



1-4

# ROMANS

GOD'S GOOD NEWS

STUDY #8

4:1-25



## **OVERVIEW - ROMANS 4:1-25**

The subject of Romans is the gospel which reveals the righteousness of God (1:16-17). Having shown that all humanity is inescapably under God's wrath (1:18-3:20), Paul makes it clear that this righteousness comes not from obeying the Law (3:20), but through faith in Christ who turns aside God's wrath (3:21-26). This gospel is for all, Jew and Gentile, and therefore undercuts any boasting or sense of superiority (3:27-30). Furthermore, far from nullifying God's Old Testament Law, it upholds it (3:31). In this week's passage, Paul develops some of the argument laid out in 3:21-31. In particular, he demonstrates that God's people have always been justified by faith, and fills out what a justifying faith looks like.

### ***By Faith Alone, All Along (4:1-8)***

**1-5** Contrary to the charge that Paul's teaching of justification by faith contradicts or nullifies God's law, he here demonstrates that this has been God's plan all along. Firstly, he shows with the example of Abraham, that God's people have always been declared righteous on the basis of faith, not by works of the law. In quoting Genesis 15:6, Paul recalls the great covenant promises made to Abraham and his offspring (cf. Gen 12) - that God would bless them, make them into a great nation, and through them, bless the earth. Abraham did nothing to earn these promises, he simply took God at his Word, and in response God *counted* him as righteous.

**6-8** Yet if Abraham, the great forefather of Israel, wasn't evidence enough for his Jewish audience, Paul now references Israel's greatest King – David. Despite his pre-meditated murder of Uriah, and adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), David rejoiced that God *did not count* his sins against him, but forgave him. In Psalm 32, David rejoices that he is forgiven not on the basis of works, but simply by clinging to God in faith and coming to him for mercy. Thus, through the OT, we see that God's people have always been counted righteous *by faith*.

### ***By Faith, For All (4:9-17)***

**9-12** Anticipating the objection that this gift of righteousness was only made available to the Jews and not the Gentiles, Paul proceeds to show that Abraham was declared righteous whilst uncircumcised (and as such, a 'Gentile'). Indeed, God's declaration of Abraham as righteous took place *at least* 13 years before circumcision was instituted to signify God's covenant promises (cf. Gen 17:25). God's gift of righteousness is thus not limited to the circumcised. Indeed, it is available to all God's people, who like their spiritual ancestor, come to God in faith.

**13-15** To drive the message home, Paul also makes clear that God's covenant promises were not received on the basis of obedience to the Law, but on the basis of faith which is credited as righteousness. The reasons are twofold: Firstly, God's promises pre-dated the law by 430 years (Gal 3:15-22). Obeying the later law was simply an expression of faith in God's covenant promises, not the cause for the covenant itself. Secondly, far from being able to make anyone righteous, the Law only convicts of guilt (3:20) increases trespass (5:20), and so incurs God's wrath. Though there was sin in the world before the Law (5:13), the presence of the Law intensifies guilt as it establishes a clearly labelled boundary, that when crossed, results not only in sin, but open transgression or trespass (cf. 5:20).

**16-17a** Thus, whether someone is physically descended from Abraham or not, God's true people are those who share the faith of Abraham. It is these people, in Christ, who are recipients of God's covenant promises.

### ***The Faith that Justifies (4:17-25)***

**17b-25** Having established that God's people have always been made righteous not by circumcision, nor by works of the Law, but by faith, Paul now uses the example of Abraham to spell out what such faith consists of.

*Firstly, faith has God as its object* (v 17). What is crucial is the object of our faith, not its strength. The object of our faith is the God who raises the dead and creates out of nothing – creating a faithful people when there were none.

*Secondly, faith acknowledges our helplessness* (v18-19). Faith acknowledges that we are incapable in and of ourselves of securing God's blessing, we thus need God to act on our behalf. Far from a work, it is a dependence on God.

*Thirdly, trust entails believing that God is able and willing to do what he says he will do* (v20-25). Abraham certainly wavered in his faith, but 25 years after first receiving God's promise of offspring, Isaac was born to him (Gen 21). His faith in God's promise wasn't blind faith, rather in spite of all the obstacles, he was 'fully persuaded' (v 21) that God had the power to do what he had promised. We have much greater reason to be persuaded on account of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Because of his atoning sacrifice, Abraham and David, along with all who trust in him will be declared righteous (aka justified).

## **GETTING STARTED**

1. Can you think of any regular occurrences (or extraordinary examples!) whereby people have money, favour or acclaim unexpectedly *credited* to them?

## **INTO THE TEXT**

### ***Read Romans 4:1-8***

2. What does the phrase 'credited to him as righteousness' (v. 3) mean?
  
3. How do the examples of Abraham and David support Paul's argument at the end of chapter 3?

### ***Read Romans 4:9-17***

4. How does Abraham's experience show that God's gift of righteousness is available to Jew *and* Gentile?
  
5. Why would God's promise be worthless if it *depended* on the law? (cf. 3:20)

### ***Read Romans 4:17-25***

6. What do we learn about the *nature of faith* from Abraham's experience?
  
7. What would you say in response to someone who insists that our *faith* is a work that saves us?
  
8. Abraham and Sarah faced obstacles to their faith. What obstacles or difficulties do you find threaten your propensity to take God at his Word?
  
9. How are we in an even better position than Abraham to be 'fully persuaded' (v. 21) in our faith?

## **TAKEAWAY**

10. Read Psalm 32, and thank God for the blessing of being counted righteous in and through Christ, and not having your sins counted against you!