

## Romans Chapter 4- John Karmelich

1. Years ago, I heard an illustration that is a great summary of living the Christian life. It goes as follows: "I (as a young Christian) spent years trying to live the Christian life like I was pushing a bus up a hill. It finally occurred to me that the bus has a motor. Following Jesus is not about pushing the bus; it's about getting aboard and riding it."
  - a) As I read Chapter 4 this week, I kept thinking about that illustration.
  - b) Chapter 4 continues Paul's thoughts on "salvation by faith alone" as opposed to trying to earn God's favor by our efforts.
  - c) We'll come back to "how to ride the Jesus' bus" in a moment.
2. Chapter 4 is Paul conducting his own bible study.
  - a) Most of Chapter 4 is Paul talking about the character Abraham from the Book of Genesis.
  - b) In a sense, what I'm writing here is a commentary of a commentary on Genesis.
  - c) Paul is going to pick out selected verses from Genesis about Abraham, and talk about their significance.
  - d) Paul also talks about King David who lived 1,000 years after Abraham.
  - e) In both cases (Abraham and David), Paul wants to show that these men believed that going to heaven is 100% about trusting in God's promises to them as opposed to their own efforts. They both "got on board the bus".
3. With that said, let me summarize some key points about Chapter 4: The single most important verse in the chapter is a quote from Genesis 15:6 (NIV):
  - a) "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."
  - b) Here is why that verse is essential:
    - i) In Genesis Chapter 15, Abraham is described as "righteous" before God.
      - a) "Righteous" is the idea as being "perfect" in God's eyes so that Abraham gets to spend eternity in heaven.
  - c) Here is the key: Abraham does not get circumcised until Genesis Chapter 17.
    - i) If you haven't noticed, Genesis Chapter 15 comes before Genesis Chapter 17. ☺
  - d) The point is God called Abraham "righteous" long before he gets circumcised.
  - e) This is important as many Jewish people of Paul's time, (and some today) believe that one is saved by the ritual of circumcision. They view that ritual as being more important than "just having faith in God".
4. At this point, it might be good to define just what "faith" means in context to salvation.
  - a) Here's a definition that I like: "Faith is simply a convicted heart reaching out to receive God's free and unmerited gift of salvation". (John MacArthur)
  - b) Let me give you a practical illustration: Suppose I gave you a cashier's check for two hundred million dollars. You didn't do anything to deserve that check. In fact, I gave you that check despite the fact you've been a bad-person. I did it just out of my own generosity. "Faith" is accepting the fact the check is good and going to the bank to cash. (Faith is not "testing" the check by going to the bank to see if it is good or not.)
    - i) Does that mean if I have doubts, my faith is no good? No. Later, we'll get into a discussion of "increasing one's faith" and what that means. In a sense, growing in faith (i.e., having less doubt) is what Christian maturity is all about.
5. Now let's get back to the "get on the bus" illustration that I used to open this study.
  - a) I believe the majority of people living in the world believe that going to heaven requires "doing things". Even in the greater Christian world, there are people working hard to discipline themselves and committing sacrifice upon sacrifice in order to get into good standing with God. They are "pushing the bus up a hill instead of getting on board".
  - b) Even among those of us who understand this principal, the danger of "doing things" constantly creeps back into our lives.

- i) Our egos want to “do things to please God”. We write bible studies. ☺
    - ii) Every now and then I have to remind myself that God is not impressed with my resume. God loves me just because He loves me, and not based on anything I do. Further, God wants to bless you and me just because He wants to show His love to us, again, and not based on anything we do. He wants us to climb on the bus.
  - c) With all of that in mind, we’re going to start Verse 1 and get into a long discussion of Jewish people and circumcision.
    - i) Remember that Paul’s audience were 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish-Christians. The issue of the moment for Paul is had to deal with a false-Jewish-view that the only way to salvation required circumcision.
    - ii) Much in the same way many Christians believe today that baptism is a requirement for salvation as opposed to a “sign” of one’s faith.
    - iii) Another modern application is to beware of “things” we are doing to try to please God as opposed to the realization that God just picked us only because He loves us and that’s it.
    - iv) Paul is focusing on the issue of salvation. The issue of Christian behavior “after” salvation is another issue. We’ll talk about “faith” and “action” later in this lesson.
6. Chapter 4, Verse 1: What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? <sup>2</sup> If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God. <sup>3</sup> What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."
- a) Remember that when Paul wrote Romans, there were no chapter breaks.
    - i) The chapter breaks and verse numbers were added many centuries later.
    - ii) My point here is, in order to understand Verse 1, we have to understand what Paul was saying near the end of Chapter 3. It is a continual thought.
    - iii) Back in Verse 28 of Chapter 3, Paul said, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”
      - a) This means that Paul is arguing that one gets to go to heaven by “faith” as opposed to keeping the law or some ritual like circumcision.
      - b) This was a radical concept to the Jewish way of thinking of that day.
    - iv) Chapter 4 is an expansion upon that theory that one is saved by faith alone.
      - a) Chapter 4 is a “bible study” to support that theory.
      - b) What Paul is going to do in Chapter 4 is show that “saved by faith” is supported in the Old Testament, which Jews accept as God-inspired.
      - c) To paraphrase Paul, “Do you Jewish people believe that the Old Testament is the word of God? Great, so do I. Given that, let me show you in that text that God says a person is going to heaven based on faith alone.”
      - d) With that, Chapter 4 is a bible study, mainly about Abraham, but also a little about King David, who came a thousand years later.
  - b) OK, why Abraham? Of all the bible characters, why this guy?
    - i) Abraham is considered “the first Jew”. He was the one individual God called to start the Jewish race. God said to Abraham in a sense, “Hey you, yes you over there. ☺ I need a guy to start a nation of people to be My “chosen people”. Whether you like it not, I picked you. Now deal with it and get on the bus.” ☺
    - ii) A nickname for Jewish people is the “Sons of Abraham” as he is the father of the Jewish people. We’ll talk more about who is and is not a “Son of Abraham” in this lesson and future lessons in Romans.
  - c) Now we can talk about the verses themselves. Verse 3 is pivotal. It says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”
    - i) Again, this is quote of Genesis 15:6.

- ii) God first picked Abraham in Chapter 12. He was called “Abram” at that point.
- iii) Abraham was 75 years old when he was picked by God in Chapter 12. (Reference Genesis 12:4). By Chapter 15, Abraham was in his 80’s.
- iv) The point here is both Abraham and his wife were past the child-bearing age by Chapter 15. In Chapter 15, God promised that through Abraham, he would have many children.
- v) The main point of Genesis 15:6 is that Abraham believed God’s promise to him, and at that point, God said Abraham was “righteous”. The word righteous in that context means God now saw Abraham in right-standing before Him.
- vi) A point we are getting to is circumcision doesn’t happen until many years later in Chapter 17. Abraham was “righteous” long before he was circumcised.
- d) With all of that in mind, Verses 1-3 should now be a little easier to understand:
  - i) Verse 1 says, “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?”
  - ii) Abraham “discovered” he was justified by faith because he believed God.
  - iii) Verse 1 says, “Abraham, our forefather”. Paul was Jewish. He also thought of Jewish-Christians as still being direct descendants of Abraham.
  - iv) There is also the idea that people of non-Jewish decent become “Sons of Abraham” by their faith in Jesus. Paul taught this in Galatians:
    - a) “Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed”. So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.” (Galatians 3:7-9,NKJV)
- e) Getting back to Romans, Verse 2 says, “If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God.”
  - i) That means if Abraham did “something” prior to God calling him “righteous”, he could boast before God about how special he was. He could say to God, “You have to let me in to heaven. I circumcised myself. Check my pants!” ☺
  - ii) The point is God picked Abraham long before he got circumcised. There was no ritual, no effort, no sacrifice, and no good deeds that Abraham had to do in order to get into heaven.
- f) Verse 3 is the pivotal verse of “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Now that I’ve beaten this verse to death, I can move on. ☺
- 7. Verse 4: Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.
  - a) We are now back to the idea of trying to work one’s way into heaven. What this verse is saying in effect is, “If you are trying to work you’re way into heaven, all the things you are doing is counting against you instead of counting for you.”
  - b) There is an interesting theory (I don’t necessarily support it) that God will judge a person based on what they think is right and wrong. God will then show those people how short they come to their own standards.
    - i) For example, if you believe the way to get into heaven is to obey the 10 Commandments, God will show you on Judgment Day your failure to live up to your own expectations of keeping those commandments.
    - ii) I give this theory because when people try to please God by their own efforts, they are insulting God whether they realize it or not.
      - a) Imagine God saying, “I gave up my own son to die for the punishment of your sins, and that’s not good enough for you?”
      - b) That is why our own efforts are counted as “debt” toward God and not as something positive.

- iii) God once said of himself through Isaiah, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." (Isaiah 42:8 NIV)
      - a) Notice the phrase, "I will not give my glory to another".
      - b) That includes you and me. One attribute of God is He does not share His glory with others. When we get to heaven, we only thank Him, and not ourselves. We can't brag about anything we do. Even "cashing the check" of accepting Jesus is a gift from God. (See Ephesians 2:8).
  - c) In summary, this verse is teaching that what we do to please God for our salvation counts against us, not for us.
    - i) It should be another motivation tool to not try to work our way into heaven.
    - ii) Going back to my "pushing the bus" illustration to open this lesson: "Trying to push a bus with a working motor uphill is not only painful, but a waste of time."
- 8. Verse 5: However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.
  - a) I want to focus on the phrase "but trusts God who justifies the wicked".
    - i) When we think of wicked, we tend to think of mass-murderers, people who hurt children, or some other hideous crime. It never occurs to us to look in the mirror.
    - ii) Remember my previous lessons on Romans are compared to an army boot camp. Paul is like an army drill sergeant constantly telling us what "scum" we are. My point here is that all people are considered "wicked" before God.
    - iii) In Chapter 3, Paul quoted the Psalms that said, "There is no one righteous, not even one". Those Psalm quotes describing humanity goes downhill from there. ☺
  - b) Let's jump to the conclusion of Chapter 4, which is the first verse of Chapter 5:
    - i) "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1 NIV).
    - ii) Paul concludes this "justified by faith" section by saying if we believe in Jesus for the payment of our sins we have peace with God.
    - iii) Here's a scary thought: The opposite of peace is war. If we have peace with God through Jesus, does that mean God, in a sense is "at war" with us prior to our belief? In a sense, yes, because of our sin disease, God considers all of us "wicked" and beyond help. At the same time, God knows all things and He chose us in advance to spend eternity with us. He may think of us as wicked, but at the same time has the love for us to want to remedy the situation.
  - c) OK, let's talk a little about "pre-destination". Why us and not others?
    - i) The term "pre-destination" refers to the idea that God knows all things, and therefore God picked some people to spend eternity with Him, but not all.
      - a) The question becomes, "If God already picked some, and not all, why did God bother in the first place?" Why didn't He just put the ones He wanted in heaven to begin with? Why create the earth and all of this "testing"?
    - ii) By the same argument, one can say, "Why Abraham and not someone else?"
    - iii) I take the view (other good bible scholars disagree) that free-will and pre-destiny are two sides of the same coin. We are stuck in time and we don't know the future. Therefore, we don't know who God picked. From our perspective of stuck-in-time, we "choose" to serve God even though we somehow understand that God gave us the gift of choosing Him.
    - iv) At the same time, we have to accept God is in charge and we are not. God set up "earth" (as opposed to heaven-only) so that we would know that He picked us while we suffer from this incurable sin-disease. It makes us appreciate God's love even more so when we figure out there is nothing we can do to please Him. God shows us that some do not choose Him. This shows us, from our perspective, the concept that free-will is also a gift from God.

- v) Just so you know, “free-will” and “pre-destination” is a classic debate in both Christianity and Judaism. There are good scholars with various positions on this issue. We will never fully reconcile the debate in our lifetime. Personally, I don’t wrestle with this issue. I accept the truth that both exist and let God worry about the details. Our job is to know that “some people out there are saved”. We don’t know which ones, so we pray and minister to all.
- d) With all of that in mind, let’s now get back to Verse 5.
  - i) The negative side of trying to please God by doing “things” is that it counts against us. The positive side of living by faith alone is God then “counts” us as being perfect-in-His-eyes, that is, “righteous” by faith alone. We are giving God the glory for His will getting done, and not us.
  - ii) Now think about that from a “pre-destined” aspect: It means that God picked you and me. I don’t know why He did, but he did. The classic joke is “If God had watched the rest of my life, He would not have picked me.” The point is God knows all the sins we have committed, are committing and will commit in the future. God picked us before we committed all of those sins. Despite all of that, He still picked us. That should give us reassurance of God’s love for us and the fact that He, and He alone gets the credit for salvation.
- 9. Verse 6: David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:
  - a) We now move from a bible-study on Abraham to a bible-study on David.
  - b) If you had to pick the second-most reverend Jewish person after Abraham, (besides Moses) David would be a great choice.
  - c) In fact, the opening sentence of the New Testament refers to Jesus as the “Son of David” and the “Son of Abraham”. (Reference Matthew 1:1.) Nobody else gets “opening credit”.
    - i) It was to those two people, living a thousand years apart, to which the promises of a future Messiah were given.
  - d) This promise of a future Messiah goes way back to Adam and Eve. There was a strange prophetic curse placed on Satan after the bad-fruit-incident. God said, “And I (God) will put enmity (distance) between you (Satan) and the woman (Eve), and between your (Satan’s) seed and her (Eve’s) Seed; He (offspring of Eve’s seed) shall bruise your (Satan, or the Antichrist, i.e., “seed of Satan”) head, and you (Satan) shall bruise His (offspring of Eve’s seed) heel. (Genesis 3:15 NKJV, with everything in parenthesis added.)
    - i) Understand that “seed” refers to a single male-sperm that became a man.
    - ii) That verse is biologically incorrect in that the seed (i.e., a sperm) comes from a male and not a female. Genesis 3:15 calls the seed “her seed”. Since women aren’t born with a seed, some see this “seed” as an implication of the virgin birth.
    - iii) That “seed” prediction goes all through the bible leading to the Promised King (Messiah) which is Jesus. My point here is that “promise of a future seed” is emphasized and promised again through Abraham (Genesis 21:12) and David (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 7:12). Understand that both passages in a literal translation speak of a “future seed” that is passed on from generation to generation.
    - iv) One has to understand Jesus as “fully human and fully God”. The “seed” was passed down from Adam and Eve, leading to Mary. In biological terms, you could say the “Y” chromosome was passed down from Eve’s body, and God provided the “X” chromosome at the time of the virgin birth.
  - e) The reason I stated all of this as a side-trip is to understand that when Paul is about to quote David in his writings in the Psalms. Paul is picking the other main person in the Old Testament to which a specific promise was made about the coming Messiah.
  - f) In the next few verses, Paul will take quotes from the Psalms. My point here is that Paul picked writings by David that the Jewish people would agree are God-inspired.

- g) Verse 6 states Paul's purpose of this verse. It says, "He (David) speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works".
  - i) That means that David argues that a person is blessed from their faith in God for their salvation and not their efforts to please God.
  - ii) We can now go to the actual quote of David in the Psalms, which is Verse 7.
- 10. Verse 7: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."
  - a) This is a quote of Psalm 32, Verse 1 and 2. If you read the Psalm itself, prior to Verse 1, it says, "A psalm of David". Therefore, we know David is credited with writing this Psalm.
  - b) Now let's look at the first phrase, "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven."
    - i) The word "transgression" refers to doing anything and everything that is against God's laws. It includes intentional and unintentional actions. It is when one breaks a specific law as stated in the bible (e.g., one of the 10 Commandments).
    - ii) The word "sin" comes from the Old English and means "missing the mark". It is like when shooting an arrow and it misses the target.
  - c) David, in the Psalms, says that a person is blessed if His (or her) transgressions are forgiven. That means a person if forgiven by God, and they realize it, they are blessed in their life here-and-now.
  - d) I believe the main thing people desire of God is to know they are forgiven of what they have done wrong. We are blessed in that we no longer have to carry the guilt around in our conscious. We may have to pay society for the harm done and suffer physical consequences for our sins, but if we ask for forgiveness of God, He will forgive us.
    - i) Understand it is a little more complicated than just saying, "God forgive me" and then go back to committing the same sin. The confession has to come with the concept that we understand it is wrong and our desire is to not do it again. Even if and when we fail again, we still understand our actions are sins and we desire to change that behavior. That is a confession of sins that is forgiven.
  - e) Now we go to the second phrase that says, "Whose sins are covered".
    - i) The idea of "covered" is the idea one can no longer see the sins.
    - ii) The point is the sin is still there, but God throws a "forgiveness covering" over the sins so we no longer have to see it. It is God telling us we no longer have to bear the guilt for that sin as long as certain procedures are followed (i.e., confession, a price has to be paid.)
    - iii) The punishment for the sins still has to be paid. Prior to Jesus, that is what animal sacrifices were for. That is what the cross is for. The point of "covering" is the sin is "taken care of" and we no longer have to worry about it. Both the animal sacrifices and the cross itself is someone innocent paying the price for our sins.
  - f) One of my favorite bits of bible trivia has to do with the tabernacle. In the book of Exodus, God describes in exact detail how to build a tabernacle to worship God.
    - i) Every dimension of every part of the tabernacle is described.
    - ii) The one exception is the "mercy seat". (See Exodus 25:17).
    - iii) There is a box called the "ark of the covenant". This is a box without a lid. The exact dimensions of the box are specified in Exodus. The main item to be placed in that box was a copy of God's laws. To violate those laws are sins. Covering that box is a separate lid called the "mercy seat". It represents God's mercy in covering those sins just like a lid covering a box.
    - iv) Here's the cool part: The height-dimension of the mercy seat (lid) is not specified in the bible. Again, every other dimension of every other aspect of the tabernacle is specified. The only exception is the mercy seat height.
    - v) Why is that? To show there is no "height limit" when it comes to God's mercy! There is no limit to God's mercy.

- vi) Gee, that's great, what does it have to do with Romans 4? Re-read these two verses in Romans 4 with the "no limit to God's mercy" in mind. One of the things that make us blessed is to realize that no matter how much we mess up, if we are willing to confess that sin, God does still forgive us. We ourselves put "limits" on God's mercy because our egos think we can do better. God has no limit.
11. Verse 9: Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.<sup>10</sup> Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!
- a) Paul continues his argument that circumcision does not save a person. Paul continues to hammer the point that God called Abraham "righteous" long before he was circumcised.
    - i) Notice the last phrase of Verse 10: "It was not after, but before!"
  - b) Circumcision is the "sign" that one is Jewish. We'll discuss this a lot more beginning in Verse 11. My point here (that Paul will expand upon later), is that God is the God-of-non-Jews as well as Jews. The "blessedness" that Abraham received is available for Jews and non-Jews alike.
  - c) OK, John I get all of that. What's the application? The application is that "rituals" for Christians make nice symbolic gestures for our salvation but we aren't saved by those rituals. We don't get "points" with God for completing such rituals.
    - i) I'm not anti-ritual if one has the right perspective. Let's take communion. I believe God calls all Christians to take communion regularly. Different churches have different interpretations of "regularly", but as far as I can tell, all Christian churches do some sort of communion on a regular basis.
    - ii) One takes communion to remind oneself of what Jesus did for us. That is "biblical" (See Luke 22:19). The mistake is to think one gets "bonus points" with God for regularly taking communion.
  - d) Some good rules of thumb on Christian practices and rituals are: 1) Did Jesus comment on it? 2) Was it practiced in the Book of Acts? And finally, 3) Did the Epistle writers comment upon it? That is how you "test" if an idea is appropriate (e.g., communion) as a part of a Christian worship service.
12. Verse 11: And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.
- a) If we are saved by faith-alone, the next question would then be, "Then what's the point of circumcision? If Abraham was saved long-prior to being circumcised, what's the point of completing that ritual?
    - i) In other words, if Abraham was accounted as righteous before God in Genesis Chapter 15, what is the point of circumcision in Genesis Chapter 17?
    - ii) The answer is in Verse 11. It is a "sign" of God's relationship to Abraham.
  - b) If I had to pick one word to remember from Verse 11, it is the word "seal".
    - i) The closest illustration I can think of is cowboys and cattle. To prove ownership of a cow to a certain ranch, they brand a mark on the cattle. That cow is now "sealed" as belonging to a particular ranch.
  - c) To a Jewish person, performing circumcision is telling God, "I want to dedicate my life to you." I understand that I want to live my life to give you the glory. A sign or a "seal" of that understanding is to perform circumcision.
  - d) Circumcision is to be performed on male babies when they are eight days old. (See Genesis 17:12) Abraham was 99 when he was told this. Since he's behind schedule by 98 years, 11 months and 22 days, he had to get moving. ☺
    - i) An 80-day old baby isn't involved in the circumcision decision process. Therefore this sign is for the parents as a sign for raising their children to serve God.

- e) Circumcision can be looked at as “agreeing to cash the check” that God gives us.
    - i) An illustration I gave earlier about faith is like God giving you a check for a huge sum of money. All we have to do is take to the bank and cash it. Doing a “sign” of circumcision is like us saying, “OK, God, I realize that I am saved just because I believe the Gospel story to be true. I’m performing this ritual of baptism or “whatever” as a visual sign to me and those around me that I accept your free gift.
  - f) There is an interesting phrase about circumcision in Genesis 17 I want to discuss here:
    - i) “Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.” (Genesis 17:14 NIV)
    - ii) What this verse is saying is any Jewish person who refuses to be circumcised will be “cut off from his people”. That term “cut off” can mean ex-communicated and it can also mean the death penalty.
    - iii) Speaking in defense of Judaism for the moment, I can see why they were so obsessed with wanting Christian Jews to be circumcised. Looking at this verse in Genesis, it implies one is “cut off” for failing to perform this ritual. If Gentile people were to join “God’s family” that is the opposite of being “cut off”. Circumcision is a sign of that relationship.
    - iv) The problem is Judaism is “mixing up” God’s relationship with the Jewish people, with those who are called to salvation, i.e., “righteous”. God did set up a special relation with the Jewish people. Circumcision was a visual sign of that relationship. Salvation is a separate issue.
    - v) To put it another way, do you think a Jewish person who is circumcised and lives a horrible, wicked life then goes to heaven? Of course not. The sign of circumcision represents God’s relationship with the Jewish people. It was never intended as an “automatic-go-to-heaven” ritual.
    - vi) Christians make the same mistake with baptism. It is a sign of one’s commitment to God. However, one does not get saved from baptism. One gets saved and then gets baptized as a symbolic gesture of one’s commitment to God.
  - g) This leads me back to Verse 11. Notice the phrase, “he is the father of all who believe”.
    - i) The “he” refers to Abraham. Abraham is not only the father of the Jewish people, but the “spiritual father” to all who are saved. This is covered more in Verse 12.
13. Verse 12: And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.
- a) In Christianity, there is a concept of “adoption”. We are “adopted” into God’s family.
    - i) This is a topic in Romans Chapter 8. It is also mentioned elsewhere by Paul:
      - a) “In love he (God) predestined us (All Christians, Jewish or non-Jewish) to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 1:4,5 NIV)
    - ii) By God “adopting us”, He is saying to us non-Jews in effect, “I know you are not direct descendants of Abraham. However, I want to adopt you as part of “the chosen people” to spend eternity with me. I want to make you part of my own family. As an adopted son or daughter, you have same full privileges as a natural offspring. I will make you like a “direct creation of God.”
      - a) By the way, this does not mean the church replaces the Jewish people as “God’s chosen people”. There are unconditional promises made to the Jewish nation. We’ll get to that in later chapters in Romans.
  - b) How does that tie to Verse 12? Notice the word “also”. Abraham is “also” the father of those who have committed their lives to God, be it Jewish or non-Jewish.
    - i) Abraham becomes the “father of the uncircumcised” (any non-Jewish person) in that we are adopted into God’s family.
    - ii) Abraham is also the “father of the circumcised” (Jewish people) in God picked the Jewish people to be His witnesses to the world.



- c) Let me get wrap up this discussion of circumcision so I can zip up my pants. ☺
  - i) In the New Testament, Paul makes it real clear that the sign of circumcision is not a requirement for Christians. (Reference 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:19).
  - ii) One can debate whether or not it is still a sign for Jewish Christians:
    - a) As a “Jewish-Christian” it is unnecessary as they are sealed by faith in God.
    - b) As a “Jewish-Christian” one can get circumcised if they understand that they are still descendants of “God’s chosen people” and wish to keep that as a reminder that God still has unconditional promises to that Nation.
  - iii) I’m actually in favor of circumcision for health reasons. That’s another issue.
  - iv) There is an interesting story in the Book of Acts, where Paul had a young-adult assistant named Timothy. Timothy’s mother was Jewish. Paul had Timothy circumcised, not because Paul thought it was necessary for salvation, but because it was such a hot-issue with Jewish people that Paul wanted to get past that issue in order to preach his message. (See Acts 16:3).
    - a) My point here is sometimes performing a ritual is necessary just so you can preach your message. For example, some churches teach that if you don’t wear a coat and tie to church, you are not accepted. Even if you are anti-necktie, it may be necessary to wear one just so you can be a witness for God. I believe God wants us to “tolerate” local customs and rituals if those are a hindering block from preaching the Gospel message to others.
- 14. Verse 13: It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.
  - a) Paul is now “off” of circumcision itself and back to a discussion of God’s laws in comparison to salvation.
  - b) Paul’s point here is that the formal giving of God’s laws came through Moses. That was roughly 500 years after Abraham. God gave Abraham the promise that he would be saved for eternity long before the God’s laws were formally given.
  - c) Was Abraham aware that say, stealing and murdering were wrong? Of course. Was Abraham aware of all the hundreds of laws given by Moses in the first five books of the Old Testament? I doubt it. Even if Abraham somehow knew all of those laws, the bible teaches that God counted Abraham as being “righteous” (again, that means being in right-standing before God) by faith, and not by obedience to God’s laws.
  - d) The point of this verse is that God made unconditional promises to Abraham about having saved-descendants-by-faith. Abraham had no children when that promise was made and he was an old man. Abraham believed that promise and that is “all it took” for God to account Abraham as “righteous”.
  - e) Back in my first lesson on Romans, I mentioned that a key verse is in Chapter 1. It was when Paul said, “The just shall live by faith”. This is a quote of Habakkuk 2:4.
    - i) Much of Romans is a commentary on the topic of “The just shall live by faith”. Paul mainly focuses on just who is “Just”. (“Just” is short for “justification” or the term “just-as-if-I-never-have-sinned”).
    - ii) Here in Chapter 4, we are focusing on Abraham. He is “just” because he believed God. He is not “just” due to obedience to any law of God.
    - iii) That is the point of Verse 13 here in Chapter 4. Re-reading this verse with all of this in mind might be helpful at this point.
- 15. Verse 14: For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,<sup>15</sup> because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.
  - a) Paul’s next point is that “faith” and “law” can be opposites in terms of salvation.
    - i) If one can get into heaven by keeping God’s laws, then faith is unnecessary.
    - ii) If we can get into heaven by “being good people” and obeying God’s laws, what is the point of trusting in His unconditional promises?

- b) Let me put it another way: One thing I would like to have in this life is assurance that I'm going to heaven. If I think that being a good person gets me into heaven, then where do I draw the line? How do I know how much "good" is good enough for God?
    - i) Where in the bible does it say, "If you keep the law, oh say, 73% of the time, that's good enough for God?" It doesn't.
    - ii) Where in the bible does it say, "As long as you don't kill someone, God will let the rest slide?" It doesn't.
    - iii) There has to be a solid, well-defined "line" of knowing how much we can do in order to be saved. Jesus gave that line. He said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48 NIV). So much for that idea. ☺
  - c) Then again, if God made us unconditional promises of salvation, then we can have assurance that we are going to heaven. There still is a purpose to behavior, and we'll get there in a moment. My point here is that "faith" gives us assurance of salvation.
  - d) Verse 15 says, "The law brings wrath". I gave the illustration earlier that you are not guilty of speeding if you never knew the speed limit. The law is God's standard of right and wrong and it shows us how guilty we are. We are judged by the law. The Law does bring wrath. Our "safety valve" is we ask Jesus to pay the punishment for us.
  - e) Finally, Verse 15 says, "where there is no law there is no transgression."
    - i) There is something about knowing God's laws that makes us want to violate it. For example, if we see a sign saying, "Do not push this button", we are all the more tempted to push it. The law is there it show us what is right and wrong. Our rebellious nature wants to violate the law and "push that button".
16. Verse 16: Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring--not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.
- a) Notice the word "guaranteed". We are guaranteed to be the "adopted" offspring of Abraham. Paul is using "guaranteed" the same way I used the word "assurance".
  - b) Faith has to be an unconditional promise of God. If it were conditional, we would be capable of breaking that "contract" for salvation. Since it is unconditional, we can have assurance of salvation. We can breath-easy knowing it is a guaranteed fact. If we can't trust a perfect God to keep an unconditional promise, who can we trust? Not ourselves.
    - i) Trust me, if there was a way to sin enough to lose my salvation, I would find it. ☺  
I can sleep nights knowing that it is not my faithfulness that counts, but God's.
  - c) Let's get back to the concept of "adoption". Although the word "adoption" is not used in this text, the concept is. Paul ends this verse with "He (Abraham) is the father of us all". "All" means all who are saved. Since we Gentiles are not genetic descendants of Abraham, we are "adopted by faith".
17. Verse 17: As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.
- a) Paul quotes Genesis 17:5 in the first sentence of this verse. This is God restating a promise to Abraham. (He stated that promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15).
  - b) At the time of Genesis 17 Verse 1, Abraham was in 99 with no children. God has now been telling Abraham on and off for years he will be the father of many nations. God is teaching Abraham that God's promises are a "done-deal", but on God's timing, not his.
  - c) Let' talk about the phrase, "calls things that are not as though they were".
    - i) Suppose you were watching a television-rerun of a sports event. You knew before the game start who would win. Imagine you could talk to the winning team through the television. You tell the winning team "in advance" they were going to win. From your "outside the TV" perspective, it is past-tense and a done-deal. From the "inside the TV" perspective, the sports team doesn't know it's a rerun.

- a) When you tell that team they have already won the game that “hasn’t been played yet, you are “Calling things that are not as though they were”.
  - ii) Now let me paraphrase God speaking to Abraham: “I am God and I know all the things that will happen in the future. I know that you will have a child and his descendants will become a great nation. This is all news to you, Abraham, but to me, I can speak of it in the past-tense as I know with certainty it is true.”
  - iii) How does that affect us? God sees us in our “perfected future beings”. God can call us “sinless” because in heaven, we will be freed from the sin-disease. From God’s all-knowing perspective, it is already a done-deal.
- 18. Verse 18: Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”
  - a) Remember that all Abraham had to do was believe in God’s promise and it’s a done-deal.
  - b) Let’s talk about “hope”. We think of hope as including doubt. For example, if the skies are cloudy, we might say, “I hope it doesn’t rain”, which implies we don’t know for sure.
    - i) Biblical “hope” is different. It is about trust. It is counting upon a future event.
    - ii) Abraham believed God’s promises of children. He had “hope” in that fact.
  - c) We might say, “But I have doubts. Does that mean I’m in trouble?” First of all, if you have doubts, welcome to the club. We all go through periods of doubts. It’s hard to trust in a God we can’t visibly see. The key is to remember that God is faithful even when we have doubts. We are trusting in God’s faithfulness, not our own. That is our “hope”.
- 19. Verse 19: Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead.<sup>20</sup> Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,<sup>21</sup> being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.
  - a) Let’s talk about faith and action. If we believe in something, we should act upon it.
  - b) Abraham believed God was going to give him children, even though, by Genesis Chapter 17 Abraham was 99 (Ref.: Genesis 17:1) and Sarah was 90 (Ref.: Genesis 17:17).
  - c) My point here is that Abraham didn’t just stand there waiting for Sarah to be pregnant. He looked at her and said something like, “Hey honey, you’re over eighty nine, but still looking mighty fine, let’s go shake the tent stakes.” ☺ (I couldn’t think of a good rhyme for “ninety” so I had to use “eighty-nine”. ☺ )
    - i) In other words, Abraham believed God, and then “took action” in order for God’s promises to come true. He took the action of having sexual relations with his wife Sarah in order to have children.
    - ii) My point here is that we are saved by faith. God expects us to act on that faith.
  - d) Next, notice the words “dead” in Romans 4, Verse 19:
    - i) It says in Verse 19, “His (Abraham’s) body was as good as dead.”
    - ii) It also says in Verse 19, “That Sarah's womb was also dead.”
    - iii) Let’s face it. People who are 99 and 90 don’t usually produce a lot of babies.
      - a) The point? Don’t put God in a box. If God said they’re going to have children, then they should take action based on that prediction and let God worry about the timing and the results.
      - b) As my wife tells me when I’m feeling down, “Do you think God is big enough He can handle this situation?”
    - iv) There is also symbolism in the “death to life”. It is symbolic of how we are “dead” in our sins and God made us alive again
  - e) Finally, let’s talk about doubts:
    - i) It’s easy to say, “Well, God spoke to Abraham. If I had the audible voice of God telling me to go something “impossible”, I could do it too. My problem is I don’t have God giving me moment by moment directions.”

- a) “God’s will” gets done through us without audible voices. The best way to get “God’s will” done is to pray for His will, regularly study your bible, then go live our life in obedience to His Word. God will “put things in your path”. If you’re trying to live a life pleasing to God, and are doing these things (prayer, bible study), you are doing God’s will.
  - ii) Now let’s get back to the verse. Verse 20 says, “But was strengthened in his faith”.
    - a) What does that mean? It meant that God knew Abraham had “enough faith to start the job” and God then increased his faith to “finish the job”.
    - b) It means that when you have doubts, but still have “some faith” that God can use what faith we do have. All we have to do is find out, start “moving forward” in faith and let God strengthen that faith.
    - c) Here’s another biblical example. Jesus walked on water. Peter asked permission to join him. Jesus said yes. Peter started walking. All of a sudden Peter started sinking. He asked Jesus for help (increased Peter’s faith”) and, next thing you know, they were both waltzing across the Sea of Galilee. (Ok, I made up that last part. ☺) The story is in Matthew 14.
      - (1) It ends with Jesus saying, “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:29 NIV). My point is Jesus knew Peter had “some faith”, and then increased his faith and helped him.
  - iii) One time the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus replied: “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.” (Luke 17:5, NIV)
    - a) I don’t think Jesus was being literal. After 2,000 years of Christian history, I haven’t read of a lot of mulberry trees being moved in the sea. ☺ I believe Jesus’ point is God works to increase our faith if we start out with a little faith, like say the size of a small mustard seed. This verse also tells me it’s ok to prayerfully ask God to increase one’s faith.
  - f) The point of this verse, and my mini-sermon on faith and doubts, is that God is not expecting some super-human ability to just do the impossible based on faith. The point is if we have “a little faith” with which God can use. God can and does provide the boldness of “more-faith” to accomplish His will. Abraham knew that getting Sarah pregnant was highly improbable if not impossible. So Abraham and Sarah just “went at it” and let God worry about the results.
  - g) Finally, I am positive God never gives us tasks that we can’t handle. Don’t worry that God will give you some tremendous task that is over your head. God works on our level. At the same time, God is always interesting in taking us to higher levels and getting us to trust Him more and more.
20. Verse 22: This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>23</sup> The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup> but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup> He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.
- a) Let’s start with “were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup> but also for us”. That means the story of Abraham, is not just to be inspired by his trust in God, it is something for us to model. Paul is saying it was written for our sakes to learn about trusting in God.
  - b) Further, it was written to teach us about Paul’s main argument, which is salvation outside of trying to keep God’s laws or doing “good things”.
  - c) Finally, Paul ends this chapter with the gospel message. Verse 25 says, “He (Jesus) was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”
    - i) The point? The story of Abraham being “dead for reproduction purposes and then producing new life” is a model of the Gospel message. The idea of “death to life” is tied to Jesus payment on the cross.

- ii) Abraham was 99. His body was “as good as dead”. God still used it produce life.
  - iii) We as Christians were “as good as dead” in our sins. God himself, via the cross paid the price so we could have life. That is idea Paul is trying to get across in that this story in Genesis has some prediction-model-aspects to the Gospel.
21. OK, let’s wrap this up and get back to “Get on the bus” illustration that I used to open this lesson:
- a) Notice “getting on the bus” implies we no longer have to work for our salvation. We don’t have to do things in order for God to be happy with us.
  - b) The mistake we make is our egos want to please God by our efforts. We think that doing “things” will make God more pleased with us. We start pushing that bus up a hill.
  - c) God can’t love us more than He already does. We don’t have to do things to please Him.
  - d) The other part of Christianity is that we do act on our faith. Abraham took the footsteps necessary to get God’s will done. God calls us to be witnesses for Him. That doesn’t affect our salvation. Our behavior should be motivated by gratitude for what God has already done for us. We let God “use us” and “work through us” to get His will done. That is “riding on the bus”.
22. Let’s pray: Heavenly Father, forgive us for trying to please You by our actions. Help us to remember that You love us more than we can ever comprehend, and there is nothing we can do to increase or decrease that love. Out of gratitude, help us to do Your will throughout the day. Increase the faith we have within us. Give us boldness over our doubts and fears. Help us to have the proper perspective, as we live to glorify You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.