it carries the idea of an account where amounts can be either credited or debited. Paul's point is that justification can only be spoken of in this way when faith is under consideration. Abraham's works could not be credited as righteousness (not even circumcision) because Abraham's works were not perfect! However, he absolutely trusted God (faith) leading him to follow God. So, faith could be credited as righteousness!
  - Note that it was his own faith that was credited. There is no room for the concept of Calvin that Christ's righteousness is imputed (or credited) to us. No, our own faith in God is what is credited.
4. Vss. 4-5 only expound upon vs. 3. Works cannot be credited by God's grace, because works only result in what is due. What is due each of us is death because we all sin (6.23). But through faith in Christ we can be found righteous!
5. Vs. 6-8 includes a quote From Psalm 32.1-2, a confession of sin from David. This passage emphasizes the point that works cannot be credited as righteousness, because we sin. We should thank God that He forgives our sins and does not take them into account (i.e. credit them).

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## Who Can Be Found Righteous? (Vss. 9-25)

Romans 4:9–25 (NASB95)

9Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, “FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

10How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

11and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,

12and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

13For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

14For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;

15for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

16For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

17(as it is written, “A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

18 In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."

19 Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;

20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

22 Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

23 Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,

24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,

25 He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

1. Could the Jews count themselves righteous since they kept the covenant of circumcision that was given to Abraham? Or is the righteousness of Abraham available to everyone? Those questions are at the heart of this section and the answer is clear: since Abraham was counted righteous according to his faith and not his works, this righteousness is available to all, both the circumcised and the uncircumcised.
2. Abraham was found righteous before circumcision (vss. 9-12). As we noted, the statement in Genesis 15.6 occurred ~ 14 years before the sign of circumcision was given in Genesis 17.
3. God's promise regarding Abraham's descendants was based on faith, not Law. Therefore, those who have faith are the true descendants of Abraham, not the ones who have the Law (vss. 13-17)
4. Abraham's faith is described (vss. 18-22). Physically, Abraham and Sarah should not have expected a child. They were old. Their physical hope was dead. But Abraham trusted in God, "who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist." So, he was fully assured that God would keep His promises. Note: the idea of following through on his trust is implied in this passage. This kind of faith, this absolute trust was credited.
5. We need to have the same kind of faith (vss. 23-25). Abraham believed in God who could give him descendants that did not yet exist (i.e. dead). We believe in God who raised Jesus from the dead. It is through Jesus that we can have sins forgiven and find justification. Will we fully trust God like Abraham? Will we follow God like Abraham?