

## Romans 4:1-12

Romans 3, through concluding all men under sin with multiple witnesses from scripture, has led us to the conclusion that at this present time a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law (verses 26-28).

Faith, verse 30 says, does not void the law, but establishes the Law, in that the Law was perfect, and since we are not, the only recourse for justification is faith.

---

With Romans 3:27-4:25, Scripture presents 5 legal proofs of justification by grace through faith without works of any kind:

- 1: Rom. 3:27 (God's court is now offering, in response to the charges of the prosecution, a plea deal by the Law of Faith)
- 2: Rom. 4:1-8 (Legal precedents of ruling: *Abram*, Gen. 15:6; *David*, 2 Samuel 12:13, Ps. 32)
- 3: Rom. 4:9-12 (These precedents prove circumcision is not required)
- 4: Rom. 4:13-16c (Inheritance for Abraham and his seed was by faith in God's promise—not of works)
- 5: Rom. 4:16d-25 (In Christ, we are Abraham's seed, and heirs of God also).

---

The first piece of evidence introduced into God's court of Law:

### **Romans 3:27**

*Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.*

The Law God has chosen to operate by in His legal proceedings in regard to our justification is the Law of Faith; boasting therefore is excluded. Personal merit, deeds, accolades, etc. are not allowed.

Justification through faith alone is offered as a plea deal, meaning, it is only available to those who submit the plea of GUILTY.

---

The second piece of evidence introduced into God's courtroom:

### **Romans 4:1-8**

*What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?*

<sup>2</sup> *For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.*

<sup>3</sup> *For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*

<sup>4</sup> *Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.*

<sup>5</sup> *But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

<sup>6</sup> *Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,*

<sup>7</sup> *Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*

<sup>8</sup> *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*

The Scripture uses Abraham and David as legal precedents from the Old Testament proving that God is able to justify a man by faith, whether in the absence of works, or in spite of his works.

---

### **Legal Precedent 1: Abraham**

---

A “legal precedent” is a previous court ruling that serves as the basis for similar cases in the future, showing that other authorities have recognized the validity and legality of the ruling.

Mariam-Webster defines precedent as follows:

**1:** an earlier occurrence of something similar

**2**

**a:** something done or said that may serve as an example or rule to authorize or justify a subsequent act of the same or an analogous kind a verdict that had no precedent

**b:** the convention established by such a precedent or by long practice

**3:** a person or thing that serves as a model

---

Last lesson, we ended in Romans chapter 4, verse 3.

In verse 1, when it says *as pertaining to the flesh*, it’s not referring to the covenant of circumcision, nor the lineage that came from Abraham, who were the first in line for the inheritance it promised.

---

We have already seen Paul address this question in **Romans 3:1-2**:

<sup>1</sup>*What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?*

<sup>2</sup>*Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*

The context of Romans 4 is now justification by faith as opposed to works *of the flesh*.

To be clear, no one was ever justified by works of the flesh. Faith was always the primary element necessary to please God. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

What Romans 4:1-2 is saying is that Abraham was justified by faith in God's *promise*, not by works of the flesh, and he received the promise of an heir and a multiplied seed *by faith*. And it is through this faith that God justified him:

---

<sup>3</sup> *And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.*

<sup>4</sup> *And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.*

<sup>5</sup> *And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.*

<sup>6</sup> *And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*

**(Genesis 15:3-6)**

This is the passage Paul is quoting from in verse 3.

Abraham was justified by God by faith alone in Genesis 15 prior to the covenant of circumcision and prior to the Law.

If he were justified by works, Paul writes, he could glory in himself, but not before God. Why? Because Abraham simply believed. There was nothing done on his part to prove he was righteous in his flesh. The flesh cannot justify itself. The flesh profits nothing (John 6:63). The Law, we will see, relies on the strength of the flesh, and thus is unprofitable.

We've also briefly discussed how that Abraham was a type and shadow both of *our* justification and the believing Hebrew remnant in the future.

James uses Abraham's test in Genesis 22 *after* receiving the covenant of circumcision as an example for his audience, the Hebrew remnant, *the circumcision*, who will also be tested by God.

Paul, however, here in Romans 4, shows us that Abraham was justified by faith alone in Genesis 15, *before* circumcision and *without* the Law.

Abraham therefore was justified *twice*. Once by faith alone, and later, by his faith in action.

---

### **Romans 4:4-5**

<sup>4</sup> *Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.*

<sup>5</sup> *But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

The fundamental difference between faith and works has been largely obscured in Christian circles today. Even in the doctrine to the Hebrew remnant, their faith was in something that required a certain aspect of *faithfulness*, that is, the works themselves are nothing, is it the obedience of their faith that mattered.

Today God forbids any attempt at earning merit before Him.

To work merits a *reward*, as in *compensation*. The one who you *worked for* is now indebted to you for your service. It is therefore not a gift in any sense of the word.

That we are saved by grace through faith today as a free gift is the clear truth presented by the Scriptures. Without jumping ahead in Romans, I will just say the exact phrase “free gift” in the context of justification unto eternal life is used 3 times in Romans chapter 5.

---

Of course there are other passages in which Paul speaks of this salvation as a gift, most notable among them being Ephesians 2:8:

### **Ephesians 2:8-10**

<sup>8</sup> *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

<sup>9</sup> *Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

<sup>10</sup> *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

We see then this salvation is a free gift through faith, and it's operative through the power of grace. We will see in Romans that "grace" is not just God "looking the other way," or even righteously pardoning our sin and giving us what we *don't* deserve, although that aspect certainly is true—but that grace is a power, and that the salvation in Ephesians 2, in context, only begins with justification, but is *unto* good works.

I say that only to say that the grace of God is not a license to lasciviousness, and that when we learn here in Romans 4 that justification is without works *of any kind*, we should not have the idea that God is in any way tolerant of sin. He's not. But He has provided something in the gospel not only for our justification but also for our functional sanctification in this mortal body, both of which are a free gift accessed by faith alone, to the exclusion of our flesh.

---

Paul, in his typical fashion, gives us a perfect idea for how we should think about grace and works in **Romans 11:5-6**, speaking of Israel:

<sup>5</sup> *Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*

<sup>6</sup> *And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*

---

And so Paul tells us in no uncertain terms that to the one who works *not*, but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly, that person's faith is counted for righteousness.

Again, this is not promoting ungodliness—the entire discourse up to this point in Romans has been to indict *all mankind* with the guilt of sin. And so this statement in **Romans 4:5** should come as good news to unregenerate men who are sincere in heart and who desire to be reconciled to God, and, not as the flesh wants to interpret it, as the irreverent flaunting of God's favor upon undeserving and ungrateful sinners.

The flesh hates this verse because it condemns its self righteousness as worthless before God.

The intent of it however is not to promote ungodliness, but simply to show that as long as one continues to strive for what they can't earn, they will never earn it. It must be *freely* given.

---

One *comes* to Christ in a state of ungodliness—and through the power of grace that were given access to through the gospel, we are to be taken from glory to glory as were systematically conformed to the image of Christ:

### **2 Corinthians 3:18**

*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

### **Romans 8:29**

*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

Godliness, or God-likeness, is *the* issue for the saint; it is mentioned *9 times* in the pastoral epistles of 1 Timothy. And so, when we come to Romans 4 verse 5, we must understand it in the light of unjustified, ungodly men who have just been condemned by the Holy Ghost in Romans 1-3. This is not the *end* result, but the beginning.

---

### **Legal Precedent 2: David**

---

### **Romans 4:6-8**

<sup>6</sup> *Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,*

<sup>7</sup> *Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*

<sup>8</sup> *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*

---

Verses 7-8 are a quote from **Psalm 32:1-2**:

<sup>1</sup> *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

<sup>2</sup> *Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.*

---

The reference to this Psalm in Romans 4:7-8 is *perfectly* fitting: consider **Psalm 32:5-6**:

<sup>5</sup> *I acknowledge 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. Selah.*

<sup>6</sup> *For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.*

He says that the *godly* will confess their sins to God, will acknowledge their transgressions.

And so, in that Romans 4:5 says *ungodly*, the truly godly will first acknowledge their own *ungodliness*.

I believe the Holy Ghost knew what He was doing when He referenced that specific Psalm exactly where He did. He is trying to call our attention back to the testimony of a man who confessed his sin and ungodliness before the LORD, and who the LORD then forgave and chose not to impute sin to.



---

We see God “put away” David’s sin in **2 Samuel 12:13**:

*And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.*

---

**Romans 4:8** says blessed is the the man to whom the Lord *will not* impute sin:

The Lord *chose* not to impute sin to David’s account, even though he had sinned sins that were punishable by death according to the Law.

---

**Leviticus 20:10**

*And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.*

**Exodus 21:12**

*He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.*

The Lord chose not to impute David’s sin to his account, and the same is also true for us who have trusted the finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

---

### Legal Proof 3: Circumcision not required

---

The blessedness of not having our sin imputed to us, just as God did not impute David's, is available to all regardless of circumcision:

#### **Romans 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.*

Again, Paul cites God's dealings with Abraham in *uncircumcision*, saying God is able to justify the uncircumcision by faith just as he did with David *in* circumcision, because Israel's patriarch Abraham was justified before circumcision was even given.

---

#### **Romans 4:10-11a**

<sup>10</sup> *How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.*

<sup>11</sup> *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised...*

The sign of circumcision itself was a sign of the righteousness which Abraham *already* had; and so, just as Paul taught in Romans 2, faith was and is the primary issue, for the Jew and the gentile:

---

### **Romans 2:28-29**

*<sup>28</sup> For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:*

*<sup>29</sup> But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

Of course this passage is in the context of circumcision under the Law, but the principle is the same, that faith was the basis of the covenant of circumcision to begin with.

---

### **Romans 4:11-12**

*<sup>11</sup> 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:*

*<sup>12</sup> 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.*

Abraham, often referred to as “the father of faith,” is the pattern of justification for both the circumcision and uncircumcision, as we have previously discussed. And so in this way, as the pattern, he is the father of both.

Christ Himself is the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise to give him a seed, and since we have placed our faith in Christ, and been baptized *into* Christ, we too are “Abraham’s seed.”

---

### **Galatians 3:6-9**

*<sup>6</sup> Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*

*<sup>7</sup> Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*

<sup>8</sup> *And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.*

<sup>9</sup> *So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.*

This is not saying we are “Israel,” in the sense of the nation. This is not teaching that we are “spiritual Jews.” Abraham, when he was justified, as we’ve said, was justified before the covenant of circumcision, before the covenant of the Law of Moses, and before there was anyone called Israel. We know this to be the case because in the same chapter of Galatians Paul writes:

---

### **Galatians 3:26-29**

<sup>26</sup> *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*

<sup>27</sup> *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

<sup>28</sup> *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

<sup>29</sup> *And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

He clarifies that it is because we are in Christ that we are able to be counted as Abraham’s seed. It is because of Christ we are able to receive justification and righteousness by grace through faith without works, without circumcision, without the covenants or Law.