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Romans 4 Paraphrased



By Dan Maines

Romans 4 Paraphrased

Introduction

† Paul now turns to Abraham to prove that righteousness has always been by faith, not by works

† He's showing that what God did in Christ wasn't new, it was the fulfillment of what was always true

† This destroys the idea that law, circumcision, or effort ever made anyone right before God

Romans 4:1

What then can we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered about this matter

† Paul brings Abraham into the discussion because the Jews trusted him as their foundation (John 8:39)

† If Abraham wasn't justified by works, then no one can be

† This goes straight to the root of their confidence in the flesh

Romans 4:2

If Abraham had been made right by works, then he'd have something to boast about, but not before God

† Works might impress men, but they never justify before God (Ephesians 2:8-9)

† Boasting is completely removed in God's system of righteousness

† God alone receives the glory, not man

Romans 4:3

Scripture says Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness

† Faith was credited as righteousness, not earned righteousness (Genesis 15:6)

† This happened long before the law was ever given

† This proves righteousness has always been based on belief, not performance

Romans 4:4

Now when someone works, his pay is not counted as a gift but as something owed

† If righteousness came by works, God would owe it, which is impossible

† Grace and works can't operate together as the basis of justification

† This shows salvation is never a wage system

Romans 4:5

But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who

justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness

† God justifies the ungodly, not the deserving (Romans 5:8)

† This destroys the idea that we must first become righteous before coming to God

† Faith is the means, not works

Romans 4:6

Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works

† Paul now adds David as a second witness (Psalm 32:1-2)

† This confirms that even under the law, righteousness wasn't based on works

† God was always dealing with people by grace

Romans 4:7

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered

† Forgiveness, not performance, is the foundation of blessing

† Covering of sin points forward to Christ's finished work

† This shows the heart of the gospel even in the Old Covenant

Romans 4:8

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account

† God choosing not to count sin is the essence of justification (2 Corinthians 5:19)

† This is imputed righteousness, not earned righteousness

† This was always God's plan

Romans 4:9

Is this blessing only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised, since we say faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness

† Paul now expands this to include the nations

† Circumcision doesn't limit God's promise

† Faith is the defining factor, not identity markers

Romans 4:10

How then was it credited, while he was circumcised or uncircumcised, not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised
† Abraham was justified before circumcision (Genesis 15 before Genesis 17)

† This proves circumcision wasn't the cause of righteousness

† It removes all reliance on ritual

Romans 4:11

He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of faith he had while uncircumcised, so that he'd be the father of all who believe without being circumcised

† Circumcision was a sign, not the source

† Abraham becomes the father of all believers, Jew and Gentile

† This shows God's plan always included the nations

Romans 4:12

And the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but also walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham

† True children of Abraham are defined by faith, not lineage (Galatians 3:7)

† Physical identity means nothing without faith

† This redefines Israel around belief

Romans 4:13

The promise to Abraham that he'd be heir of the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith

† The promise came before the law, so it can't depend on the law

† The inheritance is tied to faith, not obedience to Moses

† This shows the law was never the means of promise

Romans 4:14

If those who are of the law are heirs, then faith is made empty and the promise is canceled

† Law and promise can't function together as the basis

† If law saves, then faith becomes useless

† This exposes the contradiction in legalism

Romans 4:15

The law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there is no violation

† Law exposes sin and brings judgment (Romans 7:7-10)

† It was never designed to save

† This explains why reliance on law leads to condemnation

Romans 4:16

For this reason it is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants

† Faith ensures grace, and grace ensures certainty

† The promise is secure because it doesn't depend on human effort

† This includes both Jew and Gentile believers

Romans 4:17

As it is written, I have made you a father of many nations, in the presence of Him whom he believed, God who gives life to the dead and calls into being what does not exist

† God brings life out of death, pointing to resurrection (Hebrews 11:19)

† This connects Abraham's faith to God's power over death

† This ties directly into fulfilled resurrection in Christ

Romans 4:18

In hope against hope he believed, so that he'd become a father of many nations according to what had been spoken

† Abraham believed when it made no sense naturally

† His faith rested in God's promise, not circumstances

† This shows true faith trusts God beyond visible reality

Romans 4:19

Without becoming weak in faith he considered his own body as good as dead and Sarah's womb also dead

- † Abraham acknowledged the impossibility but still believed
- † Faith doesn't ignore reality, it trusts God above it
- † This mirrors resurrection life coming from death

Romans 4:20

Yet with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God

- † Faith strengthens when focused on God, not doubt
- † Giving glory to God is tied to trusting Him
- † This is the opposite of works-based boasting

Romans 4:21

Being fully convinced that what God had promised, He was able to perform

- † Faith rests in God's ability, not ours
- † This is the foundation of all justification
- † God's power guarantees the promise

Romans 4:22

Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness

- † This repeats the core truth, faith equals righteousness
- † This wasn't a one-time principle, it's universal
- † This is the basis of the gospel

Romans 4:23

Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him

- † Scripture was written for our understanding (Romans 15:4)
- † Abraham's account applies to all believers
- † This bridges Old and New Covenant fulfillment

Romans 4:24

But for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead

- † Faith now centers on Christ's resurrection
- † This connects Abraham's faith to fulfilled redemption

† Belief in the risen Christ is the same principle

Romans 4:25

He who was delivered over because of our offenses and was raised because of our justification

† Christ's death dealt with sin, His resurrection confirmed justification

† This shows the completed work of redemption

† This is fulfilled reality, not future expectation

Historical References

† Justin Martyr wrote that Abraham was justified by faith before circumcision, showing Gentiles are included in the promise

† Irenaeus taught that Abraham believed God and was counted righteous, proving salvation has always been by faith

† Clement of Alexandria affirmed that righteousness comes by faith apart from the law, even from the beginning

† Eusebius recorded that early believers understood Abraham as the pattern of justification for all nations

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't earn righteousness, we receive it by faith

† Our confidence isn't in what we've done, it's in what Christ has finished

† We don't live under law, we live under grace fulfilled in Christ

† Our identity isn't based on background, it's based on belief

† We can rest knowing God justifies the ungodly who trust Him

Q & A Appendix

Q Was Abraham saved by works

A No, he believed God and it was credited as righteousness (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3)

Q Does circumcision or any ritual make someone righteous

A No, Abraham was justified before circumcision (Romans 4:10-11)

Q What does it mean that God justifies the ungodly

A It means righteousness is given by grace, not earned

(Romans 4:5; Romans 5:8)

Q Why can't law and faith work together for justification

A Because law brings wrath and cancels the promise if relied on (Romans 4:14-15)

Q How is this fulfilled in Christ

A Through His death and resurrection, which secured our justification (Romans 4:25)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Romans 4

† Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho

† Irenaeus, Against Heresies

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

† Clement of Alexandria, Stromata

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