

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series two teachers will do Bible study from ROMANS 4:1-16.

In Romans chapter 3, Paul said that the gospel method of salvation is justification by faith. In Romans chapter 4, he proves that justification by faith has always been the only true method of salvation in the Bible, thus also the method of salvation during the Old Testament period.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read Romans 4:1-16 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read Romans 4:1-16 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in Romans 4:1-16. "Which truth in this passage is important for you?" or "Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?" Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in Romans 4:1-8. Paul has two arguments that prove that justification by faith has always been the only way of salvation in the Bible. His arguments are based on two quotes from the Old Testament.

His first argument is from Romans 4:1-5. Abraham's faith was credited to his account as righteousness. Paul asks, "What did Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, find? Paul makes a hypothetical argument, which he immediately refutes. He says, if Abraham was justified by his works, as some Jews, Muslims and Christians argue, he would have had something to boast about before people, but certainly not before God. Paul therefore concludes that *justification by works does not apply to Abraham*. Paul proves that Abraham was not justified by his works by making an appeal to the Bible. He quotes Genesis 15:6. Abraham received promises from God. Although these promises were not fulfilled for a long time, Abraham believed that God would fulfil them in his own time. And God credited Abraham's faith as righteousness. *To credit faith as righteousness*, means exactly the same as *to justify by faith only*.

The contrast in verse 2-3 is between justification by works and justification by faith. The contrast is not simply between the worker and the non-worker, but rather between the worker and the person who does not work but believes! Abraham was justified, not by works, but by faith!

The contrast in verse 4-5 is between deserved reward and undeserved gift, between compensation for the worker and grace for the person who does not work but believes. Abraham was justified, not by God's compensation or reward of his works, but by God's free and gracious gift upon his faith.

Thus, *justification by faith is at the same time justification by grace!* Moreover, Abraham was justified, not by a general kind of faith in any god, but by a specific faith in the God who justifies the ungodly through Jesus Christ!

His second argument is from Romans 4:6-8. David's evil works were not credited against his account as unrighteousness. Paul quotes another example from the Bible to confirm what he said about Abraham. In Psalm 32:1-2, David says that the person, whom God does not credit his sins against him, is blessed. What David calls *the non-crediting of sins*, Paul interprets positively as *the crediting of righteousness*. According to parallelism of Hebrew poetry, *the forgiveness of transgressions* is the same as *the covering of sins* and both are the same as *not crediting sin against a person's account*.

But although *forgiveness of sins* is a part of justification, justification in the Bible consists of more: it consists of the forgiveness of sins, acceptance into God's family and being loved by God.

But because this passage speaks of not crediting a person's evil works against him, Paul can use this passage to prove that people in the Old Testament times were also justified by faith and not by works! This passage does not call a person blessed because of his good works, but on the contrary because his evil works have been forgiven! A person is blessed, not because he has good works credited to his account, but rather because his transgressions and sins are not credited against his account! In the Judgement Day he will not be punished by God! What the Bible regards as a real blessing is not the *deserved reward for works*, but the bestowment of *undeserved grace through faith!*

(T) An important truth for me is from Romans 4:9-15. Paul has two more arguments that prove that justification by faith has always been the only way of salvation in the Bible.

His third argument is from Romans 4:9-12 and contrasts earlier faith with later circumcision. Abraham was justified, not through circumcision, but through faith. Paul asks the question, “Was justification by faith only a blessing for the circumcised Jews or also a blessing for the uncircumcised non-Jews?” He asks whether Abraham was justified when he was circumcised or when he was still uncircumcised. The fact that Abraham exercised faith and was justified at least 14 years *before* he was circumcised proves that circumcision was not a necessary condition for justification and also not the method of justification. Circumcision contributed nothing to the exercise of Abraham’s faith and nothing to his justification by faith, simply because circumcision among God’s people did not yet exist.

But when circumcision was instituted, it did have a relationship to faith. Circumcision was not a secular rite and not a mark of racial identity, but had religious significance and value. Circumcision was instituted by God as *a sign and seal of his covenant of grace* with Abraham and all his descendants. *Circumcision was the sign and seal of justification by faith.* As *a sign*, it signified the existence of faith that justified. As *a seal*, it guaranteed that the faith that justified was genuine. Thus, circumcision as *the sign and seal of the covenant of grace* was at the same time *the sign and seal of the existence of faith* and *the sign and seal of justification by faith*, apart from which the covenant of grace was meaningless.

Abraham received circumcision as a sign and seal in order that he should become not only the father of all uncircumcised believers, but also the father of all circumcised believers. With regard to uncircumcised believers, the fact that Abraham was justified by faith before he was circumcised, guarantees that the faith exercised by believers in Christ that are not circumcised will certainly justify them. With regard to circumcised believers, not the fact that they are circumcised, but the fact that they walk in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham, guarantees that also the faith exercised by circumcised believers in Christ will justify them.

His fourth argument is from Romans 4:13 and contrasts being righteous by faith with trying to become righteous by works of the law. Abraham received God’s promise that he will be the heir of the world, not through living by the law, but through being justified by faith. The contrast is here particularly between *doing* the works of the law and *being* righteous by faith. The contrast is between *trying to earn righteousness* by living by the law and *being completely righteous* in God’s eyes by living by faith in God’s promise. *The law* is here not the Mosaic Law, because the Mosaic Law came 430 years after God’s promise to Abraham and did not abrogate God’s promise to him. *The law* is also not the whole Old Testament revelation, because the Old Testament also testifies to the reality of justification by faith. *The law* is here the law that consists of *commandments that demand obedience* and allude to works of the law. The law commands obedience, but produces wrath when it is violated. The contrast is between *the law that knows no grace when it is transgressed* and *God’s promise that is given by grace.*

(S) An important truth for me is from Romans 4:14-16a. The promise of God cannot be received by doing the works of the law, but only by faith. In the matter of justification, *the works of the law* and *faith in God* are mutually exclusive! Jews, Christians, Muslims or anyone who live by the law are *people who try to be justified by the law*. However, instead of producing justification, the law produces the wrath of God, because people continually transgress the law! In Romans 4:15 the word *law* means *the righteous requirements* of God, namely, that all people must live completely righteous and all sin must be punished! When Paul says, “Where there is no law, there is no transgression”, he does not intend to say that there are people who have never transgressed. He emphasises exactly the opposite. Because *all people in the world* possess either the law or the requirements of the law in their heart (2:15), they *all* transgress the law. And because they all transgress the law, they are *all* under God’s wrath. Because the law produces God’s wrath, it cannot produce God’s grace, which is the ground of both God’s promise and man’s faith. Thus, wherever Jews, Christians or Muslims try to be justified by doing the works of the law, faith has no more value and God’s promise is worthless! Therefore, according to verse 16, the inheritance of God’s grace and God’s promise through faith cannot come through the works of the law. All people who live by the law, whether they are Jews, Christians or Muslims, cannot be heirs of God’s promise!

(T) An important truth for me is from Romans 4:16b. God’s promise to Abraham.

First. God’s promise was made to Abraham’s seed. Abraham’s *seed* or offspring is in final analysis no one less than Jesus Christ! However, in this context Abraham’s *seed* or offspring must be the collective seed or offspring of Abraham. Romans 4:6-17 says that God’s promise is given *to all Abraham’s seed or offspring*. It is not given to those who live only by the Mosaic law. But it is given to those who live by faith in God’s promise about the coming Messiah, whether they also live by the law (4:12) or whether they are people “not of the law but nevertheless people of the faith that Abraham also had” (4:15). Thus the promise of God is given only to believers in Christ, whether they are by nature Jews or whether they are by nature non-Jews. Abraham is the father, *not of two groups* of people, namely, those who are circumcised Jews that do not believe in Christ and those who are uncircumcised non-Jews that do believe in Christ. No, Abraham is rather the father of *one group* of people, namely, of all believers in Jesus Christ, whether they originally

come from the circumcised Jews who live under the Mosaic law or whether they originally come from the uncircumcised Gentiles who do not even possess the Mosaic law.

Second. The content of God's promise is that Abraham should be the heir of the world. This is a reference to the repeated promise in Genesis 12:3 that in Abraham's *seed*, all the families of the earth would be blessed. God's promise to Abraham is nothing less than that Christ and all believers in Christ will have worldwide dominion.

(S) STEP 3. QUESTION

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 4:1-16 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (4:3-5). What is the meaning of the word *credited*?

(T) Romans 4:3-5 says that not the person who does something, but the person who rests his faith in God, his faith is *credited* to him as righteousness. The word *credited* is an important word in the book of Romans. It means *to reckon, to count for or against, or to credit to someone's account*. It means *to consider and to treat* a person according to the nature of the thing credited. Based on Psalm 32:2, the words *not to credit sin* (4:8) mean that God regards and treats a person as not being a sinner in his eyes. And the words *to credit righteousness* (4:5-6) mean that God considers and treats a person as being completely righteous in his eyes.

The word *credit* is a *legal term* and it means that a person's *relationship* to God and God's requirements in the law has been changed even before anything in the person's *moral character* has been changed. The Bible speaks of *crediting to a person something that does not actually belong to him*. The Bible also speaks of *not crediting to him something that actually does belong to him*. In Romans 4:5-6, righteousness, which does not belong to the ungodly, is credited to him, and in Romans 4:8, sin, which does belong to the sinner, is not credited to him, because he believes in Jesus Christ! *To credit faith as righteousness* means exactly the same as *to justify by faith only*"

2nd Question. (4:3). What was credited to Abraham's account as righteousness?

(S) The word *to credit* means to reckon or place something to someone's account. The same statement, "*it* credited to him as righteousness" is used of Abraham in Genesis 15:6 and of Phinehas in Psalm 106:31. But although the words are the same, the contexts are completely different.

One. The righteousness of Phinehas. According to Numbers 25:1-9, a plague broke out amongst the Israelites, because they had fallen into spiritual and moral adultery. They worshipped idols and committed sexual immorality. Phinehas, the son of the high priest, stood up and intervened in this godless and wicked situation by punishing some of the evildoers. His faith in God produced devotion and zeal towards God in his heart and *his act of devotion* to God was credited to his account as righteousness. This means that *his act of devotion and zeal was regarded as a righteous or good deed in the religious-ethical sense and not in the religious-legal sense*.

Two. The righteousness of Abraham. While *Phinehas' act of devotion* was credited to his account as righteousness, *Abraham's faith* was credited to his account as righteousness. In the case of Phinehas, his act of devotion was regarded as a righteous or good deed in the religious-ethical sense, that is, in the area of sanctification or man's ethical behaviour. However, in the case of Abraham, his faith in God's promise was regarded as a righteous response in the religious-legal sense, that is, in the area of justification or God's legal requirements. *The faith of Abraham was not regarded as a righteous or good deed in ethical sense, but as justification in God's eyes in legal sense*.

The whole argument in Romans chapter 4 is based on the contrast between *justification by faith* and *justification by works*. If Paul had used the example of Phinehas instead of Abraham, he would have violated his whole argument in Romans chapter 4. The subjects in these two contexts are completely different, and therefore the conclusions must be completely different. Abraham was himself *justified by faith and thus became a believer*, while Phinehas *lived as a believer and demonstrated justification by doing a righteous deed*.

According to Genesis 15:6, God made certain specific promises to Abraham, and although these promises were not yet fulfilled, Abraham believed that God would fulfil them. God's promises were received, not by unbelief, but by faith and his faith in God was regarded as righteousness. Abraham's faith itself was not regarded as some kind of work, nor was it credited to his account as his own righteous deed. Instead, *his faith was the response* that justified him before God. *His faith was the instrument* by which God's righteousness was credited to his account. His faith was *the empty hand* by which he received God's undeserved gift of righteousness (cf. 5:17). God regarded and treated Abraham's faith as the only right response to God's gracious promise. God responded to Abraham's faith by regarding and treating him as completely righteous in his eyes.

3rd Question. (4:13). How does Abraham become the heir of the whole world?

(T) God made a promise to Abraham and all his spiritual children, that together with Jesus Christ they would be heirs of *the whole world*. According to Genesis 15:5-7 and 22:17-18, God's promise to Abraham consisted of the title only to the land of Canaan, the assurance that the number of his descendants would be uncountable and the guarantee that in his offspring (seed) all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The first two parts of God's promise were already fulfilled when Joshua conquered the land of Canaan (Joshua 21:43-45; cf. 23:14-16). But the third part of God's promise only began to go into fulfilment with the first coming of Jesus Christ!

Abraham believed God's promise; especially that through one of his offspring God would bless all the nations on earth! According to Galatians 3:16, this meant that *Abraham believed in the future coming Saviour Jesus Christ*. Abraham's faith in the coming Saviour Jesus Christ was *the means* by which God justified Abraham. The Jews believed that only they would be the heirs of the world, because they thought that they kept the law, especially circumcision. However, according to Romans 4:13 and 16, God's promise was made to all Abraham's spiritual children, that is, to all believers in Jesus Christ from among both the Jews and the non-Jews. God promised to them that they would be the heirs of the world together with their Head, Jesus Christ. This promise will have its literal fulfilment, when Christ, at his Second Coming, will establish his kingdom in its final glorious form on the new earth, in the East, the Middle East, the West, the North and the South! Then, according to Daniel 7:27, the uttermost parts of the world will be the possession of Christ, then the true religion will fill the earth, and then the kingdoms of the world will be given to the saints of the Most High God.

(S) **STEP 4 and 5. APPLY and PRAY.**

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of *possible applications*, consider which possible application God wants you to turn into a *personal application*. Then take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught you in Romans 4:1-16.

(T) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK.**

First. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. Use "the five steps" Bible study method to prepare Romans 4:17-25.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".