

Notes on the Greek New Testament Day 198 – July 17th – Romans 4:1-12

Works frequently referenced in these notes on Romans

- Barrett, CK *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1957.
 Dunn, JDG *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary Vols 38A, 38B, Dallas, Word, 1988.
 Moo, Douglas, J *Romans: The NIV Application Commentary*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000.
 Murray, John *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 Vols, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1959 & 1965.
 Wright, NT *The Letter to The Romans*, The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol 10, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2002.

Chapter 4

Cf. note on 3:27-31. Moo writes, "Throughout the chapter Paul grounds his exposition in the key verse, cited in 4:3, of Genesis 15:5: 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' The focus is especially on the nature and meaning of Abraham's believing. Another way to look at the chapter, then, is in terms of a series of antitheses by which Paul unfolds the significance of Abraham's faith – and of ours:

1. Faith is something completely different from 'works' (vv. 3-8).
2. Faith does not depend on any religious ceremony (e.g., circumcision) (vv. 9-12).
3. Faith is not related to the law (vv. 13-17).
4. Faith often rests in a promise that flies in the face of what is natural and normal (vv. 18-22)."

Wright, however, argues that the focus is upon the covenant: "The chapter is, in fact, a full-dress exposition of the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15, showing at every point that God always intended that the covenant family of Abraham would include Gentiles as well as Jews. Irrespective of what we might say about a systematic presentation of Paul's ideas, in his present argument this is the main topic, to which 'justification by faith' makes a vital contribution, rather than the other way round... Paul is arguing ... that Abraham's faith is the sole badge of membership in God's people, and that therefore those who share it are 'justified.'"

"Abraham is a key figure in God's plan of salvation as revealed in the Old Testament. One of Paul's purposes in Romans is to demonstrate that the gospel is in continuity with the Old Testament (see, e.g., 1:2; 3:21)." Moo.

προπατωρ, ορος m forefather

προπατορα is ἀπαξ λεγομενον in the New Testament and is replaced in some MSS by the common πατερα.

σαρξ, σαρκος f flesh, human nature

There are textual variations in this verse which affect its sense. Some mss have εὐρηκεναι after ἡμῶν and before κατα σαρκα (including the Byzantine texts and therefore the 'Received' Text and AV). With the infinitive in this position it is difficult to separate it logically from κατα σαρκα, which would require a translation such as 'what was it that Abraham ... found according to the flesh?' What this might mean is not entirely clear. However, this reading is not so well attested as that with εὐρηκεναι before Ἀβραμ. It is therefore best to understand κατα σαρκα to belong with τον προπατορα ἡμῶν. The implication (to be made explicit later, cf. vv.11, 16-17), is that, in a spiritual sense, Abraham is also the father of Gentile believers.

Verse 1

Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν εὐρηκεναι Ἀβραάμ τὸν προπάτορα ἡμῶν κατὰ σάρκα;

ἐροῦμεν Verb, fut act indic, 1 pl λεγω
 εὐρηκεναι Verb, perf act infin εὐρισκω

Wright, following Richard Hays, translates this verse "What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?" – a question which then receives its answer in vv. 16-17 where Abraham is shown to be the father of many nations. Paul is writing about the scope of Abraham's family. Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν is then read as a phrase complete in itself, as in 6:1; 7:7 (cf. τί οὖν in 3:9). Wright continues, "At this point, however, I diverge from the meaning Hays gives to his own proposed reading. He suggests that Paul wants to say 'Have we *Jews* normally considered Abraham to be our forefather only according to the flesh?' I suggest, rather, that the whole of Romans 4 hinges on the question, whether 3:21-31 means that we *Christians*, Jews and Gentiles alike, now find that we are to be members of the fleshly family of Abraham."

Verse 2

εἰ γὰρ Ἀβραὰμ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη, ἔχει καύχημα· ἀλλ' οὐ πρὸς θεόν,

ἐδικαιώθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3 s δικαιωω
justify, declare & treat as righteous
καύχημα, τος n ground for boasting

On 'boasting' cf. 2:17-20.

ἀλλ' οὐ πρὸς θεόν The opening γὰρ of the following verse might suggest that these words belong with what follows: "But in fact before God there is none for ..." Moo prefers to take the phrase with what precedes, understanding the sense to be something like, 'From God's perspective, Abraham has no right at all to boast because he was not, and could not be, justified by works.'

Verse 3

τί γὰρ ἡ γραφή λέγει; Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην.

Paul now says what *is* true before God.

γραφῆ, ης f writing, Scripture

"Genesis 15:6 is a foundational Old Testament verse for Paul's characteristic emphasis on justification by faith (see also Gal 3:6). This verse describes Abraham's response to God's promise that he would have descendants as innumerable as the stars in the sky. But this promise, in turn, stands in a sequence of similar divine promises to Abraham about his role as the founder of a nation and mediator of world-wide blessing (see esp. Gen 12:1-3). So Paul probably reads Genesis 15:6 as a summary of Abraham's response to God's promise to him generally." Moo.

ἐλογίσθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3s λογίζομαι
reckon, count, credit

The Jews interpreted this as meaning that Abraham's faith was a righteous act, a work which merited God's favour. Paul contrasts grace and works rather than faith and works. It is the nature of grace (salvation by God's free and unmerited gift) that defines the nature of faith. Faith is not a human work but the abandonment of all human effort to trust and rest simply in the promise of God and the work of Christ. Hence the argument presented by Paul in the following verses.

Paul therefore lays great emphasis on the fact that Abraham was '*reckoned*' righteous (see the use of λογίζομαι here and through to verse 8). The implication is that God accounted or reckoned to him "a righteousness that does not inherently belong to him." O Palmer Robertson.

Wright, however, comments, "We should be careful not to assume, as normal English usage of 'righteousness' might lead us to do, that (a) 'righteousness' means 'moral goodness,' and that (b) 'faith' is then either a form of, or a substitute for, such moral goodness. When Abraham's faith is 'counted for righteousness,' it means that this faith is the sure sign that his acquittal or vindication has already taken place... Abraham's faith was the sure sign that he was in partnership with God; and God sealed this with the covenant ceremony and detailed promises about Abraham's seed and their inheritance."

Verse 4

τῷ δὲ ἐργαζομένῳ ὁ μισθὸς οὐ λογίζεται κατὰ χάριν ἀλλὰ κατὰ ὀφείλημα·

ἐργαζομαι work, do, perform
μισθος, ου m pay, wages, reward
χαρις, ιτος f grace, unmerited favour
ὀφείλημα, τος n debt

Verse 5

τῷ δὲ μὴ ἐργαζομένῳ, πιστεύοντι δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἄσεβῆ, λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην,

I.e., by contrast, "God's declaration of justification is a matter of grace (v.4), and it has to do with justifying the *ungodly* (v. 5)." Wright.

ἄσεβης, ες godless, impious

Wright comments, "Paul is presumably thinking of Abraham's whole history, from his background in pagan Ur through to YHWH's call and the establishing of the covenant. Jewish tradition knew of Abraham's background in idolatry and tended to regard him as the first one to protest against this and to worship the one true God instead. Paul does not entirely dissent from this tradition. As he will show in the rest of the chapter, Abraham is thus the forefather quite specifically of Gentiles who come to faith, not merely of Jews. This is, in fact, the beginning of a daring theme: that Abraham is actually *more like* believing Gentiles than he is like believing Jews."

This can only be on the basis of Jesus death; cf. Ex 23:7; Prov 17:15 and above on Rom 3:21-26. Cf. also Rom 1:18.

πιστις, εως f faith, trust, belief

The contrast is not to be taken to mean that faith is a substitute work for which one gets paid – otherwise grace would not be grace. The contrast is between working and not working.

Verse 6

καθάπερ καὶ Δαυὶδ λέγει τὸν μακαρισμὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ᾧ ὁ θεὸς λογίζεται δικαιοσύνην χωρὶς ἔργων·

καθαπερ as, just as

μακαρισμος, ου m happiness, blessing
χωρις prep with gen without, apart from

Verse 7

Μακάριοι ὧν ἀφέθησαν αἱ ἀνομίαὶ καὶ ὧν ἐπεκαλύφθησαν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι,

The quotation is from Psalm 32:1,2. "The key point in what David says in Psalm 32 for Paul is that the people who are blessed are not those who have earned something from God; they are the ones who have received something from him." Moo.

μακαριος, α, ου blessed, fortunate, happy
ἀφέθησαν Verb, aor pass indic, 3 pl ἀφημι

cancel, forgive

ἀνομια, ας f lawlessness, sin

ἐπεκαλύφθησαν Verb, aor pass indic, 3 pl

ἐπικαλυπτω cover

ἁμαρτια, ας f sin

Verse 8

μακάριος ἀνὴρ οὗ οὐ μὴ λογίσηται κύριος ἁμαρτίαν.

ἀνηρ, ἀνδρος m man

λογίσηται Verb, aor midd dep subj, 3 s

"These verses therefore confirm what Paul has argued in Romans 4:4-5: God 'justifies the wicked.' That is, he 'declares innocent' people who are really not, in themselves, innocent. He grants them a status they have not earned and do not deserve." Moo.

Verses 9-12

Abraham was justified before he was circumcised. Hence the blessings David spoke of (v.9) belong to the uncircumcised as well as to the circumcised. Acceptance with God is dependent on faith, not on circumcision.

Verse 9

Ὁ μακαρισμὸς οὗν οὗτος ἐπὶ τὴν περιτομὴν ἦ καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ἀκροβυστίαν; λέγομεν γάρ· Ἐλογίσθη τῷ Ἀβραάμ ἡ πίστις εἰς δικαιοσύνην.

μακαρισμος see v.6

περιτομη see 3:30

ἀκροβυστια see 3:30

ἐλογίσθη see v.3

Verse 10

πῶς οὖν ἐλογίσθη; ἐν περιτομῇ ὄντι ἢ ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ; οὐκ ἐν περιτομῇ ἀλλ' ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ·

πως how? i.e. in what circumstances

"So far from it being necessary, in other words (still answering v. 1), for Gentile believers to 'discover' Abraham as their physical father – that is, for them to get circumcised – it is necessary for Jewish people to 'discover' Abraham to be their uncircumcised father – that is, to share his faith." Wright.

Verse 11

καὶ σημεῖον ἔλαβεν περιτομῆς, σφραγίδα τῆς δικαιοσύνης τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐν τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πατέρα πάντων τῶν πιστευόντων δι' ἀκροβυστίας, εἰς τὸ λογισθῆναι αὐτοῖς τὴν δικαιοσύνην.

σημειον, ου n sign

ἔλαβεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s λαμβανω

σφραγις, ιδος f seal, mark, proof

Circumcision is a sign and seal of faith and its consequent righteousness. If circumcision was to act as a *sign* of faith then the faith it signified must have been present before the sign was given. The point is even stronger when circumcision is considered as a *seal*. A seal, or mark of authentication, presupposes the existence of what is sealed – otherwise it is inauthentic.

Circumcision was a sign of covenant membership which here Paul terms 'the righteousness of faith.' Righteousness and covenant membership are one and the same thing.

εἶναι Verb, pres infin εἶμι

λογισθῆναι Verb, aor pass infin λογίζομαι

The textual evidence for or against the inclusion of καί is finely balanced. Either its existence is due to a scribal attempt to sharpen the argument or its absence an accidental omission due to the similarity between the ending of λογισθῆναι and the following καί.

Verse 12

καὶ πατέρα περιτομῆς τοῖς οὐκ ἐκ περιτομῆς
μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς στοιχοῦσιν τοῖς ἰχνεσιν
τῆς ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ πίστεως τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν
Ἀβραάμ.

μονον adv only, alone

στοιχεω walk, conduct oneself

ἶχνος, οὐς n footstep, step, example

A person may not claim to have Abraham as their father simply by physical descent and circumcision (cf. John 8:31ff). Those are children of Abraham, and share the promise and blessings of Abraham, who have faith like that of Abraham (cf. John 8:56; Gal 3:26-29). The sign or seal is empty without the presence of what is signified or sealed.

It is hard to underestimate the transition here in thinking between Saul the Pharisee (along with his fellow Jews) and Paul the apostle. It amounts to a new understanding of what defines the people of God. The people of God are no longer defined by descent from Abraham and by circumcision but by faith in Christ. By this, Paul not only includes Gentile believers, he also *excludes* those Jews who do not believe. All of this he asserts in the face of the pressure being placed on Gentile believers by some Jewish Christians insisting that they should be circumcised.

Moo rightly warns against the attempt to apply what Paul is saying in these verses to the subject of Christian baptism. Rather, the point is that the church is to be "a genuinely 'countercultural' institution, in which the usual barriers to association – race, national background, economic status, etc. – have no relevance at all."