



BE TRANSFORMED

THIS HANDOUT

BEING TRANSFORMED BY THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS CHAPTER FOUR



FAST FACTS

ROMANS CHAPTER 4

- Abraham's righteousness was accounted to him because he believed in God.
- The promise God made to Abraham is "therefore of faith that it might be according to grace" so that all people can receive God's gift of salvation.
- Just as Abraham believed in God's promise that Abraham would be a father to many nations, so Christians must believe in the same God.
- More than simply a belief in God, faithful Christians also believe that Jesus was crucified and resurrected for our justification.

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ROMANS 4

In chapter four St. Paul continues the approach he used in chapter three, addressing objections he imagines his Jewish readers might raise. In this chapter he addresses whether circumcision justified our Righteous Forefather Abraham.

Many first century Jews believed they were exempt from God's judgment because they were descended from Abraham (see Matthew 3:7-10). St. Paul responds that if Abraham were in fact justified by his works, then Abraham would be able to boast about his righteousness; at the same, however, even Abraham would not be able to boast before God (Romans 4:2). Why could Abraham not boast before God (and, ultimately, also not boast before other people)? Because, St. Paul answers - quoting Genesis 15:6 - Abraham's righteousness was accounted to him because he believed in God (4:3).

This answer is at first very complicated and confusing: what does it mean to say that Abraham's righteousness was *accounted* to him, and what does that mean for his relationship with God? St. Paul spends most of chapter four answering this question.

St. Paul starts with the example of paid employment. A worker who engages in a full day of work, and then is paid for that work, is not given a gift: he or she is simply receiving what is owed for the work (Romans 4:4). In other words, the money is not *accounted* or *credited* to the worker. In contrast, however, a person who does not work to earn salvation, but instead faithfully believes in the God Who justifies sinners, that faith is *accounted* or *credited* as righteousness: the righteousness was not earned, but was given as a gift by God (4:5).

St. Paul further explains this by quoting Psalm 32:1-2, attributed to King David (Romans 4:6-8). This quotation

DO I BELIEVE GOD?

God tells us, through the Holy Prophet Isaiah, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 50:9). Despite this admonition, we frequently question God's timetable: if we are suffering, then we demand that God end the suffering immediately; if we are engaging in a certain work, we demand that He provide a specific result within a specific period of time. If God does not meet our demands, we begin to question and doubt Him.

King David patiently worked according to God's timetable. David could honestly say, "I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps" (Psalm 40:1-2).

St. Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome from 590-604 AD, teaches us that our patience affects our souls:

For victory over cities is a less thing, because that which is subdued is without; but a far greater thing is that which is conquered by patience, since the mind itself is by itself overcome, and subjects itself to itself, when patience compels it to bridle itself within. Let the impatient hear what the Truth says to His elect; In your patience ye shall possess your souls (Luke 21:19)...Therefore the Lord pointed out patience as the guardian of our state, in that He taught us to possess ourselves in it. Thus we learn how great is the sin of impatience, through which we lose the very possession of what we are.

St. Paul concludes, "We desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:11-12).

CONTINUE

shows that blessedness is God's forgiveness of sin and accounting of righteousness to the individual. Since this is the case, St. Paul asks, did God account righteousness to Abraham before or after Abraham was circumcised? He answers, "Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised" (4:10). Abraham's circumcision was therefore a symbol of his faith, rather than a substitute for it (4:11).

This is important for St. Paul's argument in the Epistle to the Romans, because it shows that God saves people who are not Jews. Abraham, by being counted as righteous by God before he was circumcised, demonstrates that God counts as righteous faithful people who are not Jews (Romans 4:11-12).

This point is carried on in verses 13-22. The promise God made to Abraham that the Righteous Forefather would be the father of many nations was not dependent upon fidelity to the law by either Abraham or his descendents. Instead, the promise was "through the righteousness of faith" (Romans 4:13). If only "those who are of the law" - the Jews - are heirs to God's promise, then faith matters less than law-keeping (4:14). The promise is "therefore of faith that it might be according to grace" so that all people, and not exclusively the children of Israel, can receive God's gift of salvation (4:16-17).

God has the power to make Gentiles heirs to Abraham's promise, because He "gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did" (Romans 4:17). Just as God worked through Abraham's unwavering belief to give him a son (Isaac), so God can work through the faith of Gentiles to make them spiritual descendents of the Righteous Forefather Abraham. Abraham "was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform" (Romans 4:20-21). This is the faith that was accounted to Abraham as righteousness (4:22).

St. Paul concludes by linking the Righteous Forefather Abraham's faith to the faith each Christian must have. Just as Abraham believed in God's promise that Abraham would be a father to many nations, so Christians must believe in the same God (Romans 4:23-24). More than simply a belief in God - as important as that is - faithful Christians also believe that Jesus was crucified and resurrected for our justification (4:24-25).

PATRIARCH ABRAHAM



The Church commemorates our Righteous Forefather Abraham, together with his nephew, Righteous Lot, on October 9. The troparion for the righteous forefathers is:

Thou didst justify the Forefathers by faith, when of old through them Thou didst betroth Thyself to the Church of the nations. The Saints rejoice in the glorious fruit of their seed, even in her who bore Thee seedlessly. By their prayers, O Christ our God, save our souls.

Icon of Abraham courtesy of Come and See Icons (www.comeandseeicons.com).

REAL AND FALSE FAITH

Blessed Augustine teaches us to have real faith in God:

Faith is praised, it is plain, it is praised: but what kind of faith this is, the Apostle distinguishes. For certain who boasted of faith, and had not a good conversation, the Apostle James rebukes and says, 'Thou believest there is one God, thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble'...So then thou who art come to the feast, glory not of faith only. Distinguish well the nature of this faith...Let the Apostle make the distinction, let him teach us; 'neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith.' Tell us, what faith? do not even the devils believe and tremble? I will tell thee, he says, and listen, I will now draw the distinction,' But faith which worketh by love.' What faith, then, and of what kind? 'That which worketh by love.' 'Though I have all knowledge,' he says, 'and all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.' Have faith with love; for love without faith ye cannot have. This I warn, this I exhort, this in the name of the Lord I teach you, Beloved, that ye have faith with love; for ye may possibly have faith without love. I do not exhort you to have faith, but love. For ye cannot have love without faith.



ACT ON GOD'S PROMISE

St. John Chrysostom teaches that we should cooperate with God's grace for our salvation:

Now I say this so as not to despair when He threatens but divert His anger by repentance, and not lose heart when He promises good things but by zeal and concern for our way of life call the promises into effect. If in fact we do not do this, the promise alone is not sufficient to save...Accordingly, let us, who have a promise of kingdom, not be indifferent but instead make our contribution so that we may succeed in attaining the eternal good, thanks to the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be the glory and the power for ages of ages. Amen.