



Lesson 6 ~ Recipe for Faith

Romans 4

Discussion Starter

- Who is someone in your life you can always trust? What makes them trustworthy?

Introduction

The **bad news** came first. Over and over, from many different angles, Paul's letter to the Roman church has stressed that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, are sinners before God. We inherited our sin nature and we sin because we are born sinners and we are sinners because we continue to sin. We all fall short of living up to glorious standard for which we were created. We are "under" sin – in bondage. We are not free!

But then, the **good news!** "But now," Paul wrote, "God has shown us a different way of being made right in his sight . . . we are made right with God

through faith and not by obeying the law" (**Romans 3:28**). **Justification by grace through faith** in Christ sounded like such a new, radical idea! Paul knew that just because he said it didn't mean everyone was going to accept it. He knew his statements needed proof. In **Romans 4** he sets out to prove his point using **Abraham**, the revered patriarch of Israel, as his example. If Paul can show that Abraham came into right relationship with God through faith and not by works, then he can prove his case that the rest of us need to be saved by faith as well.

Preparation

1. Before you read **Romans 4**, ask God to open your eyes so that you may see wonderful truths in his Word (**Psalm 119:18**). You may want to make the following prayer your own:

Triune God – Father, Son and Spirit,

*I admit that I cannot understand the truth found in God's Word with only my mind.
I agree that spiritual truth has to be understood with my heart as well as my head.
So I ask You to give me spiritual understanding as I do this lesson.
I pray that You would enable me to see, hear and understand,
with my spirit, all that You want to teach me.
I ask this in the powerful name of Father, Son and Spirit.
Amen*

2. Read **Romans 4** slowly and thoughtfully. As you read and reread, **underline or highlight** any verses, phrases or words that are meaningful to you. Put a **question mark** beside anything you don't understand. Put a ✓ beside anything you would like more information about.

You may also want to read the Scripture in another translation. The Scripture handouts for these lessons contain the *New International Version (NIV)* and the *New Living Translation (NLT)*. The questions are phrased to be answered from **either** of these versions. Other translations and paraphrases should only be used as supplementary texts to help your understanding.

3. Sum up the Scripture passage for this lesson in a short sentence, phrase or title.

Questions

In **Romans 4**, Paul uses the example of Abraham as "proof" that we are *justified* (made right with God and granted a righteous status) by *faith* in what **Jesus did for us** and not by **works** (deeds that we do), or by **circumcision** (religious practices), or by **keeping the law** (living by a set of religious rules). (See definition for *justification* in Lesson 5.)

1. Paul assumes his readers know all about Abraham. So, to understand his reasoning in this chapter, we need to be familiar with Abraham's life and the promises God made to him. Read the following verses from **Genesis** and summarize the event and/or promise.

Genesis 12:1-5, 7 -

Genesis 15:1-6 -

Genesis 17:1-11, 15-16

- ♥ What, specifically, was God promising to do when he said that he would *bless all the peoples of the earth through Abraham* and that *Abraham's offspring would be as numerous as the stars*?

JUSTIFICATION (being declared righteous in God's sight) IS NOT BY WORKS

Read Romans 4:1-8.

2. As he often does, Paul begins to make his point by asking and answering a question. In your own words, *what is the question* Paul asks and what does he say is the *wrong answer* and the *right answer* to his question (**4:1-3**)?
- ♥ What, exactly, did Abraham believe in order to be declared righteous (**Genesis 12: 2-3; 15:4-6**)? How is it that we believe the same thing Abraham believed, although in a different way?
 - ♥ A person may boast before others or entertain boastful thoughts in secret, but why can no one boast before God (**4:2**)?
3. Wages are earned by doing work and gifts are received (**4:4-5**). What does this have to do with *justification*?
- ♥ Why do you think some people would rather work for a right standing before God rather than accept righteousness as a gift?
 - ♥ What do you see are some advantages of being granted righteousness before God as a *gift* given through faith in Jesus rather than a reward earned through *works*?
4. How is King David's sin (**2 Samuel 11**) and God's forgiveness (**Psalms 32:1-2**) an example of justification by faith and not works (**4:6-8**)?
- ♥ It is easy to feel that God accepts us only when we are good or do good things. How does David's example prove otherwise?

- ♥ Since a right standing with God does not come by works that we do, we might be tempted to think that good deeds are optional and not important. From the following verses, what do you learn about good works and how God uses them (**Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:8; Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12**)?
- ♥ In what area of your life do you need to do more believing? More working?

JUSTIFICATION (being declared righteous in God's sight) IS NOT BY RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Read Romans 4:9-12.

5. Abraham was born a Gentile, not a Jew. Consider the three events from his life listed in **Question 1**. At what juncture in Abraham's life do you think he become a Jew and the patriarch of God's chosen people through whom the Messiah, Jesus Christ would come? Explain your answer.

6. In **4:10**, Paul asks if Abraham was granted right standing with God *before or after* he was circumcised. What is the answer?

According to **Acts 15:1**, what were some teachers in Paul's day teaching? How does the example of Abraham disprove this idea (**Romans 4:11-12**)?

- ♥ Was Abraham's circumcision the *cause* of his right standing before God or the *sign* of it (**4:11**)?
- ♥ What are some religious customs, rituals and solemn ceremonies that are practiced in your religious tradition? What do these practices personally mean to you? Are your religious rituals and ceremonies the *cause* of your right standing with God or a *sign* of them? How so?
- ♥ What did the apostles and elders in Jerusalem conclude over the issue of circumcision and salvation (**Acts 15:2-11**)? If the apostles and elders could meet today over current concerns in the body of Christ, what might be some issues they would need to discuss?

JUSTIFICATION (being declared righteous in God's sight) IS NOT BY KEEPING GOD'S LAW

Read Romans 4:13-17.

In **4:13-17**, Paul is writing to Jewish Christians who believed that the promises given to Abraham in Genesis were for Jews only and if Christian Gentiles wanted to be included in these promises, they would need to be circumcised and obey the Law along with believing in Jesus as the Messiah. Paul is showing that the recipients of God's promises are not for Jews who keep the law; but rather, the promises are for Jews and Gentiles who have *been made right with God through faith in Jesus*. Abraham did not receive the promises of God because he kept the law (which had not been given yet.) Abraham received the promises of God the same way we do - through faith (**4:13**).

7. God promised that Abraham and his offspring would inherit the world (**4:13; Gen. 17:4-6**). Who is Abraham a spiritual father to and who are his offspring (**4:11-12, 16-17**)?

- ♥ What requirement would Abraham and his descendents or offspring have to fulfill in order to receive the promises of God (**4:13**)?
- ♥ Do you consider yourself an offspring of Abraham and an heir to the promises given to him and his descendents in Genesis? Why or why not? If so, when did you fulfill the requirement to receive the promises given to Abraham (**4:13**)?

8. Paul says faith has no value and that the promises of God are worthless if the only people who can receive them are those who keep the law. Why is this so (4:14-15)?

- ♥ What are some reasons why it was so important for Paul to demonstrate that Abraham was justified by faith and not by keeping the law (4:16,17)?
- ♥ What are two things you learn about God in 4:17? What are some examples from Abraham's life where God has done these things? Other examples from the Bible? Examples from your own life?
- ♥ What situation are you facing that requires faith in the God of *creation* and *resurrection* (4:17)?

RECIPE FOR FAITH

Read **Romans 4:18-25**.

9. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations and that his offspring would outnumber the stars. Yet Abraham and Sarah were childless. Fill in the chart below to discover Abraham's response to this dilemma.

Verse	What did Abraham do?
4:18	
4:19	
4:20	
4:21	

- ♥ What promise from God are you longing to see fulfilled in your life? How can Abraham's "**Recipe for Faith**" help you in *your* dilemma?
 - ♥ Do you equally believe the promises that different people make to you? If not, what makes the difference? How does this apply to believing God's promises?
 - ♥ Where do we place our faith: in *God* or his *promise*? What is the difference between these two?
 - ♥ What is the difference between *trusting* God for something and *asking* him for something?
10. How can you know for sure that you have a right standing before God (**Romans 4:23-25**)?

♥ What was the whole purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection (4:25)?

Response

If we are going to exercise faith in order to attain the promises of God, it is important to know exactly what faith is. Below are several definitions of faith. Which definitions help you the most in understanding what faith is and how to exercise it? Share with your small group the "why" behind your choices.

- Faith is confidence that God is who he says he is and he will do what he has promised to do.
- Faith is quiet, thoughtful trust in the promises of a God who is known to be trustworthy.
- Faith is the alignment of heart, mind, and will with God's truth and promises.
- Faith is like the eye. It does not create what it sees; rather, it sees what is already there.
- Faith is acting as if all of God's promises are true, regardless of our feelings or circumstances.
- Faith is being fully persuaded that God has the power to do what he has promised to do.
- Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

How and for what will you exercise faith this week?