



# *Finer Grounds Bible Study*

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## *Romans*

### *Lesson 7: Romans 4*

In our world today the word “faith” is used frequently. When things are difficult, we hear statements such as, “Just have faith, everything will be OK.” We hear it often in the religious world, particularly in regard to “faith only salvation,” which is basically the teaching that all who believe in God will be saved. Romans chapter four really focuses in on this idea of faith and its correlation to our justification before God. In fact, throughout these 25 verses we find the Greek word *dikaioo* (translated justified/righteous in the ESV) 11 times. We find *pistis/pisteuo* (translated faith/belief) 17 times in this one chapter.

As we approach this text it is crucial to ensure that we are using Bible words as the Bible uses them, rather than as society has defined them for us. This means keeping in mind Paul’s use of the word law: a merit-based system of justification, and faith: living in obedience to God. We must also keep in mind the greater context of what Paul has been addressing so far in Romans. He has been focusing on two main points: first that salvation has always been intended for all of mankind, not only for the Jews. Secondly, that it is impossible to work our way to Heaven. No matter how good we think we are, we have all still violated God’s laws and deserve death. However, because of the grace of God

He has given us the chance to overcome this death sentence through Jesus Christ.

Throughout the first four chapters of Romans Paul focuses on Abraham as the father of the Jews, and an example of living by faith. Once again, however, in chapter four Paul will turn everything the Jews think they know on its head. He does this by emphasizing that, contrary to Jewish popular opinion, Abraham was actually justified and considered faithful long before he entered into a physical covenant with God through circumcision. In chapter four Paul will bring to a close his teachings specifically directed towards correcting the Jew’s misunderstandings and will prepare for a key transition in chapter five to focusing on Christ rather than Abraham. In chapter four Paul will emphasize the necessity of faith for justification, then in chapters 5-11 he will focus on how we are justified by faith: through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our imitation of His death, burial, and resurrection through the act of baptism. From there he will explain for us what it truly means to live a life of freedom in Christ.



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**Read Romans chapter four and look for any key words or phrases.**

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## Read Romans 4:1-3

As we begin chapter four, Paul refers back to everything he has just said in chapter three with the question in verse one, "What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?" He is answering the question that would naturally have come to the Jew's minds, "If salvation is not obtained by the law, and if salvation is for both Jews and Gentiles, then what was the point of Abraham?"

With verses two and three Paul begins to demonstrate that God's plan and expectations have always been the same. Even if Abraham had been justified by his own works, the most he could have done would have been to boast before man. Anyone good enough to be able to boast in his own works would also have been wise enough to know that he could never compare to the goodness of God.

Verse three is the first of three times that Genesis 15 is quoted in this chapter: 4:3, 4:9 and 4:22. Each refers to Genesis 15:6 which states, "And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness." This is also the first of nine times we will find the word "counted" or "credited" in this chapter. The Greek word is "logizomai," and it was actually an accounting term. It carries with it

the idea of making an unearned deposit into another's account. Paul is using this term to combat the Jew's idea of meritorious works. His point is that because Abraham had faith, God marked his ledger as righteous, even though Abraham himself did not have the "funds."

**Are we guilty of trying to have a works-based faith like the Jews? Do we feel like we have to do certain actions so that God will see us favorably?**

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## Read Romans 4:4-8

Here Paul is drawing a direct comparison: working = wage, belief = justification. By going all the way back to Abraham, and then quoting David, Paul is demonstrating that what was true for Abraham and David is also true for his readers. Psalm 32:1-2 gives three synonymous statements to affirm Paul's point, blessed are those whose:

1. Lawless deeds are forgiven
2. Sins are covered
3. The Lord will not count his sin

The word "blessed" here has the connotation of being favored by divine grace. We do not deserve to have our sins forgiven, however if we believe in God's power to forgive us rather than our own ability to earn our salvation, God's divine grace will justify



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us. Once again, we must remember that when Paul speaks of faith and belief he is not talking about verbal assent, but rather living in obedience and reliance on what God has said.

“Forgiven” is another important word for the point Paul is making. It is the Greek word, “aphiemi,” which is a legal term. It refers to one who was guilty, who had committed a crime, and yet was pardoned. We are all guilty. We have all committed sins, crimes, against God (Rom. 3:23). Yet for the blessed, forgiven man those sins will not be counted against him.

**Sometimes we lose sight of the grace of God. The longer we are Christians and the more distant we become from our old lives, the easier it is to feel like we have “arrived” as Christians. What can we do to combat this as we mature as Christians?**

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## Read Romans 4:9-12

From a doctrinal standpoint this passage is very rich. For the Jews this is where the rubber meets the road as Paul points out that Abraham’s faith was counted to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6) before he was circumcised (Genesis 17:9-14). What then was the purpose of circumcision? It was an act of obedience that sealed (authenticated) his righteousness (4:11).

God’s intentionality and plan are also shown in this text. God specifically and intentionally demonstrated that Abraham was counted as righteous before his circumcision to show that he was intended to be the father of all who walk in the footsteps of faith, both the Jews and the Gentiles. In the Greek there is a strong contrast made in verse 12 between those who trust in a physical circumcision for their righteousness and those who walk according to the faith of Abraham. The Jews had missed God’s point about circumcision: that it should be a reflection of the condition of their heart before God (Deut. 10:16 & 30:6; Jer. 4:4 & 9:25).

“Walk in the footsteps of the faith” refers to literally stepping in the footprints of another. It is fully imitating and conforming to the actions of another. This is referring to how we conduct our daily lives, what is the basis of our actions? It should not be to boast to our fellow man as we saw in verse two, but to show our faith in God Almighty.

**How are you personally walking in the footsteps of the faith?**

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**Are there changes you need to make to more fully conform your life to Scripture?**

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### Read Romans 4:13-15

The Truth for Today Commentary on Romans breaks the rest of chapter four down into 3 subsections:

- 4:13-18 God's relationship with Abraham was built on promise not works
- 4:19-22 Abraham's faith was based on his trust that God could raise the dead
- 4:23-25 - Take Abraham's faith & apply it to Christians

In this text "law" is mentioned four different times. The first three usages are referring to the Torah, or the Jewish civil law system that was based upon the Mosaic law. However, the last usage found in verse 15 is referring to any law given by God, including the law of our conscience.

God's original promise to Abraham was not based on a system of laws, but rather on Abraham's obedient faith that God would fulfill His promise. Paul is pointing out that if a system of law-keeping could make us heirs to Abraham's promise, then faith has no purpose and the entire foundation of God's promise to Abraham is nullified. Why? Because although the law of Moses brought about wrath for those who defied it, it was necessary to teach us what transgression is. God had to teach us about his moral boundaries so that we would know how to stay within them.

The Jews had created a belief system; a system of trying to earn God's favor, without really considering the consequences of their belief, or what it would look like at its fruition.

**Are we guilty of the same thing? Do we come to conclusions from God's word that are inconsistent, or without really considering the consequences of this belief?**

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### Read Romans 4:16-18

What a beautiful passage of faith for those of us who were not born into the Jewish nation! Paul was certainly blowing his reader's minds here. He is teaching that Abraham is the father, not of the Jewish nation but, "of us all." How does this work? Because the promise was not based on circumcision as they had always believed, but rather on the faith Abraham demonstrated in his obedience to God. In verse 17 Paul quotes from Genesis 17:5, once again demonstrating that this had been God's plan from the very beginning.

Who is this God that Abraham put his faith in? The God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist. I love the verb tense used here, "gives." God gave life to the dead in the past, and He will give life to the dead today. This phrase is also beautiful because, although it can mean to make alive, it can also mean, "to cause to



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have life a second time.” Just as Abraham and Sarah were given life again through Isaac, we have the opportunity to live again in spite of our sins.

It also points to God’s infinite power by affirming His ability to, “call into existence things that do not exist.” This phrase means to command into place without pre-existing material. God did not need Abraham and Sarah to be fertile to call Isaac into existence in her womb. He did not need a big bang to create the earth, because He is power, even over that which does not yet exist.

How did Abraham respond to God’s promise? “In hope he believed against hope.” When Scripture uses the word, “hope,” it’s not the same way we use it most of the time. I might say, “I hope I get to go to Hawaii.” When Scripture says, “hope,” it means, “I hope I get to go to Hawaii and I have already scheduled the trip, purchased the plane tickets and reserved a hotel.” It means a confident expectation. Even when others would have thought he was crazy, Abraham continued to expect God to bless him with a son.

**Do we have faith like Abraham?**

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**Do we have hope as the Bible defines it? Or are we “hoping” that just maybe, if we are lucky, we might squeeze our way into Heaven?**

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**Read Romans 4:19-22**

Notice that this is the second time that God counted Abraham’s faith as righteousness. This demonstrates that Paul understood faith as a lifestyle of obedience, not just a one-time decision. In my lifetime there have been many times I waited on God. While never for decades, I have waited for God to bless me with a pregnancy. We have waited for years for the opportunity to adopt. We have waited for jobs. In each of these scenarios, if I am honest, I have to admit that the longer I waited the more doubtful I became that God would answer my prayers. This is what makes Abraham’s faith so amazing; the longer he waited the more faithful and expectant he became, despite the fact that all the evidence said it would be impossible for Sarah to conceive.

**How can we use our times of waiting to strengthen our faith?**

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## Read Romans 4:23-25

Here Paul speaks directly to us. If Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness, our faith will be counted as righteousness too! Abraham's faith and hopeful expectation grew with time, even without physical evidence that Sarah would be able to conceive. Yet now we know that God has already raised Jesus from the dead! We know that Jesus was willing to die, to be buried and to rise again to pave the way for our justification! Abraham responded to God's promise by living in faith, will we do the same?

**Are you truly living by faith? Are you living in obedience to God's word, expecting to be justified through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ?**

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**If not, what changes can you make to follow Abraham's example?**

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### Works Cited

*Truth for Today Commentary an Exegesis & Application of the Holy Scriptures. Romans an Exegetical Study. Paul Pollard, PhD. General Editor, Eddie Cloer, D. Min. Resource Publications, Searcy, AR. 2018.*