Paul’s Letter to the Romans

Chapter 4

Paul has introduced the concept of faith apart from the Law and has leveled the playing field between the Jew and the Gentile believer. Now he gets into the historical concepts and facts of faith apart from the Law through the Biblical fathers of the past.

A] Romans 4: 1 through 8; (read)

1] "*What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?"*

Paul starts with Abraham, who the Jews consider the 'father' of the Jewish nation, not Adam or Noah. Abraham really had nothing going for him in the behavioral department. Also Abraham did not have the Law to set the goalposts for him.

God did bless him and had a covenant with him, but on so many occasions, Abraham failed in his relationship with God. The two trips to Egypt and denying that Sarah was his wife but called her his sister. He did have his moments with the situations with his nephew Lot. So Abraham was human and a faltering one at that.

2] "*For if Abraham was justified by works. He has something to boast about, but not before God."*

Now we know Abraham as weak as he was, was also a devout believer in God, he obeyed God, but at the same time he messed up with Hagar, didn't he? He believed God and took young Isaac to be sacrificed as commanded, yet he still sinned in other areas. So what could he boast about works when his faith was marginal? Works really doesn't get a person the brass ring, does it?

3] "*For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:6)*

This is the point, right from the beginning when God called Abraham out from the Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia, to Haran; and Abraham believed and did as God commanded him. Think of this, would you pick up and move to a place you never heard of, forsaking family and friends? Because of a voice in the air? Abraham came from a family whose main business was making idols, from all appearances there was little relationship with God, but Abraham did believe and did as God asked.

4] "*Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but debt."*

When you stop to think about it, when I am working, I receive a wage, and it is not a gift, because I earn it. When I do the job, I am owed the payment for services rendered.

5] "*But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered, Blessed in the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin." (Psalm 32:1&2)*

This is not meaning a person who is not willing to work, because work does not enter into the relationship to be had by believing in God and upon His Son, Jesus Christ (Yeshua Messiah). Paul has explained that Abraham just believed in God and obeyed in his belief. Then Paul brings up David through Psalm 32: 1&2 where David has finally confessed his threefold sin concerning Bathsheba. (First he coveted her, then committed adultery with her, and then had her husband murdered. How much worse can it get?) But David confessed, then through his belief and God's forgiving Spirit and tender mercy, he was forgiven.

Now we come to another of those religious 'key' words, "impute'; which is to give what you have over to someone else as it is to be theirs. God 'imputed' His righteousness over to David. So David being forgiven, by grace he is 'justified, and his sin is removed, to be remembered no more ----except in the books who tell of it over and over again. -- God forgot all about it. Let me ask this: How long is YOUR memory? When you forgive another for some action, does it still come up from time to time? The idea is, with God, it is in the past, never to be brought up.

B] Romans 4: 9 through 12; (read)

1] "*Does this blessedness come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness*."

After explaining to the reader, that first there is no distinction between the Jewish believer and the Gentile believer, he explains that the relationship is a belief thing and starting with Abraham who the Jews consider their national father, and that his righteousness was because of his belief, not by what he did, Paul further explains, that the Justification has nothing to do with the covenant between God and Abraham, which was the circumcision, because he believed before he was bound in the covenant so, Paul explains this then goes to the uncircumcised people who were not in the covenant. It is their belief also.

2] "*How then, was it accounted? While he was circumcised or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised but while uncircumcised."*

You see everything was set before the covenant was signed. (so to speak) The covenant was put in force after God and Abraham had set their agreements. Or had worked things out as to God telling Abram that he would be the father of many nations and then changed his name to Abraham. The Covenant (contract) was the final piece, so the Blessings and righteousness was established before the contract.--------does this make sense?

3] "*And he received the sign of circumcision a seal of righteousness of the faith which he had while he was still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,----"*

Frankly I don't think the Jewish nation ever got the idea of the righteousness that was to be imputed to them, or that they fully understood what they had. Abraham did receive the covenant even before he was circumcised, meaning that it was by faith he received it. Therefore, it was not circumcision, that makes a man holy. Now friends I do not want to put the knock on the Jewish nation because they had spurned God on so many occasions over their long history, because I know that they are still God's chosen people just based on the covenant between God and Abraham which is still in force today. God never cancelled that contract. But Paul is reminding them, at this time of that contract and of what it consisted of.

4] "*And the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised."*

Here, then Paul tells them that not only are the people of the covenant blessed to be in this but those who are not of the covenant, when they too believe, are also then partakers of this blessing. The father of circumcision was the father of the Jewish nation who was the first to be circumcised under this covenant.

C] Romans 4: 13 through 25; (read)

1] "*For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath, for where there is no law there is no transgression. "*

As Paul continues on, he presses the issue that Abraham was alive well before the law was given, and God had already promised him the world, so the Law has absolutely nothing to do with God's promises and resultant contract. Even down through the generations there was no law until Moses. Yet the promise and covenant was to remain intact. The Jews had based their whole of existence on the Law, when it was grace that saved them through Abraham, ie: that promise and Covenant. Therefore what does the Law do? Point out what is wrong and sets the rules for punishment, with the inclusion of God's wrath for sin committed, and what does Grace do? By faith Grace forgives. So as the many scholars are wont to point out, Grace and Law are in opposition.

So apart from these verses, why did God, having already given Grace through Abraham and his seed then, through Moses, give the Law, that the Jews so deeply depend? (I almost sound like Paul when I write this don't I)

Remember Grace was always in effect when God gave the Law to the People coming from Egypt. Every society needs law to root that nation into a moral direction, and prevent a public chaos, and God gave them the Law to reinforce a people to always remember God and His provision as they grew as a nation. Grace never departed.

2] "*Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to Grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are under the Law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham—who is the father of us all---"*

Paul then reinforces the truth that Faith leads to Grace and this faith with Grace is not just for the Jew but for the Gentile. How many times do WE forget Grace? We go about our lives not thinking of God's grace to us, but what we will do tomorrow or next week. Many times, we have to be reminded of who we are in Christ and I am sure that these Jewish Christians have to do the same.

3] *"---(con't) as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations." (Genesis 17:5) in the presence of Him, whom he believed, God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist, as though they did;----"*

Because Abraham was called by God to begin with and obeyed as far as he was able. Remember Abram followed God from Haran to Canaan, not knowing what his future held, so this was his faith that saved him, and in obedience, believing in God's reasoning, went with his son Isaac to the sacrificial altar.

Now God did promise Abraham he would be the father of many nations, and as Paul writes "who gives life to the dead" and most scholars accept this as meaning that both Abraham and Sarah were aged and she was barren, yet they brought forth a child, and the next phrase "calls those things that did not exist as though they did." This referred to the many nations. As the promise of the many nations that came through both Ishmael and Isaac, this is why the Muslim call Abraham 'father' because they claim their lineage from Abraham. But truth be told, they err. Their lineage can be traced back to Ham and Canaan as well as Ishmael.

4] "(*con't)---Who contrary to hope, in hope, believed, so that he became the father of many nations according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." (Genesis 15:5) And not being weak in faith he did not consider his own body already dead, (since he was about one hundred years old) and the deadness of Sarah's womb.*

Abraham knew he was old, and he knew Sarah was well past child bearing years, yet he did believe God, but at the same time (well within the time period of a few years) yet gave in to Sarah's unbelief and had a child by Hagar. But he still believed and his belief was credited to as faith.

5] "*He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised, He was also able to perform."*  
 After saying that note about Sarah's unbelief and Abraham's laying with Hagar, this, by no means, meant he lost any faith in God, quite the contrary, according to Paul, his faith was all the more strong. Actually, as Paul put it, "What God had promised, God would accomplish." And Abraham believed.

6] "*Therefore is was accounted to him for righteousness."*

Therefore, WE should take a page out of Abraham's life, and really believe, don't you think? Look at these next passages.

7] "*Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses and was raised up because of our justification*.

Paul, having brought the truth of Abraham and teaching on the faith of Abraham, challenges both the Jewish Christians and the gentile Christians, to both believe on the same God and Jesus who died for them all. And this challenge is issued for us today.

Christ Died for the sins of the world, not just the Jew, and was raised because God 'justifies' those who believe on Him.