

Bible Study – Romans 4

Launch: How do you think people you know understand the word ‘faith’? What do most people think Christians mean by the word?

1. Read Romans 4:1-8. What does Abraham do to be considered righteous?

This is a slightly provocative question – the simple answer is that he believed God... but we want to go on and see that ‘believing’ isn’t a work that earns salvation. See what comes up here...

2. What words are used in these verses to describe the means by which Abraham received righteousness? What do they mean?

a) ‘credited’ – think bank account... something that was not mine is credited to my account – it is given to me and is now mine. (usually this is our wages... BUT in this case, it is not credited as a wage...):

b) ‘gift’ – the point is that if salvation was by works, we would receive righteousness as a wage (i.e. we’d earn it). But verse 4 and 5 are contrasting ‘wage’ and ‘gift’ – righteousness is NOT a wage, but a gift (i.e. not earned/deserved)

c) (‘trust’) – this one might come up here too – the same word as faith. Note here that the trust isn’t what gives righteousness – it is God who justifies. Trust is just believing that to be true.

3. List the words used to describe what a person who needs justification is like. Then list the words that describe what God does to such a person. How does this highlight grace?

State of person needing saving	What God does
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ungodly / wicked (v5) • Transgressor (v7) • Sinner (v7, 8) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justifies (v5) • Credits righteousness (v5) [NOTE ‘justify’ means to make or declare righteous – the same root word] • forgives (v7) • covers sins (v7) = does NOT count sin against them [opposite of being counted as righteous. NOTE that this is the same word being used for both ‘crediting righteousness’ and ‘not crediting sin’]

4. Read Romans 4:9-15. Summarise Paul’s argument regarding righteousness, circumcision, and the law? What happens if you misunderstand this point? [cf. Gen 15:4-6 and 17:10]

The overall argument is that Abraham received righteousness (by faith) before the sign of circumcision had been given to him, and before the law was given to Israel. Therefore, righteousness could never have come by those things... it was available before they existed! [cf. Gen 15:4-6 and 17:10 if you need to see that righteousness by faith comes before circumcision]

If this isn’t the case, then God’s promise is worthless, and the faith is useless (Rom 4:14). That is, salvation by works completely undoes grace and faith... it is the opposite of the Christian Gospel!

5. Read Romans 4:16-25. List the different things God does in this section.

Made Abraham a father of many nations (v17); gives life to the dead (17); creates (17), has power to keep promises (21); credits righteousness (22,24); raised Jesus from the dead (24); offered Jesus to die for sins (25); raised Jesus to life to justify us (25).

6. What is the right response to God? Is this a reasonable/rational response? Why?

Abraham believed God (16, 17, 18, 20). We also are to believe God (v24).

It was rational for Abraham to believe; he was convinced that God had the power to keep his promise (v21).

We have even more reason to believe God; we’ve seen God keep his promises (especially to Abraham) AND we have seen (through reliable historical account) God sending his son to earth to die and to rise again).

7. How can Paul say Abraham didn’t waver in his faith (v19) and he did not waver (v20) when we know that Abraham *did* seem to waver as he tried to force the promise of God to come true. (e.g. Gen 15:2; 16:1-2)

It's a bit of a puzzling question! But it is a great example of faith; faith isn't about the quality of OUR faith; it is about the reliability of the object (God). Even though Abraham seemed to find it hard to be confident in God's promise at all times, nonetheless, he did believe God. And here Paul seems to say that God considered his faith as 'unwavering'.

Think about:

8. What has God promised us? (E.g. Rom 3:25-26; 4:25) Do you find it easy to believe that it is true?

9. What have we learned about God's character? What are some other words (synonyms) that we can use to explain what faith is? Do these help us focus on the object of our faith?
*(e.g. **rely** on the reliable; **trust** the trustworthy; **depend** on the dependable; have **faith** in the faithful).*

10. How do you feel when you realise that faith is not a work; that is, righteousness is dependant on God giving gifts, not on my faith being 'strong enough'?

11. What makes it hard for you to really believe that we are saved by grace, through faith? (When are you most likely to act like it isn't true, or to boast in your own faith?)