

# Study in Romans

Doctrine > Good News > Salvation Explained > Justification by Faith Illustrated by Abraham  
Romans 4:1-25

Having now introduced us to the good news of the justification and righteousness of God available to all who believe in Jesus, Paul riffs on this theme of how the promises of God have always been accessed by grace through faith and never by observing the law. To prove his point to the largely Jewish audience at the church in Rome, he calls to the witness stand two towering, unimpeachable figures (at least in the Jewish mind) from the OT Scriptures: Father Abraham and King David.

Paul's main purpose in this chapter is to examine the life of Abraham as it relates to his obedience to God as a sign of his otherwise unseen faith. He especially makes the point that Abraham received this righteousness of God by faith before being given the sign of circumcision. Therefore Abraham is the father of those who are also receiving this righteousness by faith whether circumcised or not. Paul also brings up the importance of the promise of God to Abraham that Sarah would have the son of promise through whom He would bless all the nations. The promise is a direct result of faith, not law. If it were by law, the promise would never happen because law brings only wrath. We, like Abraham, hope by grace through faith in God's power to call things which are not as if they were and to make them so. We see demonstrated Paul's opening thesis: The gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe (1:16). The law promises to deliver these blessings, but is made powerless by contact with our sin. So God intervenes on behalf of sinners whom He loves with His own power which then allows the promises to be fulfilled (8:3). Thank God for His grace and power that is truly greater than our sin!

	Works	No Works
Faith in Jesus	Manifested faith; saved person	Deceived; no real salvation
Faith in works	Hides sin in the heart (moralist)	Sin is open (hedonist)

1. The witness of Abraham: He had to learn the lesson of justification by faith (vv. 1-3)
2. The wages of sin vs. the gift of God (vv. 4-5; cf. 6:23)
3. The witness of David: He speaks of the spiritual prosperity of those who are justified by faith (vv. 6-8; cf. Ps. 32:1-2)
4. Circumcision - the visible sign and seal of invisible faith (vv. 9-12)
  - a. The Greek term translated "seal" literally comes from a word meaning to fence in or inclose or block up something. It is a figure for stopping accusations against the authenticity of something. Thayer, "that by which anything is confirmed, proved, authenticated, as by a seal (a token or proof)."
  - b. "Seal" is used in 1 Cor. 9:2, 2 Tim. 2:19, and a bunch of times in Revelation to refer to the seven seals on the scroll and the seal of God on the foreheads of believers. It is a visible sign to show an invisible reality in these cases.
5. Promises of God - available only by faith, not by law (vv. 13-15)
6. Hope in the power of God Who raises the dead (vv. 16-22)
7. God's righteousness and promises are not just for Abraham, but for us who believe in Jesus (vv. 23-24)