

## Wednesday Evening Bible Study

February 1, 2023

Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*

*The Letter to the Romans*

*The Righteousness of God*

Text – Romans 4:1 - 12 – *The Faith of Abraham and David*

### Introduction

In Romans 3:21, Paul stated that the “righteousness of God without the Law is manifested” or revealed, and he goes on to say that this righteousness was “witnessed by the Law and the prophets”. This means that God taught clearly in the Old Testament that righteousness came by grace through faith. To many Jews this was a radical concept, so he backed up the principle with proof from “the law and the prophets”

*"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;" (Romans 3:21)*

Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, will now illustrate this principle in chapter four with two examples that the Jews would be very familiar with: Abraham and David.

Note – Parallel passages to this portion of Scripture are found in Galatians 3 and James 2.

Before we examine chapter four, we need to add another unfamiliar term to our vocabulary list:

**Impute** – (λογίζομαι - *logizomai*) – found in vs. 4, 6, 8, 22, 23, 24 - according to Vines it means to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over. It comes from the same word that is translated “counted” in vs. 3 & 5, and “reckoned” in 4, 9, and 10. Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the account of those who believe, while the believer’s sin was imputed to Christ.

This is one of the many examples where the King James Bible is self-defining. When an unfamiliar word is introduced, it is often explained within the context with the use of a synonym or synonyms. These are referred to as “pegs”. Oftentimes these pegs will be found in the verses immediately preceding or following the unfamiliar word.

### I The Example of Abraham (vs. 1 – 5)

Paul gave us the principle of justification by faith in chapter 3, but here in chapter 4 he will continue to prove his point by explaining that justification has always been by faith, and never came through the works of the law. The greatest example Paul could use to demonstrate this truth was Abraham. Abraham was the founding father of both the Nation of Israel and the faith of the Jews.

***"What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?"***  
(Romans 4:1)

Note – “then” clearly indicates that this passage is continuing the argument from chapter 3.

“as pertaining to the flesh” – meaning what did Abraham discover when he considered his life, his works of the flesh.

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

Paul offers a hypothetical question here. “If Abraham were justified by works”. The idea here is that Abraham might be able to glory in his own personal accomplishments, but not before God. In other words, Abraham couldn’t glory when viewed by a holy God. He fell way short of God’s glory also.

***"For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."*** (Romans 4:3)

Notice Paul’s reference to the authority of Scripture. The Scripture is our authority as well. Stop telling people what you think. Tell them what God said!

Here the Scripture clearly reveals that Abraham’s righteousness did not come through his adherence to God’s law, which wasn’t even given yet. His righteousness was “counted” or imputed to him because of his faith in God. You will remember that Abraham and Sarah did not always obey God perfectly; they sometimes took matters into their own hands.

Turn to Genesis 15:1 - 6

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

***"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt."*** (Romans 4:4)

If your works earned you righteousness, it means that God owes you something. However, God owes nobody anything because there are “none that doeth good”. The only people that are receiving righteousness are bad people, because there are no good people, and the bad people that are receiving righteousness are receiving it because of their faith in God.

***"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." (Romans 4:5)***

Note – it is only ungodly people that are being justified. See chapter 3:10 – 20.

*"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" (Romans 3:23)*

Romans 4:5 makes a startling statement: God justifies *the ungodly!* The Law said, “I will not justify the wicked” (Ex. 23:7). The Old Testament judge was commanded to “*justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked*” (Deut. 25:1). When Solomon dedicated the temple, he asked God to condemn the wicked and justify the righteous! (1 Kings 8:31–32) But God justifies the ungodly—*because there are no godly for Him to justify!* He put our sins on Christ’s account that He might put Christ’s righteousness on our account.<sup>1</sup>

## II The Exhortation of David (vs. 6 – 8)

Abraham’s righteousness had nothing to do with the Law because Abraham preceded the Law. David, however, lived under the Law. Let’s see what he has to say.

***"Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works," (Romans 4:6)***

Do you think David was trusting in his own works to earn him righteousness? David could personally testify that it was a tremendous blessing to receive righteousness “without works”, because he could never make it “with works”; and neither could we.

Paul is quoting here from Psalm 32, which one of the “penitential psalms” of David, which are psalms of confession. Psalm 51 is another famous penitential psalm. David “describeth” the blessedness in Psalm 32:1 – 2:

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 524). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

*"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." (Psalms 32:1-2)*

***"Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."  
(Romans 4:7)***

This verse and the next read like the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount or in Psalm 1, but for the lost sinner, these are certainly the greatest Beatitudes in the Bible. Oh, how blessed we really are!

***"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." (Romans 4:8)***

Notice in Psalm 32:1 David uses the word "he", not "they". David was writing about himself, but when Paul refers to the passages, he uses "they," indicating that this principle is for everyone who believes.

### **III The Existence of Faith Before Circumcision (vs. 9 – 12)**

Now Paul will go back to the subject of circumcision. His argument here is that Abraham's righteousness preceded the covenant of circumcision, which was performed on Abraham after he received the righteousness was "counted" to him, so then how could circumcision produce righteousness.

See Genesis 17 for the account of Abraham's circumcision.

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

Notice again this term "reckoned" (imputed, counted). Righteousness was given to Abraham; it was placed on his record through no merit of his own.

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

Abraham believed the promise in Genesis 15:6. We are not sure of his exact age at that point in his life, but the Bible records in Genesis 16:16 that Abraham is eighty-six. According to Genesis 17:24, Abraham is ninety-nine when he and his household are circumcised, at least 13 years after he was said to have received righteousness.

***"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:" (Romans 4:11)*

Notice here that God refers to circumcision as a “sign” or a “seal” of the righteousness that already existed in Abraham. The bottom line is that circumcision does not produce righteousness and is not a requirement for it.

*"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." (Romans 4:12)*

This refers to the Gentiles who may not have been circumcised yet have still received the righteousness of God because they have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can make an application of this principle to the ordinance of baptism today. Baptism is not efficacious, not conveying grace or saving power. It is merely a “sign” or a symbol – a picture – of the fact that a person has believed and identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.