

Comments on Romans 4

In this chapter Paul argues Abraham was justified, or declared righteous, by his faith before circumcision and before the Law of Moses, and he is the father of many nations, including the Gentiles. The theological point Paul is arguing is that Abraham, someone none of the Jews would say wasn't faithful and worthy, was declared righteous before he was circumcised in the book of Genesis, which is part of the Law of Moses. Thus, one does not need to be circumcised or to live the Law of Moses to be justified, or declared righteous.

This argument is the theological equivalent of Paul taking a sledgehammer and pulverizing the Judaizer's foundation of arguing the Gentiles within the ecclesia must observe the Law of Moses and be circumcised. If Abraham wasn't circumcised and didn't follow the Law of Moses was deemed righteous because of his faith, and he becomes their father by adoption, then how can the Judaizers argue the Gentiles must follow the Law of Moses and be circumcised?

The Gentiles are outside of the covenant of circumcision and the Law of Moses, just as Abraham was when the Lord's promises to him were made. Once the covenant was made, and Abraham was circumcised, then his lineage was under that covenant, and under the subsequent Law of Moses as well. However, the Gentiles were never under that covenant, they were outside of it entirely, and do not need to observe it.

Most of the changes in the IV/JST for [this chapter](#) are not significant, but there is one change discussed below in v. 16.

¹What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? ²For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. ³For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

⁴Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. ⁵But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

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

⁹Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not

in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. 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: 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.

v1-12 Concerning Abraham, who is the literal forefather of all Israel, what did he discover? (v. 1) If he were justified, or made righteous, by his works, then he would have something to brag about (v. 2). But what does the Law of Moses say? It says Abraham believed God and was deemed righteous (v. 3).

Those who work earn their pay, their pay is not a gift (v. 4). But the one who does not do any work, but only believes in the justifying God, that is considered faith, and that faith is what God justifies him for (v. 5).

Paul brings a second witness into the argument: David. Quoting a Psalm that makes it clear the Lord forgives sinners (v. 6-8).

Is the blessing of forgiveness only given to those who are circumcised? It cannot be, because the Scriptures say Abraham's faith was counted as righteousness (v. 9), and he was uncircumcised at the time (v. 10), when he was given the covenant of circumcision, so that he might be the adoptive father of all who believe, regardless of them being circumcised or not, so they might be considered righteous as well (v. 11). Abraham is the father of those who are circumcised, as well as the uncircumcised who follow his example of faith while he himself was uncircumcised (v. 12).

Now, it may seem like Paul is beating a dead horse here, in that he is arguing against the circumcision of Gentiles, which was already decided against in Acts 15. However, Paul himself circumcised Timothy in Acts 16:3, and it continued to be a lingering issue among the ecclesia (Paul later refused to circumcise Titus, cf. Gal. 2:3-5).

Even aside from that, Paul is using the issue of circumcision as a proxy for the legal requirements of the Law of Moses. If Abraham was not circumcised or observing the particulars of Law of Moses when he was called righteous because of his faith, then a Gentile doesn't need to circumcise or obey the particulars of the Law of Moses either. If the Gentile is faithful as was Abraham, then the Lord will declare them righteous because of their faith, as He did with Abraham.

v3 A quote of Gen. 15:6, which will be quoted again in v. 9 and v. 22. Paul builds the strength of his theological argument on the Biblical character of Abraham and what the Law of Moses says about him because it is something his theological opponents cannot possibly argue against. As such, he uses it to destroy their position in a reductio ad absurdum.

v5 "justifieth...righteousness", in the Greek, these are variations on the same word: [dikaioo](#), [dikaiosyne](#). The terms "justify" and "righteous" are the same thing, which get used differently in English because "justify" is a verb and "righteous" is an adjective.

v6-8 Paul's use of David as an example is another case of an unimpeachable witness. None can argue David wasn't an egregious sinner, and none can argue David wasn't forgiven by the Lord. Paul then uses David's own words (cf. Ps. 32:1-2), assuming David write this Psalm attributed to him, to show that the Lord does in fact justify the sinner.

v7-8 A quote of Ps. 32:1-2.

v9 A repeat of the quote of Gen. 15:6.

v11-12 The argument is Abraham was promised to be the father of all Nations, the Gentiles, while he was uncircumcised and all of the Gentiles will be uncircumcised as well, because they are not part of natural Israel. And, all of Nations who believe in the Lord, as did Abraham, will be counted righteous, as was Abraham, as long as they follow in his example of faith.

The Judaizers would argue that the Gentiles at an individual level must be circumcised as was Abraham if they are faithful like Abraham. The problem with this argument is the various Prophets who predicted Israel would inherit all Nations because of the promise to Abraham (cf. Isa. 49-62). These Nations clearly were not proselyted to Judaism in the prophecies.

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. ¹⁴ For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: ¹⁵ Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

v13-15 The Lord's covenant with Abraham, that he would inherit all the Nations, was not through the Law of Moses, but through

faith (v. 13). If the covenant with Abraham were through the Law of Moses, then it would be nullified (v. 14), because humanity's inability to keep the Law of Moses only brings the Lord's punishment. But, if it is not by the Law of Moses, then there is no violation of the Law, only faith and righteousness (v. 15).

Paul's argument is the covenant with Abraham is not dependent upon or mediated by the Law of Moses. If it were, then it would be a failure, because nobody can keep the Law of Moses perfectly, so there is only divine Judgement upon the sinner, and none go into Abraham's family.

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, 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. 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. 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 Sarah's womb: ²⁰ He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; ²¹ And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. ²² And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. ²³ Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; 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; ²⁵ who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

v16-25 Thus, the covenant with Abraham is because of the believer's faith and the Lord's Grace, so the promise will be for all Nations, and not just Israel (v. 16). As the Scriptures say Abraham will be a father of many Nations, because he believed in God's miraculous promise, the God who raises the dead and created all things (v. 17). Abraham believed the Lord's promise that he would be the father of many Nations (v. 18) because he had great faith, regardless of the seeming impossibility of his situation (v. 19). Abraham's faith was unwavering, and he gave glory to God (v. 20), because he knew the Lord could keep the promise He had made (v. 21). Thus, Abraham's great faith resulting in the Lord forgiving his sins and declaring him righteous (v. 22). And it is not for Abraham's sake only (v. 23), but for all who have faith and

believe that God raised of Jesus from the dead (v. 24). Which Jesus was delivered up to die for our sins and be raised again so we might be justified (v. 25).

v16-17 These two verses are meant to highlight Abraham's faith that the Lord's promise that he would be father of many Nations would come to pass. Just like Abraham believed the Lord could do great miracles, like raise the dead or create the heavens and earth, so did he believe the Lord could give a child to himself and his wife, who was barren and post-menopausal.

v16 "the faith of Abraham", i.e., faith like Abraham, those who are spiritually adopted into Abraham's family because of their faith, cf. 9:8.

The IV/JST on this verse makes a significant change in the text, as follows:

Therefore ye are justified of faith and works, through grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to them only who are of the law, but to them also who are of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

Smith adds "and works" after "ye are justified of faith". It is likely Smith's intent is to parallel the "them...who are of the law", the Jews, with "them...who are of the faith of Abraham", the Gentiles, as "the promise might be sure to all the seed". Smith's insertion follows the meaning of 2:13, them that are doers of the Law of Moses shall be justified.

v17 A quote of Gen. 17:5.

v18 A quote of Gen. 15:5.

v22 A quote of Gen. 15:6.

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