

Rom. 4:1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

Rom. 4:2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God.

The discussion continues regarding justification by the law or by faith. The phrases “pertaining to the flesh” and “justified by works” go hand in hand in these verses. Paul is posing a question, “Was Abraham justified by his works?” If the answer is yes, then Abraham has a right to glory/boast. Paul immediately follows that Abraham has no reason to boast before God.

The wording of these verses is hard. Calvin made a statement that is helpful, “The sentence structure infers that you can’t pretend to have anything of your own to which a reward is supposed to be due at God’s tribunal.”

Rom. 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

This is a quote from the book of Genesis:

Genesis 15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

This is a statement of fact. Abraham’s belief/faith in God’s provision according to His word was the basis upon which God considered him righteous. Abraham may not have understood about Jesus, but his faith was in the provision of God just as surely as our faith must be in the provision of God. We just enjoy the privilege of knowing that provision was made through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Kenneth Wuest has this to say regarding the word “counted” – “put down to one’s account...God put to Abraham’s account, placed on deposit for him, credited to him, righteousness...Abraham possessed righteousness in the same manner as a person would possess a sum of money placed in his account in a bank.”

Rom. 4:4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

Rom. 4:5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

In simple English—A person that works to be rewarded is rewarded what he has earned. The one giving the reward is paying a debt. We all understand the concept of being paid for our work. Frankly, many of us relish our independence and ability to earn our way in this world. We don’t like to be indebted to someone else.

In verse 5 Paul makes the contrast. Justification is dependent on faith on “him that justifieth the ungodly,” the Lord Jesus Christ. You can’t DO anything to earn righteousness; you can only be declared righteous by God. Your faith is dependent on the work of Jesus Christ—His death, burial and resurrection in

obedience to the Father. The hardest hurdle for many people to jump is admitting they are one of the ungodly.

**Rom. 4:6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,
Rom. 4:7 *Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*
Rom. 4:8 *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.***

Paul is referencing the Psalms in these verses.

Psalm 32:1-2 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

David said nothing about works. David knew from personal experience that man could be forgiven of terrible sin. He goes on to say in verse 5 that it was his repentant confession of his sin to God that resulted in his forgiveness.

Psalm 32:5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

In verse 10 David identifies trust / faith as the key to experiencing God's mercy.

Psalm 32:10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.

The fact that God chooses to forgive a man, to not impute sin to man, based on his faith in Him is an act of mercy and grace.

Rom. 4:9 *Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.*

Rom. 4:10 *How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.*

In these verses Paul is stating that Abraham is proof that God justifies both the circumcised and the uncircumcised. When Paul references Genesis 15:6 in verse 3 above, he is referencing a time before Abraham even had a son, a time before circumcision ever entered the picture. When God declared Abraham righteous because of his faith, he was an uncircumcised man. There was no nation of Israel, just the promise of it. This basically allows Abraham to represent both Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised, as their father in faith. Circumcision came later and was an act of obedience that demonstrated faith in God. It was a particular sign of covenant between God and the nation of Israel.

Rom. 4:11 *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father*

of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

Rom. 4:12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which *he had being yet uncircumcised.*

Sign = an indication, especially ceremonially, distinguishing mark, that which furnishes evidence

Seal = the stamp impressed as a mark of privacy, or genuineness; authenticates, confirms, certifies

Paul is explaining that circumcision was evidence of the faith that Abraham had in God, faith that he had long before God instituted circumcision as a sign of that faith. I think Paul is saying that God deliberately waited to institute circumcision after Abraham was well known for his faith in God for the specific purpose of establishing Abraham as the father of all people of faith in the true God. Salvation was always intended to be for all men, not just the people of Israel.

Jesus noted a distinction in being Abraham's descendants (John 8:37) and Abraham's children (John 8:39).

John 8:37&39 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you....They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

Being a father of a child involves more than just providing the "seed" necessary for that child to be formed. One thing that makes a father is teaching by example. Abraham is the father of those that follow his example and place their faith in God.

Jesus declared Abraham the father of those who did the works of Abraham. What were the works of Abraham? Following God in faith.

John 6:28-29 Then said they unto him, **What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?** Jesus answered and said unto them, **This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.**

Rom. 4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, *was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.*

God's promise to Abraham and his seed that they would inherit the world was not based on their response to His law; it was based on their response to Him in faith. As I looked for the Old Testament scripture to define this promise, the closest I could find was in Genesis 22.

Genesis 22:16-18 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I

will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

To think of your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and sand on the seashore must have painted a picture of needing the whole world to hold them. To be told that you would possess the gate of any enemies you might have would seem to add to your control that part of the world which your descendants didn't already possess. Then to be told that through your seed ALL nations of the earth would be blessed certainly seems to picture being in a position of authority and power in the world to be able to bestow that blessing. So although Abraham did not have a clear picture of the coming Messiah and His kingdom, Abraham believed that God would act according to His promise to him.

Rom. 4:14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

Rom. 4:15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

To receive something because of something you have done to earn it eliminates the need for faith (back to verse 4).

The law was given some 400 years after Abraham. The law was established to help man see his sinfulness. The law doesn't result in blessing; it results in wrath/punishment. Transgression is a result of disobedience to the law. Paul did not say that where no law is, there is no sin. Sin is a term that means "to miss the mark, to err," falling short of perfection. Actually, sin has existed since the rebellion of Lucifer/Satan. Mankind embraced sin when Eve was deceived by the serpent, and Adam followed her in disobedience.

2Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled (seduce wholly, deceive) Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

1Timothy 2:14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

*Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one **man** sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:*

God established the law in love as a guide to protect His people and make them aware of their sin; it was to show them their need to obey Him and look to Him to provide for them in love and mercy. It also established a clear picture of what is just and righteous and a clear understanding that sin has consequences and must be punished.

Rom. 4:16 Therefore *it is* of faith, that *it might be* by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, Rom. 4:17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, *even* God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

Hebrews 11 reminds us that Abraham wasn't the first great man of faith; Abel, Enoch and Noah all lived before Abraham and are listed as men of faith. Abraham was the man chosen by God to receive His promise of blessing for the whole world based on his faith.

I've always heard *mercy* defined as not being given what we deserved and *grace* as being given what we don't deserve. When Abraham looked to God in faith, he believed that God would do what He said because He said it—not because Abraham deserved it. Every person who turns to God in faith according to His word, as did Abraham, is a child of Abraham—no matter what his biological ancestry might be.

“quickeneth” = revitalize, make alive, give life
The context of the passage will make clear that Paul is speaking of Abraham's faith regarding God's ability to quicken/revitalize Abraham's and Sarah's bodies that had already passed the ability to reproduce.

“calleth those things which be not as though they were” – This phrase takes me beyond the immediate context of the passage. God is omniscient; He is the Alpha and Omega. He knows the end from the beginning. He is omnipotent; He has the power to do anything that He chooses. From man's perspective, God could speak of the future as having already happened. He is outside of time.

Rom. 4:18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

This verse confirms that Abraham was focused on God's promise to make him a father of many nations. From man's point of view, it seemed impossible for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham. Abraham's faith believed that God could do what to man seemed impossible. Abraham's hope was a “confident expectation” (from the Greek).

Note: It's amazing to look back and see how many nations actually descended from the loins of Abraham, and many of those nations are Gentile (non-Jewish) nations.

Rom. 4:19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb:

Rom. 4:20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

Rom. 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

Rom. 4:22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Paul is emphasizing that Abraham never lost faith in spite of the hopelessness of the situation from man's perspective. In context, this is referencing Abraham's belief that God would allow He and Sarah to have a son together even though they were far past child-bearing age. This faith continued to grow and be exhibited by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac to God. He knew that God had promised him a great nation would descend from Isaac, so he knew that God would bring him back to life. He died never seeing the promises of God fulfilled in that great nation or seeing how God would bless the world through him, but he believed God would do just what He said. In fact, Abraham praised God for his blessing when he had yet to see the fulfillment. Hebrews addresses that point.

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

These verses say a lot about the kind of faith Abraham had.

- God's power is limitless.
- He can bring the dead to life.
- He can cause something to exist from nothing.
- What God promises, He is able to perform.
- Abraham's faith didn't waiver; it grew.

I think God is emphasizing the man of faith that Abraham had become. The times of stumbling and taking things into his own hands out of fear or lack of patience in the growth process are now forgotten.

Abraham gave all glory to God; he knew that with God ALL things are possible.

Mark 10:27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

Rom. 4:23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

Rom. 4:24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

Rom. 4:25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Paul is stating the importance of the scripture. It's not just a book of stories. God inspired the contents of the scripture for His own purposes. One of those purposes was to encourage future generations of believers—to provide real life examples of men and women who grew in their faith and learned that God is

sufficient and His word is sure—even when things look hopeless from our perspective.

Abraham didn't know the whole story. We now know that it includes the death, burial and resurrection of "Jesus our Lord." Our salvation rests on our faith in Jesus' sacrifice for our sin and His victory over sin and death. I thought it was interesting that Paul referred to believing "Him that raised up Jesus."

Ephesians 1:17 & 20 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, THE FATHER of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him....Which HE wrought in Christ, when HE raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,
(emphasis mine)

The promise to Abraham was from God the Father. That promise was fulfilled by the obedience of the Son. Belief in the Son = belief in the Father.

Matthew Henry – "God honors faith, and faith honors God."