

UNASHAMED

A study of the book of Romans

I am not ashamed of the GOSPEL, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Romans 1:16

April 4, 2021
Romans 4:18-25

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] 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. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” ²³ The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

COMMENTARY

4:18. As the way of salvation, faith involves a constant trust in God’s ability to do as He promised. Abraham’s persevering faith in the face of adversity helped Paul define faith. “Against all hope” reminds us Abraham and Sarah were far beyond typical childbearing years. Yet he believed. Again, the word for “believed” is from the same root word as the

word for “faith.” God had made a promise: Abraham would become the father of many nations. In spite of his and Sarah’s advanced age, Abraham believed in God.

4:19. Without the perspective of trusting faith, Abraham had no reason to believe he would father anyone, much less a multitude. He was about “a hundred years old” and Sarah’s womb was “dead.” They had no way to force God’s promise. The entire situation was up to God. All Abraham could do was believe.

4:20. Not only did Abraham “not waver through unbelief,” but also he was “strengthened in his faith.” Trusting in good works as the way of salvation has the effect of making a person focus on himself or herself. Relying on God through faith means we are putting the focus solely on Him, which strengthens our relationship with Him. Through his faith in God, Abraham trusted more deeply and in this way “gave glory to God.”

4:21. Note carefully the emphasis of this verse. If any part of the salvation equation relied on Abraham, then he would have worked to make it a reality. Instead he was “fully persuaded” of God’s ability to do as He promised. God has the integrity and the power to be trusted with salvation. As Abraham was completely persuaded God can be trusted, so we also must trust God to take care of us in salvation and in all other matters of life.

4:22. Paul had driven home the point that Abraham had done nothing but trust God. Works were not part of the equation. Abraham’s faith was “credited to him as righteousness.” The main question Paul dealt with in Romans was how a person can attain righteousness. The answer is by faith. We cannot attain this right standing in our strength, but we can receive it as a gift from God through faith.

4:23. Paul, as a Pharisee, had spent a great deal of his life believing God offered salvation only to a few special people. In his life with Christ, however, Paul began to realize God makes the offer of salvation available to all people. We have seen the principle of “the Jew first and also the Greek” applied to sin and to salvation (see Rom. 2:9-11). Once again in this verse, Paul repeated that the offer to justify a person was not reserved for one person or one race. The offer was “not for him alone.”

4:24. Paul was writing to both Jews and Greeks in the Roman church; so when he wrote “but also for us,” he included members of both races. The offer is universally available. “To be credited” is an accounting term, and here it means we will be rendered righteous. A person will be rendered righteous in the same way it occurred for Abraham. We too must “believe in Him.” The resurrection is a major theme in the Christian faith, and Paul sounded that note here. When God “raised Jesus from the dead,” He was validating the sacrifice Jesus made. As living Lord, Jesus is ready to give salvation to all who believe.

4:25. This verse serves as a summary of the gospel. “He was delivered over” is in the passive voice, and means God presented His Son as a sacrifice for our sins. The proof of the effectiveness of Jesus’ sacrifice is found in the resurrection. Death and resurrection are forever bound together. When God raised Jesus, He proved the offer of “justification” is real.

MAIN POINT

Salvation is received by grace through faith, not by works of the law.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the most significant promise you have made? Were you able to keep that promise? Why or why not?

What determines whether we believe a promise made to us?

The source of a promise, the nature of the promise, or the time frame in which it was made affects our decision to trust the promise. Most of us would likely say we believe promises from God. Today we will consider how willing we are to take God at His Word and surrender to His plan.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

In Genesis 15, God answered Abram’s questions by assuming the full risk of the covenant. He walked through the slaughtered animals as a sign of His faithfulness to Abram. In other words, if He didn’t fulfill His promises, then let His holiness and perfection be chopped into pieces like the animals. God provided a reminder. In essence, God was letting Abram know that nothing would stand in the way of His faithfulness to him.

Do you think Abram had given up hope of ever being a father? Why or why not?

How can we know, like Abram, that we will possess all of God’s amazing promises?

Paul picks up on this concept in Romans 4:18-25, explaining to the Romans that from the earliest days, God has always credited righteousness to His covenant people through faith.

- HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 4:18-21.

What do these verses tell us about Abram's faith? Is that encouraging or discouraging to you? Why?

Paul tells us that Abraham in hope against hope, believed, even when the circumstances around him seemed to make fulfillment impossible. The terms hope and faith are related, but they are not the same. Hope, in this case, is the desire for something that might be true or might happen. Faith is the firm confidence that it *is* true or *will* happen. Abraham had hope when, from the human vantage point, there was no justification for it. Yet he believed it would happen as God said it would.

Paul declares that Abraham believed God without becoming weak in faith. To become weak in faith is to allow doubt to cloud and partly undermine belief. Abraham had been trusting God for 40 years and as far as we know had not witnessed a miracle of God. Yet he firmly believed that the Lord was easily capable.

- HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 4:22.

How does belief in God's promises result in our righteousness?

The heart of this passage, in fact of the whole chapter, is that in response to Abraham's faith, God graciously credited it to him as righteousness. In his sinful flesh, Abraham was totally unable to meet God's standard of perfect righteousness. But the good news of salvation, "the gospel of God", is that the Lord will take the faith that He Himself has enabled a person to possess and count that faith as divine righteousness on the believing sinner's behalf.

It is not that faith merits salvation but that faith accepts salvation from God's gracious hand. Through that acceptance comes the righteousness that only God can impart.

- HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 4:23-25.

According to this passage, what has God promised us?

The marvelous thing about Abraham's faith being credited as righteousness is that the same divine principle applies to everyone who trusts in God's Son.

Abraham was convinced of God's ability to do as He promised. God has the integrity and power to be trusted with salvation. As Abraham was completely persuaded God can be trusted, so must we trust God to take care of us in salvation and in all other matters of life.

NEXT STEPS

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some ways that your heart is like Abram's heart? In what ways are you struggling to believe God's promises?

How does knowing that God is always faithful to His Word help us through seasons when our faith is weak?

What does it look like to trust in God's promises? How is such trust essential to our spiritual growth?

PRAYER

Close your group time in prayer together. Spend some time thanking God for His promises and His faithfulness to always uphold His end of the covenant, even when we are unfaithful. Take time to thank God for sending Jesus and declaring us His righteous children. Pray that group members would trust God's promises this week regardless of their circumstances.