

Romans 4 – part II (vv. 9-25)
Andrew Stopyra

This passage picks up with the second of Paul's questions with which he ended chapter 3 – namely, *"Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles?"* (3:29) His initial answer was brief and to the point, *"Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith."* This question and its answer deal with what we might call the impartiality of the gospel. In 3:22-23, Paul told us that the *"righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ"* is for *"all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God..."* In other words, even as all have sinned, so anyone may be saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

In continuing his appeal to Abraham which we began to look at last week, Paul now moves in 4:9 from the means whereby Abraham received the promise and was counted righteous by God, to the moment when it happened. As we looked at last week, Abraham becomes the 'rule' so to speak for Jew and Gentile as regards the manner in which he was made righteous. Paul will say at the end of chapter 4, *"Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead..."* (4:23-24) But now the chronology of exactly when Abraham was justified by faith also becomes significant for Jew and Gentile alike.

The third major event in Abraham's life after his calling out of Ur (Gen. 12) and his justification (Gen. 15), was the institution of the rite of circumcision by God for Abraham and all his offspring after him. This was to be *"a token of the covenant"* between them (Gen. 17:11). Here in chapter 4 of Romans, Paul looks at circumcision in two lights – one, as the distinguishing mark of those descendants of Abraham's who were given the Law. Elsewhere, in Galatians 3:10, Paul says that the one who becomes circumcised *"is a debtor to do the whole law."* But Paul backs us up to the moment it was given, and argues that it was initially a sign of the righteousness which had already been credited to Abraham on account of his faith! Hence, that circumcision itself neither added to nor detracted from his standing before God, it simply attested to it. Thus, as Paul concludes, circumcision itself does not entitle anyone to the promise nor to justification – rather, faith continues to be the key. Therefore, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision defines a child of Abraham, but faith alone. In fact, Paul argues that if circumcision was really the key, and therefore the keeping of the Law the central basis of righteousness, then not only would all of his teaching concerning the gospel up to this point be rubbish, but the promise would be meaningless – because the Law does not remedy sin, it reveals it. And so, by the Law, there would be no *"blessing"* through Abraham and his seed, only wrath against sin.

So Paul says that justification is by faith precisely so that it might come by grace – as we discussed last week, if even the smallest fraction of works are considered, the reward is no longer a free gift but wages that are due us. However, according to chapter 3, the only thing we can merit is wrath because we fall utterly short of God's standard. Hence, faith is the only way we can receive what we did not, and cannot, earn. And this, 4:16 tells us, means that the promise of Abraham, the promise of *"blessing"*, is sure and certain for all his offspring – that is, all who are his children by faith in his God – because the blessing rests not upon our merit but upon Jesus!

Vv. 17b-22 give us a brief account of just what the substance of Abraham's faith was. Vv. 23-25 then conclude the chapter with personal application – that the example of Abraham and God's proclamation concerning him and his faith, was not written only for Abraham's sake, but also for ours. We too, upon these grounds, may be *"fully persuaded"* that righteousness shall be imputed to us even as to Abraham... and this, by faith resting upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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Also Sunday 22 10.00am - Psalm 90 - Teach us to number our days.

Contact Ross Pettigrew 03 4728887

Outlines are provided and a *free will* offering will be taken at all sessions.

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