

“Why Works Won’t Work” (Romans 3:27–4:12)

The late Alex Haley, who wrote *Roots*, had on his office wall a unique picture of a turtle sitting atop a fence post. When someone asked him about it, Haley would say, “If you see a turtle on a fence post, you know that he had some help. Anytime I start thinking, ‘Wow, isn’t this marvelous what I’ve done?’ I look at that picture and remember how this turtle, *me*, got up on that post.”¹

Obviously, a turtle can’t get on top of a fence post unless a hand picks it up and puts it there. If you see a turtle on top of a fencepost bragging his heart out, you know something is terribly wrong! Yet it’s so easy to boast, isn’t it? We can boast about our accomplishments, our finances, our possessions, our grades, our athletic abilities, our friends, our looks, and nearly anything else. We’re braggadocios people. Sadly, our bragging ways can creep into our spiritual lives as well.² Have you ever made critical comments about unbelievers calling them “ignorant,” “stupid,” or “blind” because they have refused to trust in Christ? Have you ever claimed that you chose Christ? Or have you ever assumed that God chose you because you were smarter or better than others? If so, you need to adjust your faulty thinking about salvation. We could put it like this: *Don’t take credit; receive God’s credit.*

In Rom 3:27–4:12, Paul expounds the great theological thesis of 3:21–26. In what I called “the greatest paragraph in the Bible,” Paul expounded the guts of the gospel, but he hasn’t yet finished what he wants to say. Having shown what justification is, he now reaffirms that it is available only by faith. In 3:27–31 he states this theme, and 4:1–12 elucidates and elaborates it.³ In these seventeen verses, Paul explains three essential truths related to justification.⁴

1. Justification excludes pride (3:27–31).⁵ Since salvation is by faith, there’s no place for boasting. Paul raises three questions and provides three answers in these five verses. These questions and answers begin to interpret and apply his teaching in the first three chapters and serve as an introduction to what follows. Paul’s first question and answer is found in 3:27–28: “**Where then⁶ is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man [a person⁷] is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.**” Paul’s rhetorical question assumes that boasting is illegitimate. He says, “It is excluded” (lit. “to shut out, to make no room for”).⁸ We can’t boast about receiving something that we didn’t earn!⁹ Any boasting has been “excluded” not by a law of works but “by a law of faith.” This is a wordplay in which Paul uses the concept of “law” (*nomos*)¹⁰ to contrast works and faith.¹¹ He insists that we’ve been “justified by faith apart¹² from works of the Law.” You may recall that the word “justified” (*dikaioo*) means “to declare righteous.” The term comes from the courtroom of the first century. As a trial drew to a close, the judge, having heard all the evidence, would pronounce his verdict. To justify a person meant to declare they were not guilty in the eyes of the law. Yet, there’s another more contemporary way to understand the term. If you have a computer you probably know what it means to have justified margins. A “justified” margin is one that is absolutely straight from top to bottom. The computer arranges the words and spaces so that all the lines end up at exactly the same place. In that sense to justify means “to make straight that which would otherwise be crooked.” Now take those two concepts and put them together. When you trust Jesus Christ as Savior, God declares you “not guilty” of sin and “straight” instead of “crooked” in His eyes. This can only take place through faith.

Imagine your car runs out of gas in a remote area. It’s late at night and you need a ride to a gas station. Out of sheer desperation, you begin to hitchhike. Eventually, a gracious motorist picks you up. He then takes you to the gas station, buys you a gas can, fills it up, and takes you back to your car. Since it’s dark outside, he even stays with you until you’ve finished filling up your car. Now can you imagine telling this story to your spouse, your children, your friends, and bragging about your thumb?¹³ “My thumb sparkled like a diamond in the moonlight. The curvature of my thumb notified the motorist of my need.” That would be crazy, right?! The motorist deserves all the credit. It was his work; you merely responded.

Similarly, Jesus Christ is the basis of our justification while “faith” (*pistis*) is equivalent to the thumb. Faith is the instrument through which we embrace what he did as our only hope.¹⁴ God doesn’t justify us because we have faith. God justifies us because of what Jesus did, which we receive through faith. The only boasting is not in what I have done for Him, but in what He has done for me (see 1 Cor 1:29, 31). In Gal 6:14 Paul writes: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (NIV). *Don’t take credit; receive God’s credit.*

In 3:29–30 Paul records the second question and answer: **“Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.”** The Jews may have thought God’s only interest was in them and that He couldn’t care less about the Gentiles. But Paul affirms that God “is one”¹⁵ and deals with both Jews and Gentiles on the same basis.¹⁶ God has worked salvation in such a way that the gospel is for everyone. Are you sharing the good news of God’s grace with people of all races or have you let barriers of age, class, color, or status creep in? Why not talk to someone outside your own circle about the good news of Christ?

The third question and answer is found in 3:31: **“Do we then nullify¹⁷ the Law through faith? May it never be!¹⁸ On the contrary, we establish [“uphold, validate”]¹⁹ the Law.”²⁰** After reading 3:21–30, most Jews would have assumed that the Law was to be discarded. Yet, in this context, Paul states that the Law is to be upheld or validated. The reason is simple: The Law is fulfilled in the believer through the power of the Spirit. Paul will develop this point more fully in chapter 8. For the moment let’s simply note that when we trust Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us to enable and empower us daily to please God.²¹ He supernaturally lives His life in and through us.

[Now that Paul has briefly answered three pertinent questions, he transitions into chapter 4 to answer these same three questions in even greater detail. The second essential truth that Paul explains is . . .]

2. Justification excludes works (4:1–8). The Bible has always taught the doctrine of justification apart from works. Hence, Paul calls forth two examples to validate his argument. In 4:1, Paul brings up Abraham²² and asks the question: **“What then shall we say²³ that Abraham,²⁴ our forefather²⁵ according to the flesh, has found?”** Paul is addressing the question: How did Abraham get to be righteous before God?²⁶ He gives two arguments (“for”), one logical and the other biblical, concerning Abraham’s justification. Paul begins with the logical argument in 4:2. He picks up on the concept of “boasting” (cf. 3:27) and states, **“If Abraham was justified by works,²⁷ he has something to boast²⁸ about, but not before God.”²⁹** Paul’s point is that even *if* works justified Abraham, he still couldn’t boast before God. Admittedly, Abraham was a man of great works. He kept the commandments to such an extent that the Lord called Abraham His “friend.”³⁰ As a result, the three great world religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism identify Abraham with the coveted title, “friend of God.” Yet, even Abraham was saved by faith, apart from works, because it’s impossible to boast before God.³¹

In 4:3, Paul follows up his logical argument with a biblical argument. Paul quotes Gen 15:6, which doesn’t say one word about Abraham’s good works.³² Rather, it says that **“Abraham believed God,³³ and it was credited³⁴ to him as righteousness.”** Bear in mind, this experience of Abraham was prior to the Law of Moses by about six hundred years.³⁵ The setting is rather memorable. God told Abraham that at the age of eighty–five he was about to have a child. Abraham assumed that God was kidding. He must have said, “What kind of joke is this?” “It’s no joke, Abraham. You’re going to have a son.” “Lord, you know full well, I lost that ability years ago.” “Don’t worry, just trust me and I will work a miracle on your behalf.” God took Abraham outside and said, “Look up!” Abraham looked up and God said, “Count the stars.” As Abraham began counting, God said, “Before I’m through, I will give you more descendants than the stars in the skies.” “Abraham believed God it was credited³⁶ to him as righteousness.”

To believe is to be persuaded. It's to place one's trust in God's promises apart from any works. In the case of Abraham and other Old Testament saints, it was to believe God's promise of a coming Savior.³⁷ While these believers didn't understand all of the details concerning the Messiah, nor did they know His name, they certainly knew enough to believe in a coming seed that would deliver them.³⁸ Hence, Old Testament saints and New Testament saints were saved the very same way—belief in God's promise of a Messiah. The only difference is that New Testament saints have the benefit of progressive revelation (i.e., they know the name Jesus and live on this side of the cross). Again, the issue is that faith excludes boasting because the one with the faith doesn't do anything. Works are antithetical to faith. In 4:2–3, Paul sharply contrasts “belief” with “works.” Why? Because faith and works are opposites, like water and oil that don't mix. To do good works is one thing; to believe God is another thing.

The key to Paul's explanation is in the term “credited.” The verb “credited” (*logizomai*) occurs eight times in 4:1–12.³⁹ It's the key word in the chapter. *Logizomai* is an accounting term that means “to take into account or credit something to someone.”⁴⁰ It's what happens when you deposit money in the bank. If you bring a \$1,000 check, the teller “credits” your account with one thousand dollars. Similarly, when you're justified by faith, God puts His righteousness into your bank account! Although you were spiritually bankrupt, now you're a spiritual millionaire because Christ's perfection has been placed in your account. In this verse, Paul is saying that you have a choice. You can be credited for your works, as payment for what's owed, or you can be credited with righteousness for simply trusting God. The point of this passage turns on what you want credited to your account. Do you want God to credit you with what you're owed according to your works or do you want Him to credit you with righteousness for your faith? The simple equation is: Belief in the promise of God plus nothing equals righteousness (B + N = R).

The next two verses exhort people not to mingle faith and works when seeking eternal life and forgiveness. In 4:4 Paul states the negative side of the principle: “**Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.**” A person who “works” receives what's due or owed, which is contrary to grace. Imagine your current job. You're working hard for your employer. By the end of the month you've worked well. Now you're eager to collect your paycheck. But your employer seems very causal. He says, “Well, I'm not planning to give you anything. But I'll give you a gift to keep you going.” What would you say? “What do you mean you'll give me a gift? I don't want a gift. I want my salary, my wages. I've worked hard for it. You owe it to me.” That's Paul's argument. When a person works, his wages aren't credited to him as a gift. But the point is that salvation doesn't come by way of works; it comes freely. It's not earned; it's free. If God justified people on the basis of their good works outweighing their bad He would owe them something. Yet, I assure you, God is no man's debtor.

The positive side of the principle is found in 4:5: “**But to the one who does not work, but believes⁴¹ in Him who justifies the ungodly,⁴² his faith⁴³ is credited as righteousness.**” This is the strongest statement of justification in the Bible. The scandal of the gospel is that we're justified by doing absolutely nothing! Justification is effortless. It's shockingly free. Another startling statement is found in this verse: “God justifies the ungodly!” He puts our sins on Christ's account that He might put Christ's righteousness on our account. What an amazing plan orchestrated by an amazing God! Salvation is a gift, not a paycheck. *So don't take credit; receive God's credit.*

In case his audience missed the point about Abraham, in 4:6–8 Paul calls another witness from the Old Testament to testify to justification through faith.⁴⁴ According to Jewish Law, two or three witnesses settled a question. So Paul chooses David—a man after God's heart—whom the Jews deeply respected. He wants to demonstrate that Abraham (who lived before the Law) wasn't an exceptional case. David (a man who lived after the Law) was also declared righteous “apart from works.” In 4:6 Paul writes: “**just as David also speaks of the blessing⁴⁵ on the man to whom God credits⁴⁶ righteousness apart from works.**” This verse makes it clear that the “crediting” of righteousness to David wasn't part of what was owed him but was in spite of what was owed.⁴⁷

In 4:7–8 Paul quotes from Psalm 32, which is a Psalm of David. **“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.”** These verses were penned after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. Although the Law existed in David’s day, David refuses to quote it or even refer to it. David finds his refuge against sin and guilt in God. He experiences the great blessing of being justified. These two verses are not only for David, they are also for us. They teach us three valuable truths about justification. (1) When we’re justified our “lawless deeds have been forgiven.” The word “forgiven” (*aphiemi*) means to “send away.” It has the idea of physical removal from one location to another. When God forgives you, He removes your sins from you and takes them so far away that you will never be able to find them again. There’s a tombstone which bears only one word on it: “FORGIVEN!” That word is more important than anything else that could be said about the person. Forgiveness is only found in Jesus Christ.⁴⁸ (2) When we’re justified our “sins have been covered.” The word “covered” (*epikalupto*) means to “cover so completely that it can never be uncovered again.”⁴⁹ (3) We can have confidence that the Lord will not take our sins into account. We’ve been given Christ’s righteousness.

I seem to be cursed with computers. In my more imaginative moments, I’ve joked that my computers are demonized! Consequently, I’ve wanted to perform some exorcisms. Sadly, *some* of my computer problems are of my own making. I’ve deleted things, inadvertently switched formats, etc. Fortunately, God has blessed me with a neighbor who is a computer specialist for the State. One day he shared a Windows feature with me called “system restore.” This has been my word processing salvation. With a few clicks of my mouse, I have the option of setting my computer back to a prior date. All the things I somehow messed up are put back in their original configuration. These simple steps forgive and cover my computer sins. My sins aren’t taken into account or held against me. Likewise, when God justifies you, He declares you righteous and covers all your sins past, present, and future. Now, He won’t erase all the consequences of your actions, but when it comes to your eternal status with Him, you are forgiven and declared righteous. *Don’t take credit; receive God’s credit.*

[After making an irrefutable case that justification excludes pride and works, Paul now explains that . . .]

3. Justification excludes race (4:9–12). At first glance you might be inclined to think that these verses are intended to prove that Abraham was saved by faith and not by works; specifically, not by the rite of circumcision. Although this is true, it’s not the main point Paul is striving to prove. The point which Paul is driving at is the universal nature of justification by faith, and that not for the Jews only, but also for Gentiles (cf. 3:29–30). Paul writes, **“Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, ‘Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.’ How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.”** These verses beg the question: Was Abraham saved as a Jew or as a Gentile? Was Abraham declared righteous as one who was circumcised or as uncircumcised? Of course, Abraham believed God and was declared righteous *before* he was circumcised. According to Gen 15:6 (cf. Rom 4:3) Abraham was eighty–five years old when he believed God and was justified. But Abraham did not undergo circumcision until Gen 17, some fourteen years later when he was ninety–nine. Thus, long before Abraham submitted to any religious ritual or ordinance, he was saved and accepted in God’s sight. Technically then, Abraham was saved as a Gentile and not as a Jew for he didn’t enter Judaism by circumcision, nor did he have the Law to keep. What a blow to the Jew who maintained that one couldn’t be saved without becoming a Jew by circumcision and keeping the Law!⁵⁰

So why did Abraham get circumcised? What's circumcision for? If circumcision doesn't automatically save, what's its purpose? Paul answers that for us in Rom 4:11–12. This first half of 4:11 defines circumcision in two specific ways. (1) Circumcision was a “sign” of new life.⁵¹ Circumcision isn't the source of one's salvation, but the sign of it. It's a symbolic testimony to what has happened inwardly in the man who's been justified by faith. (2) Circumcision was a “seal” that God had given the promise and would keep it. Believers today are “sealed” by the Holy Spirit. We experience a spiritual circumcision in the heart, not just a minor physical operation, but the putting off of the old nature through the death and resurrection of Christ. The point of this section is that while circumcision is valuable, justification is available to Jew and Gentile alike through simple faith in Christ.

Several years ago Buick ran a series of ads to promote a new line of cars. General Motors typically manufactures full-size cars. These cars aren't exactly considered cutting-edge among most young people. So Buick decided to target a younger audience by attempting to bridge the gap between the Buicks of old and the Buicks of new. The campaign centered on the slogan: “This isn't your father's Oldsmobile.” Buick made every effort to convince young people that the new Buick was much better and very different than the old. Obviously, the Bible is not Buick because the Bible does the very opposite. Instead of the new and improved, the Bible returns to the tried and true—the Old Testament. Paul's slogan is: “This is our father's faith.”

The outcome of all this great text is that Abraham is the “father” of all who are justified by faith (4:12). Hence, we should follow⁵² in his footsteps and exercise faith in God's promises. We should reach new heights and be a man or a woman who will pass the baton of faith to the next generation. May we revel in the free gift of our justification and share the simple gospel with as many people as possible. May we boast in the Lord Jesus alone. *Don't take credit; receive God's credit.*

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Scripture References

Romans 3:27–4:12

Romans 5:2, 11

Psalm 32:1–2

Jeremiah 9:23–24

1 Corinthians 1:19–31, 3:21; 4:7

Galatians 6:14

Philippians 3:8–9

Study Questions

1. What do I tend to boast about (Romans 3:27–28)? When am I most prone to boast? Have I been guilty of boasting in my salvation? Have I made critical comments about unbelievers calling them “ignorant,” “stupid,” or “blind” because they have refused to trust in Christ? What does this indicate about my beliefs about my own salvation? How do I need to adjust my faulty thinking?
2. What are the biblical purposes of the Law (Romans 3:29–30)? How do unbelievers tend to use the Law? Why is it so easy to use the Law unlawfully? If believers are not under Law, why did Paul say “we establish the Law” (3:31)? How should I use the Law in an appropriate way? How can I explain the purpose of the Law to believers, particularly new believers?
3. Why does Paul emphasize the importance of “belief” in Romans 4:1–5? How can I explain Paul’s use of belief? How do the New Testament writers use the phrase “believes in Him [Jesus]” (4:5; 9:33; 10:11; John 3:16, 18; 6:40; 1 Peter 2:6)? How can I explain this concept to an unbeliever?
4. Why is forgiveness so critical (Romans 4:6–8)? How does it make me feel to know that my sins are forgiven? When did I first realize that Jesus Christ had forgiven all my past, present, and future sins? How can I communicate God’s forgiveness to those that have little understanding of it?
5. Why does God draw people from other races and classes to faith (Romans 4:9–12)? When have I witnessed God bringing His salvation to someone outside of my context (e.g., short-term mission experience, school, work, neighborhood)? How did this make me feel? Do I have a heart/burden for people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev 5:9)?

Notes

¹ Kent Crockett, “The Turtle on the Fencepost” (8/7/2009): www.kentcrockett.blogspot.com/2009/08/turtle-on-fence-post.html.

² See John P. Correia, “Nothing to Brag About” (Rom 3:27–4:12): unpublished sermon notes.

³ Moo cogently argues that Rom 3:27–31 belongs with 4:1–25. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 243–45. See also Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 354–57. It could be said, however, that 3:27–31 is a hinge verse between 3:21–26 and 4:1–25. This explains why most commentators include it with 3:21–26.

⁴ Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans, Volume 1* (London: Proclamation of Trust, 2009), 155.

⁵ See Jesus’ parable about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18:9–14.

⁶ The inferential particle *oun* (“then”) rhetorically marks an inference from what precedes (BDAG s.v. *oun* 1c).

⁷ Here, *anthropon* is used in an indefinite and general sense (see BDAG s.v. *anthropos* 4.a.γ).

⁸ All of the major English versions translate *ekkleio* “excluded” (e.g., NASB, NET, ESV, HCSB, NRSV, NIV, KJV, NKJV). This term (*ek* [“out”] plus *kleio* [“shut”]) is used only here and in Gal 4:17. It literally means “to lock out.” See BDAG s.v. *ekkleio* 2: “to make no room for, *exclude, shut out.*”

⁹ See esp. Eph 2:8–9. Mounce remarks, “One would think that the sinner would love to be forgiven at no cost. Unfortunately that is not the case. After all, sinners have their pride. They desperately want to claim some role in their own redemption.” Robert Mounce, *Romans*. The New American Commentary series (Nashville: Broadman, 1995), 38.

¹⁰ The NASB, ESV, and NKJV translate *nomou* as “law”; while the NET and NIV translate it as “principle.” Either is semantically possible, though in light of the context it would appear that “principle” makes the most sense. See BDAG s.v. *nomos* 1: “a procedure or practice that has taken hold, *a custom, rule, principle, norm.*”

¹¹ Michael Eaton, *Romans*, forthcoming.

¹² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 251 comments: “A serious erosion of the full significance of Paul’s gospel occurs if we soften this antithesis; no works, whatever their nature or their motivation, can play any part in making a sinner right with God.”

¹³ This illustration has been revised from Correia, “Nothing to Brag About.” Crockett also uses a similar illustration about a man who falls out of a boat and is saved by a helicopter. Kent Crockett, *The 911 Handbook* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 221.

¹⁴ *Pistis* (“faith”) is used five times in five verses (Rom 3:27–31).

¹⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 251 explains Paul’s tactics: “Paul takes one of the most basic of Jewish beliefs, monotheism, and turns it against Judaism. The ‘oneness’ of God was confessed by the pious Jew every day: ‘the Lord our God is one Lord’ (Deut. 6:4). Yet if this is so, then God must be God of the Gentiles; else they would be left with no god.”

¹⁶ Paul probably used two separate prepositions in Rom 3:30 (*ek* [“by”] and *dia* [“through”]) simply for literary variety. See Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 252.

¹⁷ BDAG s.v. *katargeo* 2: “to cause someth. to lose its power or effectiveness, *invalidate, make powerless.*” With reference to Rom 3:31, “make the law invalid.”

¹⁸ Paul uses the phrase *me genoito* (“may never be”) nineteen times in his letters, eleven of which are in Romans (3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; 12:16).

¹⁹ BDAG s.v. 4: “to validate something that is in force or practice.”

²⁰ There are certain things which the Law can do (Rom 3:20; 7:7–14) and there are certain things which the Law cannot do (3:20; 8:3; Gal 2:16).

²¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 254–55.

²² Concerning Paul’s choice of Abraham, Stott explains: “There seem to have been two reasons for Paul’s choosing Abraham as his main example. The first is that he was the founding father of Israel, ‘the rock from which [they] were cut’, the favoured recipient of God’s covenant and promises. The second reason is doubtless that Abraham was held in the highest esteem by the Rabbis as the epitome of righteousness and even the special ‘friend’ of God. They took it for granted that he had been justified by works of righteousness. For instance, ‘Abraham was perfect in all his dealings with the Lord and gained favour by his righteousness throughout his life.’ They quoted the Scriptures in which God promised to bless Abraham *because* he had obeyed him, without observing that these verses referred to Abraham’s life of obedience *after* his justification. They even quoted Genesis 15:6 (Paul’s text in this chapter, verse 3), in such a way as to represent Abraham’s faith as meaning his fidelity or faithfulness, which was therefore

meritorious. For example, ‘was not Abraham found faithful in temptation, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness?’” See John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 123.

²³ This rhetorical question is used often in Romans (cf. 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14, 30).

²⁴ Abraham’s name meant “father of a multitude” (cf. Rom 4:16–18). His original name, Abram, meant “exalted father.”

²⁵ See BDAG s.v. *sarx* 4: “according to natural descent.”

²⁶ Why does he use Abraham as his primary case study? For several reasons: (1) He is the fountainhead of the Jewish race. (2) He was justified while a Gentile (i.e., before circumcision). (3) He forms a perfect model of Jew-Gentile unity, which Paul hopes the Roman church will develop, since he (Abraham) is the only man who is both a Jew and a Gentile. (4) He illustrates the kind of faith Paul desires of the Romans (and all Christians): a faith in the God who brings life to a dead body, a God of resurrection (Rom 6–8) (cf. 4:17, 19, 24; 6:6, 12, 15; 8:11); a faith in the God who resurrects “dead” Israel in the end times (Rom 9–11). (5) He exemplifies the need to grow “strong in faith” and not be “weak in faith” (Rom 14–15). See John Hart, “The Letter to the Romans,” unpublished class notes (2010 ed.), Moody Bible Institute, 57. I would also add: Paul wants to prove that the gospel isn’t new, but was taught in the OT.

²⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 216–17 comments here: “Paul would not deny that works are necessary to obtain eternal life.”

²⁸ The noun *kauchema* links Rom 4:2 closely with what preceded in 3:27 with the related noun *kauchesis*.

²⁹ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 87 explains: “Paul does not regard all forms of boasting sinful or perhaps a type of false-humility. Instead, Paul viewed spiritual boasting as something valid (cf. 2:17, 23; 5:3; 1 Cor 9:15–16; 2 Cor 5:12; 9:2; 10:8, 13, 16; 11:16, 18, 30; 2 Thess 1:4) without excluding God’s indispensable enabling and function in the matter (1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 1:12). Therefore, Paul does not deny boasting in an absolute sense, but (*all*), the strongest Gk contrast) when it comes to legal-justification in declaring a sinner righteous boasting could not occur before (*pros*) God. The fact that one may translate the preposition *pros* ‘in the direction of’ (BDAG, 873) or ‘toward’ (NIV) leaves room for Paul’s understanding of another type of justification, by works, *in the direction* seen by men as mentioned in James 2:21, *but not in the direction of God.*”

³⁰ See 2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8; Jas 2:23.

³¹ Those who try to justify themselves have forgotten that it is God who sets the standards. Ps 130:3 says: “If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?”

³² In Paul’s day many of the rabbis taught that Abraham experienced justification because of his obedience rather than because of his faith (cf. 1 Macc 2:51). See Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, “Romans” in the *Revised Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008),

³³ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 88 makes this helpful analysis: “The context of Genesis 15:6 refers to Abraham’s belief in God that He will provide a seed (vv 4–5). Since this reiterates by renewing the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, this promised-seed must entail more than an immediate progenitor, since it includes the worldwide blessings promised in the earlier passage (Moo, *Romans*, 261–62; Leupold, *Genesis*, 478; Calvin, *Genesis*, 406). Romans 3:21–22 claims the Old Testament bore witness of God’s righteousness and that righteousness directly involved Jesus Christ. Paul’s faith alone in Christ doctrine, taught in 3:21–31, defended and elaborated in chapter 4 as an Old Testament derived doctrine does not make sense if the same object of faith was not understood. Other passages like Luke 10:24; 20:41–44; 24:25–27; John 5:39, 46; 8:56; Acts 2:14–36; 8:32–33; Galatians 3:8, 9, 29; 1 Peter 1:10–12 explicitly suggest Old Testament believers knew of a coming deliverer. Even if the future would reveal all of the details concerning this Deliverer, Old Testament saints knew enough to believe God’s promise of a coming Savior.” See also Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 334.

³⁴ Ross writes, “Please pardon a rather simple but I think useful illustration. The Hebrew word to ‘reckon’ [‘credit’] has been brought over into modern Hebrew for ‘computer,’ which is no surprise given the obvious link between ‘reckon, account, credit’ and ‘computer.’ We could say, then, that it is as if God calls up our file on the heavenly computer, deletes all the sins that were registered against us, and enters into our account ‘the righteousness of Christ.’” Allen Ross, “The Epistle of St. Paul to the ROMANS” (Rom 3:21–4:25): www.christianleadershipcenter.org/romans3.htm.

³⁵ Ross, “The Epistle of St. Paul to the ROMANS.”

³⁶ The term credited concerns a change of status rather than a change of character. When God credited righteousness to Abraham, He did so in an instant. Any change in Abraham’s character came gradually and subsequently.

³⁷ Gen 15:6 is the first time that the verb *pisteuo/aman* (“to believe”) is used in the Bible.

³⁸ Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad” (John 8:56).

³⁹ See Rom 4:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11; cf. 4:22, 23, 24. Paul uses this a total of thirty-four times in his letter, nineteen of which are found in Romans (eleven in ch. 4 alone).

⁴⁰ BDAG s.v. *logizomai* 1a.

⁴¹ The meaning of the present particular participle of “believe” = “the one who believes” or “the ones who believe.” The articular participle of *pisteuo* is used eight times in Romans, always with the present tense. Some think this means that a genuine Christian cannot stop believing. They hold that this Greek form means “the one who is [continually] believing” or “the ones who are [continually] believing.” So, only those who continually believe get eternal life. However, Hart, “The Letter to the Romans,” 55, argues convincingly that the present articular participle describes a characteristic action, not continual action. The action may happen many times or just once. Nevertheless, it characterizes the person who does it. He cites the following examples: (1) Rom 5:14 (NET) “. . . Adam (who is a type of *the coming one* [pres. art. part.]).” Does Jesus come continually or does one act give him the character of the Coming One? (2) Rom 14:23 “But *the man who has doubts* [pres. art. part.] is condemned if he eats . . .” There is no suggestion that one who doubts will do so continually. One or several acts of doubt can characterize him as a “doubter.” In each of the following cases, the action of the present articular participle can stop. (3) Rom 13:2 “. . . *he who rebels* [pres. art. part.] against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted . . .” (4) Rom 13:4 “. . . [governing authority] is . . . an agent of wrath to bring punishment on *the wrongdoer* [pres. art. part.].” (5) Rom 14:1 (NASB) “Now accept *the one who is weak* [pres. art. part.] in faith.” (6) Rom 8:8 “and *those who are* [pres. art. part.] in the flesh cannot please God.”

⁴² Paul only uses the adjective *asebes* (“ungodly”) elsewhere in Rom 5:6 and 1 Tim 1:9.

⁴³ The term “faith” in the OT meant loyalty, fidelity, or trustworthiness and was a description of God’s nature, not ours. It came from a Hebrew term (*emun, emunah*) which meant “to be sure or stable.”

⁴⁴ Paul uses one from the Law and one from the Prophets (cf. Rom 3:21).

⁴⁵ The noun *makarismos* (“blessing”) occurs only three times in Scripture (Rom 4:6, 9; Gal 4:15).

⁴⁶ Paul likely turned to Ps 32 because of the rabbinical principle of interpretation that when the same word was used in two biblical passages, each can be used to interpret the other. (Gen 15:6 and Ps 32:2 both contain the same word—*logizesthai*, LXX and *hasab*, MT— which the NASB renders “reckoned” in Gen 15:6 and “impute” in Ps 32:2.) See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. ICC series (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 323.

⁴⁷ Paul quotes from this psalm because David uses the word “credit” in it. This links Paul’s words in Rom 4:3–5 and the stories of Abraham and David.

⁴⁸ www.middletonbiblechurch.org/romans/romans4.htm.

⁴⁹ The verb *epikalupto* (“to cover”) only occurs here in the NT. It does occur nineteen times in the LXX and is related to the Day of Atonement.

⁵⁰ Hoehner writes, “The point is that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised; hence, faith obtains rights in right standing before God and not the right of circumcision.” Harold W. Hoehner, “Romans” in *The Bible Knowledge Word Study* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2006), 150.

⁵¹ In Gen 17, Abraham received a new name, was made a new person, and was given a new enablement.

Circumcision was a sign of what happened to Abraham after he was declared righteous. Circumcision was also a sign that the promises of salvation would come through Abraham’s line. Abraham and Sarah were miraculously given God’s strength to conceive and bring forth the miracle child, Isaac. As soon a Jewish boy was born he became a member of the people in whose line the Savior would come. One only had to be born into Abraham’s line to be the “seed of Abraham” in a nationalistic sense. Circumcision was a sign of new birth and a sign of the coming Savior, so all Jewish boys were circumcised on the eighth day. Circumcision summoned Abraham to new obedience. Because he was a new person a new obedience was expected of him.

⁵² The verb “follow” (*stoicheo*) was originally a military term for soldiers marching in single file. See other NT uses in Acts 21:24; Gal 5:25; 6:16; Phil 3:16.