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a *Grace Notes* course

## **The Epistle to the ROMANS**

an expositional Bible study

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### **Lesson 4**

**Romans 4:1-25**

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*Grace Notes*

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# The Epistle to the Romans

## Lesson 4

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## Chapter 4

### INTRODUCTION

Paul has presented the doctrine of Justification in Romans 3:19-31. As he continues to address the religious Jews of Rome he uses an illustration of justification that p[re]-dates the OT Law. He presents the case of Abraham.

Abraham is used in the epistles as an example of our life of faith. Abraham was the physical father of Israel by procreation. He is the Spiritual Father of all of us by way of faith. As he was justified by faith, so are we. As he was sanctified in his spiritual walk by faith decisions, so are we. As he anticipated by faith his own ultimate glorification, so do we.

Romans 4:1-4, Justification Salvation by faith.

Hebrews 11:8, (see v 2, this is Sanctification of the Believer). Abraham was sanctified by faith decisions and faith obedience.

Heb 11:9-10, Glorification. He looked ahead to eternity by faith.

Abraham is one of the key figures in the Scriptures, being mentioned 285 times with over 70 references in the New Testament.

### Romans 4:1

#### **What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?**

Paul, continuing his Socratic style, asks a question. "What should we say or conclude when we consider Abraham."

"According to the flesh" refers to Abraham while it applies literally to the Jews who claim Abraham as their father, Paul is simply using the phrase to refer to Abraham while living.

"Has found" is a perfect, active, infinitive. A result, a conclusion found by Abraham as a result of what God did in justifying him.

Westcott and Hort do not find this word in the better manuscripts, so it may be in the margin of some Bibles.

### Romans 4:2

#### **For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God.**

Our works, our deeds do establish in the mind of others our character. Our deeds validate our mental attitude and our words. So there is a form of justification or a declaration of human righteousness from man as a result of our works.

If that was all that mattered, what others thought of him, then there would be a cause for boasting before men.

### Romans 4:3

#### **For what does the Scripture say? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.**

It is the Bible that is the absolute final authority and the absolute criterion in this matter. Not rationalism nor empiricism. Not what appears to be right before man but what is declared to be right before God.

Paul emphasizes the Scriptures because then, as now, man, especially religious man, had added to the OT not only their own interpretations of the Law but additional laws.

They had taken the Law that was designed to show the total inability of man to justify himself before God and turned it into a systems of works for righteousness.

So they and we today are reminded of just how Abraham was reckoned with or imputed with perfect righteousness.

A simple equation: He believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

READ 2 Cor. 5:21

To believe God is not only to believe that He exists. It is to believe also what God has to say.

In Genesis 15:4-6 Abraham is questioning God about his heir:

**"Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, This man (Lot) will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your**

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**own body, he shall be your heir. And He took him outside and said, Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, So shall your descendants be. Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."**

God made a promise to Abraham. and Abraham believed God.

We see here the true essence of faith...to trust in what God has promised when He has promised and at all times to trust in God as the One who is faithful.

**James 2:20-24**

**"But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?**

**"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?**

**"You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;**

**"and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.**

**"You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone."**

Both Paul and James look back to Genesis 15 as the time when righteousness was imputed to Abraham. Both agree this was a divine response to Abraham's trust in God's promise.

James then jumps ahead in Genesis to Chapter 22 to illustrate when that trust was tested. Now the object of faith is God's promise and God's character that backs up the promise. But in both Genesis 15 and Genesis 22 the content of what is believed is Isaac! "Believe he will be your heir and believe that you could sacrifice him and God could restore him to life."

**Genesis 22:5, "And Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and (we will) return to you."**

WHEN DID THIS OCCUR:

**Genesis 12:1-4 Abram is obedient to God, he is a believer**

**Genesis 15:1-6 Abram believed God's promise of the seed who will be the Lord Jesus Christ through Isaac, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.**

**Genesis 14:9ff The first sacrifice that affirmed the belief Abram had in the plan of God**

**Genesis 17:23 Abraham is circumcised, 13 years after the events in Genesis 15 when he believed God and this non-meritorious faith was reckoned to him as righteousness.**

PRINCIPLE: Abram (Abraham after Genesis 17:5) was saved and credited with the righteousness of God, prior to any sacrifices and long before any circumcision.

Genesis 22. Abraham obeys God and is willing to sacrifice his only heir, his son. James tells us this was a demonstration of the righteousness that had been imputed years ago. His trust in God was put to the test and he passed.

**Hebrews 11:17-19, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, In Isaac your descendants shall be called. He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type."**

**Romans 4:4**

**In contrast to that: Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due.**

The word "favor" is CARIS grace! You cannot work for grace, you cannot earn it nor deserve it.

If something is given as what is due it is not grace.

A very simple work ethic is presented in this verse. If you work, you get what is due to you. If you do not work and yet receive the imputation, it is grace.

The more you try to work for salvation the further away from salvation you get. The more in debt you become.

Works, at salvation and in the Christian life, do not work. They contradict grace and they move the unbeliever and the believer further away from God has for them.

#### Romans 4:5

**In contrast now to works: But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness,**

Here the object of our faith, our trust is the one who does something we have come to recognize we cannot do.

Only God can justify the ungodly. And all of Romans 1:17 through Romans 3:18 has demonstrated that we are just that, we are ungodly.

The word UNGODLY is a religious word, it is the antithesis of GODLY...but what does that mean?

**GODLINESS: EUSEBIA, A WORD STUDY:**

The common New Testament Greek word for godliness is EUSEBIA

- It is not found in the Gospels and begins to appear only in the later epistles
- But because it was a religious word it had a rich usage in classical Greek

Simply, the word was used as man made his approach to an idol. He was to have an attitude of godliness, which would include fear and reverence.

This attitude, however, was replaced as the idol was approached with an attitude of harmony. And as stated in classical Greek, admiration.

In the same way, the believer reaches for harmony with God through three stages:

- Fear: Dominant concept in O.T.
- Respect: Dominant concept in Gospels
- Love: Dominant concept in the Epistles

The emphasis in EUSEBIA is to move into a relationship of harmony. This is based on knowledge and is friendship:

**2 Peter 1:3, "Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of**

**Him who called us by His own glory and excellence."**

LIFE is the horizontal relationship, while GODLINESS is the vertical relationship.

Some of the German theologians have written extensively on this word:

- One said that it was the good and careful cherishing of God that goes beyond fear
- Luther: The recognition of dependence upon God that leads to the confession of human dependence.

In II Peter 1 we would see virtue as the recognized need for dependence and godliness as the action of this dependence.

- Luther also stated: Godliness is to be at harmony with God.

The only non-cultic use we have in classical Greek is found in Lubker's *Sopha Christis, Theologia* vol 2, p 54 and is the idea of EUSEBIA man to man in which the idea of equitable bearing one to another is brought out.

We grow to have an equitable bearing with Christ, a friendship.

At the end of the earthly ministry of Christ, the Lord changed the relationship he had with those who believed in him:

**John 15:15, "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you."**

A friend knows about his friend, knows what his friend is doing. A friend of Christ is a man or woman who has applied Bible truth.

Therefore, the approach to God and friendship with Christ is summed up in the approach of Godliness, coming to a relationship of harmony and friendship with Christ.

That is why godliness is called a mystery.

**I Timothy 3:16, "And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among**

**the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory."**

As unregenerate people we are ungodly. We can do nothing about that but God has done everything about it. He can justify us.

This comes about by faith or trust in the one who has the power to justify even those who are not His friends.

**Romans 4:6**

**Just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:**

Paul now jumps ahead to another brief illustration prior to getting back to his discussion of Abraham. This is very wise because he will quote David. The religious Jew may be thinking at this point that all this is fine regarding Abraham but Abraham live prior to the giving of the OT Law (by about 600 years).

But David lived and ruled under the OT Law:

"just as" is a conjunction from the adverb KAQWS and means "just, exactly as", i.e., no difference in God's grace with Abraham, with David, with the people to whom Paul writes, or to us.

Blessing comes apart from works...we cannot expect to work for a blessing. God is greater in grace than that.

**Romans 4:7,8**

**Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account. (quoting Psalm 32:1,2)**

Psalm 32 is a companion Psalm to Psalm 51, David's Psalm of confession after his sin with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite.

In both Psalms he is overwhelmed by the grace of God and forgiving him of his sin.

PRINCIPLE: We will sin, and when we do, we can confess that sin and by faith return to fellowship with God. We should also be overwhelmed at the graciousness of God.

In Psalm 32 David encourages others who have sinned to return to the Lord for His gracious forgiveness.

Believers who are in some system of works get out of fellowship and stay out of fellowship due to their guilt and shame, but God is gracious to forgive.

By quoting David in these Psalms, Paul brings what was true regarding justification by faith prior to the giving of the Law to what was true after the giving of the Law.

Abraham lived about 2000 BC. The Law was given in 1440 BC and David lived about 1000 BC.

Yet justification was not in any way altered by the absence of the Law or the presence of the Law or now, the fulfillment of the Law.

Verses 9 to 12 deal with the extent of the blessings.

**Romans 4:9**

**Is this blessing then upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.**

The prepositions used here show us how justification and blessing work:

The preposition "upon" is EPI, which is a superlative and looks at something resting upon something else. Here, the blessings of God are resting upon the believer.

There is blessing for the one who is justified: he is saved, he is in God's family, and he has tremendous potential.

When the verse states that it was "faith" that brought about the declaration of righteousness it uses the preposition EIS which can be translated with a view towards or leading towards.

It is faith, non-meritorious, that results in justification which is the imputation of Righteousness which sets up a potential for Righteousness in time and secures Righteousness in eternity.

But what we have right now is the blessing, all we need to do is recognize it. Are we aware of the fantastic blessings that are ON us right now.

Some who read this verse came up with two objections:

1. This blessing by faith is only to the Jews, the circumcised. Abraham is the Father of the Jews so it is limited. But as we have seen, the imputation of righteousness came prior to circumcision.
2. The other objection not stated could be that this FAITH system is only for the Gentiles, whereas the Jews have a Law / Works system.

Verse 10 starts to deal with these objections.

#### Romans 4:10

**How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;**

The imputation of righteousness for Abraham came fourteen years after the events of Genesis 15 when he was justified by faith and credited with righteousness. Circumcision, occurring much later, was a sign of what God had done fourteen years earlier.

#### Romans 4:11

**And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them,**

So Abraham becomes a great example of righteousness imputed as a result of justification by faith and faith alone in that it occurred prior to circumcision.

ABRAHAM IS THE FATHER OF ALL WHO BELIEVE and circumcision is not an issue:

1. He is the father of the One Seed: The Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 1 genealogy)
2. He is the spiritual father of all believers, because the only way to become a believer is the same way he became a believer and that is by faith.

**Galatians 3:29, "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."**

3. He is the earthly father of all Jews by way of Isaac and physical lineage.

PRINCIPLE: Abraham is the only member of the human race that was a righteous Gentile and a righteous Jew. He is the Father of all of us who put faith alone in the promise of God.

#### Romans 4:12,13

**And the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.**

**For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.**

Here we see Paul making a transition to the fact that faith is the system by which Abraham trusted God for all things.

If we can trust Him for salvation we can trust Him for sanctification and glorification.

Every blessing of God comes to the believer by way of faith.

Romans 4:14-22 asks the question "What about the Law?"

#### Romans 4:14

**For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;**

Simply put, you cannot have it both ways. God did not institute a system of Law for some and Faith for others. These Law systems, which are the systems of works vs grace, are incompatible and mutually exclusive.

If it is Law - notice what happens if Law is the system:

- Faith on our part is made empty: Perfect tense. As soon as Law gets into the process faith is void.
- The promise in God's part is destroyed: Again a perfect tense indicating that God's promises would be destroyed if Law-Works were the system.

**Romans 4:15**

**For the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation.**

This is the explanation of the previous statement.

For you see, Law brings about wrath. The phrase "brings about" is a very strong word for something that works according to a standard. Here the standard is the Law and wrath or the ORGE or anger of God works according to the standard of the Law.

This tells us that if we rely upon the Law-Works system there is only one outcome, the wrath of God.

In contrast, where there is no Law there is not violation or transgression:

The word "violation", PARABASIS, is technical and looks at violations or transgressions of a legal code.

In Romans 2:23 this word is translated "breaking the Law".

In Galatians 3:19 we read: "Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions...until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made."

Now take away the Law and there is no identification of violation.

The OT Law with its 600 ordinances for living for all the Sons of Israel was very specific and yet it also gave freedom to Israel in the areas in which there was no Law.

Simply put: NO LAW = NO BREAKING OF WHAT DOES NOT EXIST.

The church today must understand that principle because so many believers try to establish law where there is not law. If God chose not to lay down a law in a specific area of life then that area comes under doubtful things, not the DOs and the DON'Ts.

One purpose of the Law was to show man that he was a transgressor of God's righteousness.

**Romans 4:16**

**For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the**

**descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,**

So the Law system was never the system for obtaining righteousness, only for demonstrating to man that he was a sinner...all have sinned and come short.

And because the Law could not bring in Righteousness, it is Faith that is effective according to grace, in order that the promise may be to all the descendants of Abraham, both Jews (those of the Law) and Gentiles (those of faith).

The model then: OUR FAITH + GOD'S GRACE = THE PROMISE

Then Paul kinda rubs it in by quoting from Genesis...

**Romans 4:17**

**As it is written (Genesis 17:5), A father of many nations have I made you. In the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.**

Life to the dead here is life to Abraham and Sarah who are sexually dead.

"Calling into being that which does not exist" refers to the birth of Isaac, the heir who at the time of promise was even less than a gleam in his father's eye.

Now, Abraham's response to the promise ...

**Romans 4:18**

**In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, So shall your descendants be (Genesis 15:5).**

In the opening word of this verse we have the essence of true faith...In hope against hope he believed. But believed in what? In that which was spoken!

Here are some of the substitutes for faith we have around us today.



## Modern Substitutes for Faith

**Delusion:** This is denial of reality which becomes a form of escapism. Some suppose they have great faith because they refuse to accept reality.

I heard once of an epitaph on a tombstone that read "Not dead, but sleeping". One of the grounds keepers at the cemetery was fond of saying, "He ain't foolin' anyone but himself".

We try to fool ourselves, deny reality, escape into a world of our own making. This is not faith.

Abraham had to face reality, he and Sarah were long past the age of child bearing, but the greater reality was not in his own mind, but in the Word of the Lord.

**The Error:** This type of faith runs through a course of logic that goes something like this: God is perfect (yes), a perfect God cannot create anything that is not perfect (yes), God created all things did He not (again yes)...Therefore all things are perfect and any imperfection, sin, is just an illusion of the mortal mind (NO!).

But that error forgets one thing. The perfect God gave perfect man free will. And perfection can do that! Even prior to that God gave a perfect creature, Lucifer, free will and that free will was misused.

Failure to take into account the entrance of sin and death into creation and divine judgment at the fall of man will lead to delusion, self deception, and error.

**Presumption** is a substitute for Faith. Here man has bought into the lie that the human mind can be so exalted as to touch upon the divine. Rationalism reigns supreme in this system.

So often in this system of false faith only that which agrees with the rational mind is believed. So if God's Word agrees with us, then good, if not, it is archaic and not intended to be applied today.

**Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many**

**miracles? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."**

LAWLESSNESS is ANOMIA which is anti-law or being a law unto self.

The fourth false system of Faith is to rely upon the supposed **faith of another**. This is called credulity. The tendency to believe too rapidly, without thought. In primitive cultures we see the native buying into and believing all that the witch doctor has to say.

But even in our sophisticated society we have those who by way of a false faith just buy into whatever is promoted as being of God. Such claims as God told me, God visited me, God told me to tell you, seem to abound in religious thinking today.

This is not faith, this is being a sucker for a showman. Ignoring what is plainly taught in the Word of God.

### Romans 4:19-22

**And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;**

**Yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,**

**And being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.**

Therefore also, it was reckoned to him as righteousness

Seven Aspects of Abraham's Faith

1. Abraham was not weak in faith: The word "weak" means to be feeble. He understood that the strength of faith was not in Him but in the Lord. Hence, there was not inner doubt but outward faith. True faith originates with God not with us.
2. He did not look at his own personal inability: He was nearly 100 years old and was sexually dead but that problem was God's problem, not his.

3. He did not look at the difficulties of circumstances: His wife, Sarah, was also old but the deadness of her womb was a circumstance and God was greater than circumstances.
4. He did not see God's promise as impossible: With man many things are impossible. That is part of the reality in which we live. To deny it is to delude ourselves. But with God, all things are possible.
5. He grew even stronger in faith: He knew that his faith was in something of great strength, the promise of God and therefore it was a strong faith. The more he matured as a believer the stronger his faith became because he knew more of the One his faith rested in.
6. Who whole attitude was that of being fully persuaded as one who knows something without question.

His name ABRAHAM, meant Father of a Great Multitude. He had that name given to him by God prior to the birth of Isaac. And it was the name he used with confidence.

7. Faith, true faith results in action: v 21b, "He was also able to perform".

Now all the promises of the birth of Isaac would not do any good if they were just talked about. I could hear Abraham and Sarah now, in the moonlight of Canaan, by the flickering fire, the tent shades drawn, talking about having a son...folks, they did not talk about it, they did it.

Faith takes the action! "Therefore also it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

Romans 4:23-25 show the application of these teaching to us.

#### **Romans 4:23,24**

**Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him,**

**But for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,**

Here Paul begins to lead into the imputation of divine righteousness in the Christian life, by introducing the resurrection of Christ.

Out total and ultimate acceptance by God comes in heaven and is a result of the Father's acceptance of Jesus Christ who endured the Cross.

One could be accepted into heaven, in the presence of the Father, until the Jesus Christ was accepted in heaven at the right hand of God.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ and His accession is important for four reasons:

1. He is the heir of the Davidic Covenant: David was promised a descendant who would rule forever and that descendant is the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. He is the Mediator of a New Covenant: And a mediator must be equal with both parties, God and man, and the one who sits at God's right hand is fully God and fully man.
3. He is our High Priest: We need a man to represent us before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, alive, in heaven right now, is that man, our High Priest.
4. He is our Savior: He purchased us out of the slave market of sin, but without a living Savior we have no place to go. He is our Lord, alive right now.

#### **Romans 4:25**

**He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.**

Jesus Christ went to the Cross because of our transgressions clearly taught in the OT Law.

And then He rose again because we were already justified.

The Christian Life is not good without a Living Christ.