

GOD’S GLORIOUS GOSPEL**Romans, chapter 4****The Gospel: Faith ‘Counted’ for Righteousness****I | CONTEXT AND CONNECTIONS**

1 / We have been following Paul’s letter to the saints in Rome as he meticulously develops and proclaims **God’s Glorious Gospel**. He is unfolding and developing the truths of the Gospel feature by feature.

ch 1.1-7: a brief synopsis of the Gospel

ch 1.8-15: Paul’s passion to preach the Gospel at Rome also

ch 1.16-17: The Gospel’s preeminent message is ‘the righteousness of God—“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” The righteousness of God is who God is in His nature, character, and conduct; the righteousness God requires of us to be *‘right with God’* or *‘good enough for God’*; and the standard by which every human being will be judged by God to determine our right and worthiness to be with Him in Heaven.

And, also, in this preeminent message of the Gospel—**“The righteousness of God”** ... Paul introduces the only way we can receive **the righteousness of God—“by faith.”** This truth of **by faith** is going to be contained in every following teaching of The Gospel...and especially in the lesson we’re undertaking right now...

ch 1.18—3.20: since God is righteous in Himself and all His ways, therefore the ‘bad news’ is that God must ‘reveal His wrath’ against everyone who is un-righteous—which includes every human being, both Jew and Gentile, both religious and irreligious. Paul begins to address a particular ‘target audience’ here in this extended section of universal indictment and condemnation for their un-righteousness—and that ‘targeted audience’ are Jews who assume that their ‘Jewish-ness’ either ‘pre-qualifies’ them for favor with God; or at least, it gives them a ‘head-start,’ a ‘leg-up,’ or a ‘favored people’ status with God. Paul addresses this self-assumed favoritism with God in **ch 2.17-29**. They assumed that because of their covenantal privileges going back to Abraham and Moses, their national and ethnic heritage, their physical lineage and descent from Abraham, and because of their external conformity with and compliance to the Law—especially circumcision—they were attaining to the righteousness of God by their religious heritage and practices. In other words, they were pre-qualifying or self-qualifying themselves by their own efforts. Paul refers to their efforts to make themselves *‘right with God’* and *‘good enough for God’* by such phrases as: **‘rely on the law’ [2.17]; ‘boast in the law’ [2.23]; ‘works of the law’ [3.20]; ‘law of works’ [3.27]; etc...** What Paul means by these phrases is that: *anyone who thinks he/she is going to produce or work any act of goodness or righteousness before God by their own efforts that will ‘qualify’ them to be considered righteous before God is WRONG!* And that goes, not only for Jews, but for any of us also who thinks we are working out our own righteousness that God will look at and say: *“Yeah, looking at what you’ve done—all of your religious and moral works, services, and activities—I’d say that what you have done there is as good as My own righteousness, **The righteousness of God**, and therefore I’m going to accept your deeds as ‘good enough for God’!”* Not going to happen!

ch 3.21-31: in verse 21, Paul returns to connect and follow up with ch 1.17. After declaring that “in [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed” in ch 1.17; and then condemning us all in un-righteousness in 1.18—3.20, we are left in a quandary: “How then will we ever be made right with God? How can we un-righteous sinners ever be considered to be ‘as righteous as God’?” Ch 3.21-22 gives us the Gospel answer! “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested [connect with 1.17] apart from the law ... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” So these two verses, 1.17 & 3.21-22 encapsulate what the Gospel is: **the righteousness of God**

in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the Cross and His resurrection ... AND the means by which we receive it: “through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” *What does that FAITH look like?*

II | chapter 4.1-12 | Both Abraham and David—the two most prominent covenant ‘heads’ of the Jewish faith—they both were justified before God by their *faith* ... apart from their self-produced works of righteousness

ch 4.1-3: So now, that brings us to chapter 4. All along, Paul has been preemptively anticipating questions and objections that his Jewish audience [*or, in our own context, think ‘religious’*] will be raising. They could not accept the fact that their Jewishness [religion] did not in some way make them **‘better off’** than Gentiles [see **ch 3.9**]. They touted and boasted in their descentance from Abraham. But, Abraham was NOT justified before God at all by any works of his own! How was Abraham justified—declared by God to be righteous? **By faith! “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’”** The quotation here is from **Genesis 15.5-6**. God came down to Abraham, put him to sleep, and performed a covenant ceremony for Abraham—making covenant promises that He would keep! **“And he [Abraham] believed The LORD, and He [The LORD] ‘counted’ it to him as righteousness.”** And that was that! God ‘credited’ Abraham with a righteousness that Abraham did not have! But because Abraham ‘believed’ God—and that God would keep the promises He was making to Abraham, God ‘counted’ it to Abraham—credited to him—His own righteousness!

ch 4.4-8: So now, here again, as he has been doing all along, Paul introduces another key word that is essential to the Gospel: **‘counted’** or ‘credited’ [Grk *logidzomai*]. Paul will use this key word eleven times in this message. It is an accounting term. An accounting ledger will have two columns: what you owe, and what you have paid. *Let’s say you owe a debt to a creditor or lender. It is an astronomical debt. There is no way you will ever repay it—you just can’t, it’s humanly impossible. But your creditor/lender is gracious to you, and says: “I know you will never be able to repay this debt; but tell you what I’m going to do: out of the kindness of my heart, out of my own assets and resources, I’m going to give you that equal amount, and write it down here in your ‘credited’ column. This is not an additional loan; it’s a free gift. There! Your debt has been paid by the gift I have ‘credited’ to your account! It is ‘your’ payment that I have given and made for you. As the record shows, you’re paid in full!”* That is what God did for Abraham; and that is what God does for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and His righteousness granted to us on the Cross [see **ch 3.21-26**].

To continue the discussion here: if you work your hours and do your job, you get paid for what you do. That is how reward for your works...works—you earned it by your own efforts. But, **the righteousness of God** can never be earned by any works we have done or can do. It wasn’t so with Abraham, and it wasn’t so with David—another one of their covenant ‘fathers.’ Paul then quotes from **Psalm 32.1-2**. David sinned grievously against God in the Bathsheba affair. Yet, God forgave David. God did not **‘count his sin’** against him; rather **“...David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works...”** In both of these cases—Abraham and David—and in the cases of everyone of us, and everyone else who has faith in Jesus Christ: **“And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...”** [v 5].

ch 4.9-12: Another objection-- *“But, wait! We’re faithful followers of our father Abraham. And wasn’t his circumcision the physical sign of his covenant faith and obedience to God? And we, too, have been circumcised like him...so doesn’t that make us people of faith like Abraham, and therefore justified by it—or at least give us ‘extra credit’ over uncircumcised Gentiles?”* Paul answers that objection with a simple question: **“When God ‘counted’ Abraham’s faith to him as righteousness—‘Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.’”** And that is borne out by the historical account. God declared Abraham to be **justified by his faith** in **Genesis 15 ...** but God didn’t give Abraham the sign of circumcision until **Genesis 17**. So, **he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised** [v 11a]. And God did that in this order *on purpose!* **The purpose was to make him the father of all who would believe without**

being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised! [vv 11b-12].

III | chapter 4.13-25 | The promises of justification and righteousness before God—both to Abraham and to us who believe—are all revealed and received by faith, and faith alone ... apart from any works we contribute

ch 4.13-15: Abraham received all of the covenant blessings God promised him ‘through the righteousness of faith [received by faith]’ and not through any effort or works of his own. The promise that God made to Abraham was that **he and his offspring [descendants] would be heir of the world.** Abraham’s **offspring** refer to all of those who would **believe God** like Abraham did, and be **justified from their sins—whether from among the circumcised or the uncircumcised.**

So, what does ‘**heir of the world**’ mean? It means that God’s people, who believe in Him and receive His righteousness by faith, will inherit and inhabit the eternal Kingdom that is to be realized in the New Creation—when we all dwell with God Himself in the New Heaven and New Earth.

Paul will explain that in the next verses—but for now, he means to emphasize that those believers, **the heirs**, will not receive it by keeping the law through their own religious efforts and works, **but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. Faith and religious efforts cancel one another.** This takes us back to **v 4**: if we earn it, then it is our rightful wages. But, if it is freely given to us **by faith**, because we believe in and trust in the free grace of God, then we receive it by the free, gracious, and undeserved promise of God. As we have seen before in **ch 1.18 and following**, the law of God condemns us before the righteousness of God and sentences us to His **wrath**.

Then Paul makes that statement that kinda makes us scratch our heads [‘What does that mean?’]: **For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression...** Paul is not saying here that *those who don’t know God’s law can’t be charged with sinning against the law they don’t know anything about.* Because he’s already proven that even those who have lived in ignorance of God’s Law given through Moses in the Old Testament still **“show that the work of the law is written on their hearts and conscience” [ch 2.14-16].** But Paul is saying here in **ch 4** that keeping the law cannot produce the righteousness of God because the law can only show us where we come up short of the glory of God [**ch 3.23**]. **The Law brings wrath** upon those who violate its specific commandments. Those **who have sinned without the Law [ch 2.12]** cannot be charged with a specific **transgression** because they didn’t know about it. But they are still sinners before the righteousness of God just like those who **transgressed** the Law they did know—as Paul’s Jewish hearers did.

ch 4.16-17: No one can work out the righteousness of God by his/her own religious efforts and activities—because we have nothing to contribute and no ability to produce anything to contribute!

“That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his [Abraham’s] offspring—not only to the adherent of the law [Jew] but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham [Gentile], who is the father of us all.” What Paul is doing here is ‘leveling the playing field’ for both Jews and Gentiles. In essence, he is saying: *“Whether you are a Jew [physical descendent of Abraham] or a Gentile, the only way you can claim to be a true child of Abraham is by believing and trusting in the gracious promise of God like Abraham did when he was still uncircumcised—a Gentile himself!”* God made Abraham a Jew...by faith and not by any ‘work’ that Abraham could do to fulfill God’s promise!

AND, the specific promise that God made to Abraham was: **“...as it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations!’”** Not ‘**the father of the Jew-nation**’ ... but ‘**the father of faith of many nations of peoples who will follow you in believing in my promises like you have**’! This promise was

given to Abraham in **Genesis 17.5**. Those **‘many nations’** equally include those believers **“from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages”** [Revelation 7.9] who would believe the Gospel in the ages to come. And that includes the Gentile believers in Rome—and all of us who receive the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ!

BUT MORE! Paul keeps referring to this **‘promise’** that God made to Abraham...and that Abraham believed. *What was that specific ‘promise’? It was that God would make Abraham ‘the father of many nations’ who would have faith in Him just as Abraham believed.* Abraham believed that promise of God—by faith—because he had no other option!

God was promising Abraham that he would be **‘the father of many nations—innumerable descendants and ‘children of faith’—when Abraham was old and had no children at all, not even the first one!** That’s why Paul adds this line: [Abraham believed this promise] **“—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”** Paul is still quoting from the context of **Genesis 15.1-6**. Here was God promising Abraham innumerable descendants—and Abraham hadn’t been able to produce even the first one! Abraham offered his personal servant, Eliezer of Damascus, who stood to inherit everything he had since he had no physical son of his own, to fulfill God’s promise of descendants. But God said **“NO! This man shall not be your heir; your very son shall be your heir!”** *‘Abraham, you’ll have to trust Me!’* **“And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then He said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed The LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.”** Abraham was no more able to produce even the first offspring—much less innumerable nations of ‘like-faith’ descendants—than he could produce the stars he was looking at in the night skies. **But the God, in whose Presence he was standing...CAN! God is “[He] who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist!”** And Abraham can only believe Him and trust Him to do it! And **THAT’S THE FAITH** with which Abraham believed—and God **‘counted’ / credited it to Abraham as righteousness.** The righteousness Abraham was trusting in was not his own—but **GOD’S!** And that’s the faith God requires you and me—and every believer—to have!

ch 4.18-25: Here in this testimony to Abraham’s faith, we will find some distinctive and distinguishing characteristics of saving faith—both Abraham’s and ours!

[1] vv 18-19 | Saving faith trusts in God’s promise [v 18] regardless of how we feel or how our physical reality appears [v 19]. Abraham **“‘considered’ his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old)...and he ‘considered’ the barrenness of Sarah’s womb...”** In other words, he saw and reasoned upon his and Sarah’s physical weaknesses, impotence, and barrenness to fulfill the requirements of God’s promises—and there was nothing, no hope in themselves. **He had to have faith in God’s promise apart from any ability of his own!** And so do we!

[2] vv 20-21 | Saving faith focuses on God’s power, faithfulness, and grace to keep and fulfill His own promises—believes Him, trusts Him, and relies upon Him! Contrast the **‘consider his own body, which was as good as dead’** with **‘fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised.’** As Abraham kept his faith fixed on God—and not on anything he could do or contribute to make God’s promise come to reality—his faith grew stronger, and the **glory he gave to God** increased! This is what purposed and intended when He made our faith in Him necessary for us to receive His promise!

[3] vv 22-25 | Saving faith is God’s gift to us, too! The very same faith with which Abraham believed is the faith by which we believe The Gospel of God **‘counted to us!** And what is that Gospel? What is it that we must believe and trust in **ONLY** for our salvation? **“It [the righteousness of God] will be ‘counted’ [freely credited] to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”**

This is **“the Gospel”** that **“is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”** [ch 1.16].

“THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH!”