

A Study in Romans

Study Four Romans 4:1-25

Day One

- 1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?
- 2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-but not before God.
- 3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."
- 4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.

v. 1 – What matter was being discussed here? The matter of whether a man is justified by obeying the Law or by faith. It is interesting that Paul is writing to the Roman church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, but he referred to Abraham as “our father.” Abraham is the father of those who have faith, not those who can trace their ancestry to him through a family tree or through the practice of circumcision. Abraham is my father, and yours too, if we have faith.

You might say that Paul used a case study here to prove his point, a common educational practice.

v. 2 – Paul stated that if Abraham had found God through his own effort, he had done something to brag about to men, but not to God. Someone once said that the Bible is a book not about good men seeking God, but a good God seeking men. The fact remains that God finds us or allows us to find Him.

When Paul mentioned “works,” he was probably referring to the specific practice of circumcision. (Please see the Galatians study for a complete discussion of this important issue.)

v. 3 – This important question should be a guideline for all our lives: What does the Bible say? Not what do we want it to say, or do wish it said? What does the Bible say? That means that we must study the Bible and become familiar with it as our guide for life and righteous living. Yet we cannot put our confidence in the Bible; our confidence must be in God. I know it sounds strange, but there are some who worship the Bible instead of the God of the Bible. Let’s review some familiar passages about God’s word:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the

morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God (Matthew 22:29).

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life (John 5:39-40).

v. 4 – Paul presented a basic fact of life: wages are not considered a gift. Of course Paul has made it clear that salvation is a gift and cannot be the result of something due to man. Salvation is something God freely bestowed through His own grace and not the efforts of man. Whatever you have, you have not earned; it is a gift. Even if you have disciplined yourself and have received something from God, it still had its roots in the free gift of God's salvation through Christ. There is no reason, therefore, to feel proud of your accomplishments. They are God's gift to you.

Day Two

5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7 "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

v. 5 – What a paradox! It would seem that man would have to do some great deed, perform some magnificent sacrifice of love or perform penance commensurate with his sins to earn God's favor. But God is not looking for works or deeds; God is searching for those who will trust Him to do what man cannot do for himself. When you and I put our faith in God, God considers us righteous. But man in his pride has continued to make every effort to do something, anything that could win God's approval on man's terms. No one will ever be able to do that apart from faith.

Vs. 6-8 – Here Paul referred to another hero of the Jews, King David, to reinforce his point that it is faith and not the Law that justifies man. Someone once said that David was the greatest New Testament man, even though he lived in Old Testament times. He was a great worshipper, and even though he lived in the midst of the Law, he understood the issues of grace and mercy better than some New Testament figures.

How blessed we are that our sins are forgiven. They are covered by the blood of Jesus and will never be counted against us. What a deal! I put my trust in the Lord and He

takes away my sins, forever. If this doesn't cause you to worship, I don't know what will.

Day Three

9 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.

10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!

11 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.

12 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.

vs. 9&10 – Obviously the thinking among Jews was that they were God's special people because they were circumcised as God had commanded Abraham. But Paul pointed out that Abraham had faith many years before God instituted circumcision as a rite. The implication was that the Gentiles were now being received into God's family just as Abraham had been—by faith and not by the “work” of circumcision. Furthermore, no Jew could rely on his heritage for access to God. For Jew and Gentile both, faith was (and is) the only means to God.

v. 11 – Let's look at the rite of circumcision as it was first introduced:

Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner--those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant" (Genesis 17:9-14).

This is obviously referred to as the Abrahamic covenant. A covenant is an agreement or pact between parties and God always enters into relationship with people by means of a covenant or contract. There was the Adamic, Noahic, and Davidic covenants in the Old Testament. The writer of Hebrews referred to the new covenant in Jesus:

But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. For if there had

been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another (Hebrews 8:6-8).

This “new” covenant was implied when God spoke to Abraham after instituting circumcision and said:

Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him" (Genesis 18:18-19).

So it is believers in Jesus that have inherited the Abrahamic covenant to be a blessing to all the nations through faith. This is why believers must go to the nations and extend the same covenant offer of access to God by faith. Are you willing to go? You are a son or daughter of Abraham, not by circumcision or other Jewish rites, but through faith.

v. 12 – Abraham is my father because I have faith not because of circumcision or any other work on my part. There are clues in the Old Testament that God never was interested in a physical circumcision, but rather a spiritual one. Circumcision was a sign of death at the point of life—the need for the flesh to be cut away if man was to relate to God in any way. Consider these biblical clues to substantiate this statement:

Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer (Deuteronomy 10:16-17).

The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live (Deuteronomy 30:6-7).

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem. (Jeremiah 4:4).

Is your heart circumcised and sensitive to the Lord? Or is it calloused and hardened? If it is the latter, then it is your duty to cut away anything that may affect your ability to hear from the Lord and do His will.

Day Four

13 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.

14 For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, 15 because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

v. 13 – Abraham had the promise that his descendants would be more numerous than the sand on the seashore, more than the stars in the sky. That has been fulfilled when you consider how many people have put their faith in God through Jesus. How does it feel to be a son or daughter of Abraham? Perhaps you should do a study that focuses on your father's faith. We will do one shortly as Paul continued his discourse on Abraham.

vs. 14&15 – Paul pointed out that law brings wrath and punishment because there are rules to be followed; if they aren't, then there is punishment. So the only promise of Law is that lawbreakers will be punished. There is no reward for keeping the Law. But there is great reward for those who have faith. Why would anyone want to live under Law? Yet there are many today who still want to live by, and have others live under, the Law. I keep God's commandments not to earn His favor, but because I already have!

Day Five

16 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.

17 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.

18 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."

19 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.

v. 16 – Let's look at what Adam Clarke's Bible commentary says about this verse:

On this account the promise is mercifully grounded, not on obedience to a law, but on the infinite goodness of God: and thus the promise is sure to all he seed—to all, both Jews and Gentiles, who, believing in Christ Jesus, have a right to all the blessings contained in the Abrahamic covenant. All the seed necessarily comprehends all mankind. Of the Gentiles there can be no doubt, for the promise was given to Abraham while he was a Gentile; and the salvation of the Jews may be inferred, because they all sprang from him after he became an heir of the righteousness or justification which is received by faith; for he is the father of us all, both Jews and Gentiles. Dr. Taylor has an excellent note on this verse. "Here," says he, "it should be well observed that faith and grace do mutually and necessarily infer each other (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by BibleSoft).

v. 17 – For decades, God had spoken to Abraham promising that he would be the father of many. Yet Abraham had no children. In fact, when we first meet Abraham, his name was really Abram—exalted father.

No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you (Genesis 17:4-7).

The Lord had him change his name to Abraham—father of a multitude—before he ever had a son! That’s faith on God’s part that He would do what He promised. And Abraham was 99 years old when God changed his name! Imagine Abraham meeting someone and them asking how many children the father of a multitude had! Abraham would have to respond, “None.”

That is how faith can be sometimes. It is awkward, even embarrassing. You must walk in the truth of what God has spoken, but often it is far removed from the eventual outcome of the faith promise you have received.

v. 18 – Abraham believed against all hope. How could a 99-year-old man have a child? There was no hope. Yet Abraham went past all hope to continue in faith. It is one thing to believe when you still have some hope; to believe when all hope is gone is indeed a special thing. To obtain the promises of God, you must sometimes endure great suffering and pain to be worthy of the goal.

v. 19 – I like this verse. Abraham did not have to deny reality to maintain his faith. He considered the fact that his body was dead—and so was Sarah’s. Faith never requires that you ignore the facts or walk in some kind of deception. Abraham knew that he and his wife were far past child-bearing years. Yet Abraham did not let the facts affect his faith. He did not walk by sight, but by faith.

How about you? How are you walking? Are the facts “getting you down?” I think God will allow circumstances to come into your life that are the exact opposite to what He has promised will be. This is to teach you how to look at His promise and not the situation. This is not easy to do and often takes a long time to develop, especially when the promise is significant.

Be encouraged today. God hasn’t forgotten His promise to you! But don’t you forget it either.

Day Six

20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,
21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.
22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."
23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone,

v. 20 – You can consider and acknowledge the facts and not allow those facts to hinder your faith. I can remember some people who would not want to say that they were sick. They would be coughing and sneezing with a cold, looking like they were under the

weather. Yet they would deny that they were sick! They felt that if they made such an admission, it would not be “faith.” That is nonsense. Abraham knew that his body was dead—that was a fact. But he held that fact in the context of the promise of God and he did not waver in unbelief even though the facts were the opposite of what the Lord was saying to him.

What’s more, after he considered the facts, Abraham was actually strengthened in his faith! Now you understand why he is the father of all who have faith. Without anything to rely on except God’s word to him—no Bible or testimonies of others walking in faith—Abraham chose to believe God in spite of what seemed to be. And as he made that choice, he gave glory to God—he attributed greatness and goodness to God. That means that he didn’t second guess or complain to God when he had to wait so long for the promise of God to be fulfilled.

As I write, I am encouraged concerning some of my own personal promises for my family and ministry that the Lord has made. They seem to be taking much longer to fulfill than I had originally thought. But I am strengthened in my faith today.

v. 21 – Furthermore, I am persuaded today, just as Abraham was persuaded, that God is able to do what He promised. Faith is not a feeling; it is a rational decision and conclusion based on the facts and the trustworthiness of God. Abraham took everything into consideration and, when he did, he chose to trust God. How about you? Can you make the same rational decision today concerning your own life and the promises that God has given you? I hope you can.

vs. 22&23 – It is always true in my life that God teaches me lessons so that those lessons can help other people. Abraham’s decision to trust God had benefits for him—his faith was credited to his account as right behavior. But those words “credited as righteousness” were not for him alone; they were for you and me as well. I am always looking to help someone else apply the truth that God is teaching me, for if I look hard and long enough, I will find someone who is going through what I am going through (or worse).

Is there someone you can encourage today who is going through something similar to your dilemma? Pray and ask God to open your eyes as to who that person is.

Day Seven

24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

vs. 24&25 – While I have been applying the faith lessons from Abraham’s life to every-day living, Paul was applying it to the most important thing in life—putting faith in Jesus for salvation and the forgiveness of sins. That is the ultimate expression of faith. If you

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believe that God can do that through Jesus, you can have faith for the day-to-day struggles. If you can have faith that God raised Jesus from the dead, you can believe Him for healing, provision or victory over sin. You can believe Him, like Abraham did, to have a child long after it is physically possible to do so.

Faith is not an event; it is a way of life. It is not something we do once to obtain a salvation insurance policy and then get on with living our lives. No, faith is a lifestyle. What is your last faith testimony? What are you trusting God to do that He told you He would do? Where is your day-to-day faith application?

Abraham didn't have faith that led to correct doctrine. He had faith for correct living. His faith led him to correct choices and attitudes, thoughts and conclusions. I hope that you will be a good son or daughter of Abraham today and will do what your father did. I hope you will trust God and then find some way to express that faith today.