

## Romans 4

Written by K B Napier  
Monday, 10 August 2009 11:52

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Is there a difference between Old Testament saints and New Testament saints? Were people saved differently in the two eras? According to scripture both are the same. Even before God made promises to Abraham, men and women were accepted by Him as righteous... people like Abel, Enoch, and Noah.

What made them righteous was their faith in God. As with Abraham, and as with us today, it was a faith given to them by God. When Jesus came, only the means of salvation changed, not the fact. The Christian church comprises only of those elect and saved. So, what does this mean for the Old Testament saints? Exactly the same. They may not be of the Christian church, but they are of the 'Church' nevertheless, being saved by faith under a different name.

Some today argue that the 'Church' properly and only refers to Christians, those saved by the new testament of God. But, it is a false argument, for God says He accepted Old Testament men and women who lived by faith; therefore, there is no difference. This is illustrated in the previous chapter notes, where we saw the lineage of salvation... including regeneration after being made elect in eternity, and the newly-enlivened human spirit being prompted by the Holy Spirit to have faith to repent and be saved.

In this chapter are words hard to understand without careful and thorough study. They are complex words because Paul, as a theologian, was more than aware of the need to be very careful how he presented his statements. But, his words contain the essence of salvation and what it means. To not read them in depth because the words are hard, is foolishness. Take time to digest them all!

### Verses 1 - 3

1.

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

2.

For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

3.

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For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Faith, then, establishes the law of God, and God is the Lord of all through faith, whether Jew or Gentile. This being so, says Paul, what can we say about Abraham concerning the 'fleshy' rites or works of Judaism? He asks because if Abraham, the 'father' of the nation, was accepted by God because of his works, he could boast about it, because he himself bought his way into heaven. But, this is not what God said, so if Abraham did boast, it would be unacceptable to God.

Of course, Abraham did not boast or glory in the way he kept God's laws. Once again, this was Paul's use of rhetoric, to make a point. What does scripture say? It was Abraham's belief (faith) in God that gave him entry into Heaven, not his works or obedience to Judaistic rites.

What is meant by 'belief'? Belief is not just outward agreement with scripture. Many sad folks say they 'believe', but then go off at a tangent and actually deny their belief with all kinds of odd notions. Belief means absolute trust in what God says and so to have confidence in Him and His word. This takes the believer along a path of dependence on God, loathing for sin, and a desire to live in holiness. This is the very ground on which believers live their lives.

It also includes intellectual faith; that is, belief that whatever God says in His word is true, regardless of human interpretations. Abraham had all this... what other man would leave his home and take his family into the wilderness, to travel for the rest of his life, on the word of a God he had not previously known?

I get many emails and letters from Christians who honestly think they can interpret scripture as they wish. They base this on the idea that they are free to do so. This is faulty reasoning, for scripture can only be given one meaning, determined by the languages it is written in. A variety of interpretations can be applied, but these must always be based on the actual meanings, given by scripture itself. I have lost count of the many 'interpretations' I am sent in support of an heretical stance!

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As any true scholar of scripture knows, almost every word in scripture can have one of many possible meanings. It is the task of the interpreter (a teacher called by God to do so) to discover which meaning applies in any given text. What heretics do is either ignore these multi-meanings entirely, or, they only refer to the ones that suit their particular stance. This is because they are not called to the task and act in unbelief.

Others, also not called, tend to read a few commentaries, etc., and convince themselves that whatever they have read must be the truth. In each and every case, they are not led by the Holy Spirit, and inevitably come up with many falsities. Such men mislead and misguide other Christians, just as the Pharisees invented their own system of beliefs, attracting the anger of Christ.

Those in such error will accuse men called by God of being 'arrogant', because they insist that others follow their teachings. In fact, they are merely obeying the Lord, being called to their role. Their, and my, teaching, is that if we say what God says, then it is the truth. All else is a lie. This is the teaching of Paul also.

### Verses 4 - 8

1.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

2.

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

3.

Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

4.

Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

5.

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Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

A man often feels 'guilty' only because he has been caught in something. It is not true guilt, but an annoyance that he has been caught. Likewise, many claim to feel 'guilt' before God, when, in reality, their 'guilt' is merely an acceptance that someone (God) has caught them in sin, or just something they feel they must declare out of duty... so they do not really mean it. True guilt leads to repentance.

Those who say they are Christians but who show no real faith, and yet work tirelessly to prove themselves to be holy, are bound still under the task-master of the law. They think that their works and efforts will take them to Heaven. But they won't. They work tirelessly out of a sense of debt, not of obedience to God's grace. Therefore, their "reward (is) not reckoned of grace", but is a self-satisfaction of works.

On the other hand, those who do not see a need to work continually to 'clear' themselves before God, but believe totally that God gives faith and salvation by grace, are counted as righteous by God. How many people claim to be of God, when, all along, they are just working hard to please God, thinking it will make them righteous? Not only does it mean nothing, but they are not saved to begin with. Or, they have been very badly taught. Or, their sinful selves have decided to invent their own meanings for scripture. Even in recent days I have been told that man has no soul, that hell does not exist, that God will never damn anyone to hell anyway. This is *unbelief* in action, not simple doubt! Oh what a tangled web they weave, to *try* and be 'believers', only to move farther and farther from truth with every erroneous belief they hold.

David wrote of how blessed a man is if he is counted as righteous by God, when he has not done any works to try and impress God. This was at a time when Hebrews obeyed the rites and demands of Mosaic law. As God Himself said in the Old Testament, he was sick of their offerings and legalistic beliefs. He wanted their hearts, not their hands or works! Those who did such things and yet had absolute faith in God – *those* were accepted as righteous. This is because works are a sign of faith and righteousness... faith are not a sign of the power and efficacy of works!

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Those thus accepted by God are blessed because their sins are forgiven and blotted out by God (verse 7). Indeed, God will NOT think of such a man as worthy of hell. Once we repent and are saved, God forgets our sinfulness.

### Verses 9 - 12

1.

Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

2.

How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

3.

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:

4.

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.

Who is given this blessedness? (When God declares us to be blessed, or happy). Is it Jews only, or Gentiles only? Paul asks because Abraham was saved by faith. How did this come about: because he was circumcised a Jew? Or, because of his faith? His circumcision was in obedience to God, but it did not save him. His faith saved him.

Even before he was circumcised he had faith! Thus, the physical act and mark of circumcision was only the result of his faith. His faith was not caused by the circumcision. Thus the physical mark was a sign or seal of something he already had – saving faith. Everyone who is saved, is saved by the same token. That is how both Jew and Gentile are saved: by faith. Everything else is a sign or result of that faith. Abraham had faith even before he had to do works (circumcision,

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rites, etc), and we are the same if we walk in the same path as Abraham.

This is why I say I prefer to see a man who makes mistakes and has true faith, than one who works hard to make himself accepted by God and yet has little or no faith. Give me the man who has doubts, rather than the man who is so confident in himself, he does not listen to truth!

Faith does not make us suddenly perfect. We must strive towards perfection throughout our lives. We do this by obeying the Lord and doing what He says. Surely this is works? Yes, of course it is. But, works arising from a heart tuned into God, out of sheer love for the Lord, and not out of duty. Such works are, then, proof of our faith, and not originators of our faith.

### Verses 13 - 15

1.

For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

2.

For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

3.

Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

Abraham was "heir of the world". What does this mean? An heir is someone who receives something that has previously been allotted to him. The world? The word 'world' is kosmos. Invariably unbelievers use this to only mean the physical world, or all people. Yes, it can mean that, but not in this text (or in John 3:16). As usual, it is the context that gives us the actual interpretation – believers only. So, God promised all believers to Abraham as his offspring. It did not rely on anything they did to deserve it; it was a gift of God, through faith, to the elect only.

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Paul reinforces this by saying that if people were heirs simply by the law (works), then “faith is made void” (verse 14) and the promise (covenant) made to Abraham would be useless. This is because if works, or our own efforts or choice, could save us, then there would be no need for faith!

The law only brings anger from God, because once it was introduced it meant we had to obey it, or else! However, the whole point of the law was to drive us towards God in faith. Today, if there was no law against stealing, then the law would not accuse us if we stole something. In the same way, we only know we are sinners because God’s law says so. And we only know there is an eternal penalty to sin, because the law tells us so. Therefore, if the law did not exist, we would not know we were sinners and cannot be accused. This is why hell exists: to display God’s wrath against sinners who do not repent and who cannot repent if they are not elect.

### Verses 16 - 18

1.

Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

2.

(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

3.

Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

Therefore, says Paul, salvation is by faith, that it can only be given by God, by grace (free gift). Only God can forgive us our sins; only He can give us salvation. Because we have no part in our own salvation we (“all the seed”) can be totally assured that when we receive it, it will be absolute, never to be removed. How can we be sure? Because God does not change His mind and never takes back what He has promised. If salvation relied on our own efforts or choice, because we are human beings with sin, we could easily overturn our salvation by sinning or changing our mind. That is why.

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This is also why Abraham is the 'father' of all who are saved, because of faith. So, Jew or Gentile, all are equal in God's sight, if they are saved by faith, the same faith Abraham had.

"As it is written" Abraham is the father of many nations. If we look at that only in national terms, it can only apply to the Jews. But the statement speaks of "many nations", so it cannot just apply to the Jews, but to all believers in every nation of the world. He stands for all time as 'father' of believers, because that is what God calls him, He Who makes the dead alive ("quickeneth the dead"; regenerates the souls of men), giving them spiritual life where none existed before (verse 17).

Abraham had nothing but God's promise to go by, yet he believed absolutely and only in Him. "Against hope he believed in hope". This means 'because of hope he believed in hope', or 'para', as in parallel, or 'alongside hope came hope'. That is, his own hope led to belief in God, or his hope proceeded from the trust placed in him by God. This was possible because it was the Holy Spirit Who gave him the hope or trust in the first place. So, Abraham's faith led to many others of faith.

It is fact that just one Christian can be used by God to guide many others to salvation. Some fine souls have said to me they were useless, because they were alone and hardly ever spoke to anyone. I have told them that their prayers, and their example, is sufficient. Even though we may not know it, many watch us from afar, and wait for us to make grave errors! When we do not, they begin to hold us in respect, because though they do not understand us, they admire that we stand firm for the Lord. Never underestimate the power of simply being yourself, perhaps believing whilst in isolation. Others will watch and wait, and perhaps come to the Lord, as a result. But, even if not, God watches and approves when you stand alone obediently in faith.

### Verses 19 - 22

1.

And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb:

2.

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to

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God;

3.

And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

4.

And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Here, Paul tells us that Abraham's faith was "not weak". He knew nothing of the Lord when God called him to wander into the desert. Yet, he believed implicitly. We, who have so many advantages and information, so readily cast off our faith! We are often weak and useless. Yet, God reminds us, time and again, that if we repent and turn back, He will give us strength and power to believe. We have so much to thank God for – let us stand firm and show our faith to all.

Abraham's body was "now dead"; he was 100 years old and did not expect ever to father a child by his wife, who was barren. But, God promised him an heir... and he got one! Christians should remember that a child is gifted to them by His power and authority. We have children if it is His will, not because men and women can naturally beget offspring. It is He gives life, not the sexual act! If we are not to have children, then we will not. It is His prerogative to withhold or give a child... there are always divine reasons. Nevertheless, if we truly believe, God will reward that belief.

Abraham continued to believe, though Sarah secretly doubted. This is the problem we all have at times. We look at the massive odds against us and our spirits sink. But, it does not matter how big or small the 'problem' is, if God determines we shall overcome, then the size of a problem is irrelevant. The God Who created everything out of nothing can easily create a solution for anything we care to think of! If it is His will, then He will give it, in abundance. The condition is simple: you must believe! Not just the half-hearted semi-belief (which is also, by definition, semi-unbelief) most of us have, but the whole-hearted belief that defies any other answer. Give glory to God and expect an answer, and it will be given.

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Because Abraham fully believed, without doubt, God gave him his heart's desire - a child. His faith was absolute, without deviation. And so he was considered righteous by God. His faith was the gift of God to begin with, and when he exercised it, it proved his obedience.

### Verses 23 - 25

1.

Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

2.

But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

3.

Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Paul continues by saying that all of this was not just for Abraham. It is also for us, and all who believe as he did. Do we truly believe God raised Jesus from the dead? Really and truly? No doubt whatever? Are you sure? Do you truly and honestly believe Jesus is our Christ, the Messiah, Whose sacrifice took away our sins? Do you truly believe He arose the third day so that we would be justified before God, and so enter Heaven?

Ask yourself those questions and be honest, for the answers are vital. If you truly believe, without a hint of doubt, then ask of God and you will receive. This is because we are the children of Abraham, and the promise made to him was also for our benefit.

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