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**Romans 4: 1-25:
Justification As
Orthodoxy**

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The greatest happiness of the thinking man is to have fathomed what can be fathomed, and quietly to reverence what is unfathomable (Johann Goethe)

The details of the founding of the Roman Church are shrouded in mystery. However, because the congregation seems to have been predominately Gentile in composition, the apostle Paul maintained a healthy pastoral interest in it (Guthrie 1970, 393-96). So in A.D. 57 the apostle dispatches his epistle to the Christians in Rome – probably the most important letter he has ever penned, judging from its impact throughout the history of the Christian era (Robinson 1979, viii).

Paul had wanted on a number of occasions to visit Rome both for purposes of evangelization (1:13) and edification (1:11). But his precise

purpose of writing is still debated today. Guthrie has canvassed a number of proposals with respect to this question. The Tubingen School posited that the letter to the Romans was basically a polemic against Jewish Christianity. The view has little to commend it among New Testament scholars, according to Guthrie (1970, 398; cf. Klein 1991, 29-43).

The traditional view maintains that the apostle used the occasion, after over twenty years of ministry, to set forth a treatise of his theological position. Both Guthrie and Harrison find this view unsatisfactory for the following reasons: (1) there are at least two doctrines that are conspicuous by their absence--ecclesiology and eschatology (Harrison 1971, 305). Guthrie adds the doctrine of cosmic reconciliation, and rightly observes that chapters 9-11 are inexplicable if Paul were merely stating his understanding of Christian doctrines (Guthrie 1970, 398). Kümmel (1966, 221) gives a summary critique of the traditional proposal when he writes,

“The old view that Romans is a systematic doctrinal presentation of Christian beliefs . . . , is untenable, for important elements of Paul’s teaching, such as Christology and eschatology do not receive full attention” The other purposes listed by Guthrie (1970, 398-400) are the following: 1) Paul wrote to conciliate Jewish and Gentile factions, 2) the apostle wrote to provide a fitting summary of his missionary experience up to that point, and 3) he wrote to meet the immediate needs of the Christians at Rome. While all of these proposals seem to have some element of truth, none has commanded the respect of New Testament exegetes today.

In an article entitled “An Alternative suggestion for the Purpose of Romans,” Russell (1988, 174-184) evaluates the proposals of four prominent exegetes, namely, C.K. Barrett, C.E.B. Cranfield, Ernest Käsemann and John Murray. Russell points out that all four commentators reject the traditional proposal, while demonstrating a logical consistency in the way they correlate chapters 9-11 with the rest of the book. Although Russell feels that western scholarship, represented by the four exegetes mentioned above, is coherent in its purpose statement of Romans, he nevertheless questions its accuracy on contextual grounds. The reason for this is “That a purpose statement built solely on ‘justification by faith’ may be suspect because of western cultural biases. The epistle [then] should be evaluated from a perspective more resembling Paul’s viewpoint.” Russell writes that in a

... letter confronting their Jewish/Gentile relationships, Paul challenged the Roman churches to participate fully in God’s present harvest of all peoples by showing that their ethnocentrism opposed God’s plan of justifying people by faith, of giving them new life in the Spirit, and of mercifully placing them in His redemptive plan.

Two of the strengths of Russell’s proposal are 1) it includes the important theme of Justification by faith, without awkwardly subsuming chapters 9-11 under the same rubric; and 2) it provides a more coherent framework that does justice to the Jew/Gentile tension intimated in the book in general and chapters 1-3, 9-11, 14-15 in particular. It also, of course, seeks to explicate the opening and closing chapters (note their

missionary flavour) with the rest of the epistle. After greeting the Christians at Rome, the Apostle Paul announces his intention to carry out his missionary mandate in the imperial capital (1:1-15). He then declares the central motif of his message in verses 16 and 17. From 1:18 to 3:20 the apostle demonstrates the need and relevance of God's righteousness among Heathen and Hebrews alike, with a summary statement in 3:23, which 'embraces all humanity' (Carson 2004, 346; cf. Gathercole 2004, 147-184). Paul will later seek to impress upon the minds of his readers the need to be involved in helping to spread the Gospel of righteousness beyond their borders (Chae 1997). But for the time being the writer invokes a powerful illustration from the Scriptures which, rightly understood, serves to establish the continuity between the Old and the New covenants and underscores his orthodox position in regard to justification (Williams 2006, 649-667; Donaldson 2006, 27-54; *contra* Gaston 1979, 48-71). This justification is part and parcel of the believer's liberation from evil powers that is effected 'by the twofold work of Christ: . . . his life of faithful perfection, which is imputed to the Christian, and his death and resurrection, which remove the penalty of eternal separation from God' (Gruenler 1996, 691). The overall structure of Romans may be set out as follows:

A 1-5 *Gospel for Unbelievers: Liberation from Sins' Penalty (Global)*

B 6-8 *Gospel for Saints: Liberation from Sin's Power & Presence (Doctrinal)*

A' 9-11 *Gospel for Sinners: Liberation from Sins' Penalty (National)*

B' 12-16 *Gospel for Believers: Liberation from Sin's Power & Presence (Practical)*¹

¹ Some close patterns on the micro-level to the one we are proposing appear in Ps. 27:14; Prov. 118:15-16 (ABA); Prov. 17: 25; Is. 30:31; Amos 1:3; Nahum 3:17; Ps. 86: 12; Cant. 1:11—all ABA' (Watson 1986, 204). A similar (macro) pattern is to be found in 1Cor. (Palmer 1992, 32-33), which is thought by Goulder (1987, 496-497) to be a prototype of Romans in terms of structure. For cautions on neat summaries like the above, see Caird (1994, 119ff), and especially McGrath (1998, 376-378). Broadly speaking, the 'A' and 'B' sections deal with Justification and Sanctification respectively; so Jong (2002, 17-18) is incorrect in asserting that "Christianity today has degraded itself into a worldly religion due to the Doctrine of Justification and the Doctrine of Sanctification."

Discovery of Abraham with Regard to Righteousness 4:1-5

The passage begins with two text-critical problems; the first centres around the infinitive (εὐρηκέναι; v.1a) variously translated as “gained” (NRSV), “discovered” (NIV) and “found” (AV), and its position in the sentence. The influential Vaticanus manuscript (B) does not have this term and its different locations in several other manuscripts may seem to some to be a case of interpolation. As Metzger (1994, 450) points out, it is easy to argue that the shorter reading of the vaticanus be accepted, since scribes tended to add to the text at times. However, the witnesses to εὐρηκέναι are impressive with respect to their age and geographical spread. It is also intrinsically probable to have been present in the original, because its absence would make an awkward ellipsis at this point.

The second problem has to do with whether the reading “forefather” (NIV) is superior to “father” (AV).² Although Greenlee (1964, 81) seems to question Westcott and Hort for having included “forefather” in their critical text, I agree with Cranfield (1975, 226; also Aland et al 1994) that it should be retained on the grounds that it is the more difficult reading.

The next challenge is syntactical in nature. It concerns whether the prepositional phrase, “according to the flesh” (NRSV; κατὰ σάρκα. should be construed adjectivally or adverbially. In other words, does the phrase govern “ancestor” (NRSV) or the infinitive (εὐρηκέναι)? It does seem that the former construction is more in keeping with Pauline usage, (cf. Rom. 1:3; 9:3, 5; I Cor. 10:18; Eph. 6:5; and Col 3:22).³ The opening verse, then, inquires of the discovery of Abraham in reference to the issue of righteousness. The question is to be understood against the background

²I.e., προπάτορα (a NT hapax) or πατέρα. Black (1973, 75) feels that perhaps the text at this point (v.1) is hopelessly corrupt. Käsemann (1980, 106), however, expresses confidence that the “dominant reading is the only possible one. . . .” What needs to be borne in mind is that “It is Abraham, not the issue of being a forefather, that is pursued in the following verses” (Porter 2003, 278).

³However, Hays (1989, 54; also 1985, 76-98)) rejects this construal, and is followed by Wright (2002, 489).

of Jewish opinion which believed that the merits of this forefather commended him entirely before God (*pace* Lieber 2004, 83).⁴

The apostle follows up the argument in verse 2 by reasoning something like this: “let us for argument sake assume that Abraham was justified by works, wouldn’t he have had grounds on which to glory? Yes, but certainly not before God!”⁵ A keyword in this verse is the term “boast” (καύχημα).⁶ It is not only important in the development of Paul’s argument, it also “exemplifies both literary and emotional ‘colour’” (Liefeld 1984, 87). Paul already uses a cognate term (καύχησις) to demonstrate that the principle of faith precludes human boasting (Rom. 3:27). Here he links the word to probably the greatest religious role model before the Christian era. “But”, a Jew might ask, “can you prove that Abraham was not indeed justified by works?” “Well, let us turn to the Scriptures,” says the apostle.⁷

To support his claims, Paul invokes Genesis 15:6, which declares that it was Abraham’s faith that brought him a right standing before God. At this point

Paul’s versatility as a writer is seen. . . . He can move with agility from the employment of Hellenistic debating style . . .

⁴ “The rabbis . . . maintained that long before the law was promulgated from Sinai, Abraham already had a thorough knowledge of it and obeyed it in all its details” (Hendricksen 1981, 154). Abraham definitely had what we might call the ‘Mesographic’ Law (cf. Rom. 2: 14, 15); but to say he had its Mosaic counterpart is anachronistic.

⁵ The first class condition (v. 2a) assumes the case for sake of argument (Burton 1970, 262). In this connection, Young (1994, 29-49) feels that the traditional classification of conditional clauses short changes the exegetical process by narrowing the focus on surface features. Therefore, recourse must be taken to the speaker’s/writer’s intent, morphology, as well as the situational and linguistic context in order to get a better grasp of the meaning. It is this consideration that has guided my paraphrase.

⁶ The apostle Paul almost has a monopoly on the use of this word group (Bultmann 3: 645-654).

⁷ At this juncture (v.3) the Old Testament scripture is personified. “Indeed, so habitual was the identification of the Divine Author with the words of Scripture that occasionally personality is attributed to the passage itself” (Metzger 1951, 306).

to a careful piece of exegesis based on the Old Testament. His exegesis follows the rabbinic principle of *Gezerah Sawah*. . . . The principle . . . states that when the same word or phrase is found in two passages of the Old Testament, one can be used to illumine the other. This is Paul's key to the Christian use of Genesis 15:6 adopted in Romans 4 (Martin 1977, 247).

It would seem that the apostle not only attempts to substantiate his point from Genesis 15:6 but also to correct a misunderstanding of the verse based in part on the following: "Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?" (1 Maccabees 2: 52; NRSV).⁸

Having turned to Old Testament Revelation for support of his claims that faith, not works, is the basis on which a person is justified, the apostle Paul now draws upon an experience from daily life (v. 4). The analogy states that which was common knowledge in the first century: Remuneration is commensurate with output ("Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation"--NIV). There is nothing gratuitous here.

Two pairs of words are set in stark contrast (each pair marking out a fundamental approach to God). Taking the thoughts of verses 3 and 4 together, the word-pairs are summed up as follows:⁹

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>ἔργαζομένω ('works')</p> <p>ὀφείλημα ('obligation')</p> | <p>πίστις ('faith')</p> <p>χάρις ('grace')</p> |
|--|--|

"The contrast between ['as gift'] and ['as an obligation'] is instructive. 'Works' and ['obligation'] belong together as correlatives; 'faith' and 'grace' similarly correspond, and, and it is to this pair that ['credited'] belongs" (Barrett 1957, 88).

⁸ Ἀβρααμ οὐχὶ ἐν πειρασμῷ εὐρέθη πιστός καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην; (Rahlfs 1979).

⁹ Verse 3 reads in the NIV: "What does the Scripture say?" Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

In contrast, then, to the natural affairs of verse 4, verse 5 declares the heart of the gospel proclamation. In order to grasp fully the import of this declaration four key terms need to be looked at.

The first key word to be examined is the verb πιστεύω (“believe”). In its active form Paul used it twice before: in Romans 1:16 and 3:22. Like these occurrences, it is also employed in a soteriological sense and setting in chapter 4. The meaning of πιστεύω in 4:3, 5 is wholehearted trust and confidence (Bauer et al 1957, 666-667). It is the only kind of faith that brings justification.¹⁰ This happens when the believer (πιστεύοντι) comes face to face with the Justifier (τὸν δικαιούντα; most likely a New Testament metonym for God).¹¹

This brings us to another key term of verse 5: righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). Δικαιούντα (‘Justifier’) and δικαιοσύνη are cognate terms and both relate to the concept of justification. It is the verb form, “justify” (ἐδικαιώθη), that occurs in verse 2, and elsewhere, which Bible students find problematic. The difficulty does not seem to be merely with the lexical idea, which has to do with righteousness but with the theological import of the term. The question is, Should we view justification as forensic (i.e. imputed righteousness) or intrinsic (imparted righteousness)?¹²

While exegetes like Sandy and Headlam (1902, 36) have serious reservations about the concept of forensic righteousness in Romans, the idea seems to fit Paul’s intention better than any other.

¹⁰ Sproul (1991, 6; cited in Thomas 2005, 187) sets out the Roman and Reformation positions respectively: Faith + Works=Justification; Faith=Justification + Works.

¹¹ Others include ‘The Name . . . The Glory’ et cetera (McCasland 1949, 99-114).

¹² Karl Barth, for example, thought of justification in a universalistic and objective sense (cf. Turner 1980, 240). All men, therefore, are automatically righteous because of predestination and redemption (Klooster 1959, 13). With regard to the forensic/intrinsic question, Longenecker feels (1977, 203-212) that the disjunction is a false one.

First, because the suffix of verb in the original appears to carry the declarative/causative idea (Black 1988, 60, 69), and second, the Septuagint, which Paul had already quoted, seems to have influenced the Apostle along forensic lines (Abbot-Smith 1937, 116). So to be justified is to be “pronounced and treated as righteous.” (Bauer et al 1957, 196).

The meaning of “counted” (KJV) or “credited” (λογίζεται) in verse 5 also bears out the forensic view of justification. Bauer and company (1957, 477) cite Psalm 105:31 and 1 Macabbees 5:52 to support the meaning “credited” here. Faith is credited or put to the “account” of the believing sinner.

This brings us to the other key-term in the verse: ἀσεβῆ (“ungodly”). As an adjective ἀσεβῆ is found one other time in Romans, where we are informed that Christ died for the “ungodly” (5:6; cf. Thompson 2003, 16). The term is a strong one denoting gross impiety; it is a deep-seated lack of reverence for God. The ungodly person is “not merely irreligious, but acting in contravention of God’s demands” (Vine 1976; 63). Although God’s wrath is unleashed against every form of impiety (1:18), in the eschaton God is going to remove it altogether (11:26). It is by sheer grace that God justifies such a person based, of course, on the loving release of His Son (5:6). The context demands that even the Patriarch, Abraham, fall under the category of the “ungodly”¹³ (Cranfield 1975, 232); after all, how else could he have been an example of justification, *sola fide*?

Delight of David in Respect of Remission

4:6-8

A new witness to the orthodox teaching of justification is now called to the stand (Denny n.d., 616). The apostle will now show that the testimony of David is in harmony with that of the patriarch, Abraham, thus proving his case from the Law and the Prophets (cf. 3:21).

¹³ Some manuscripts have a ■ on ἀσεβῆ (Robertson and Davis 1958, 93). “‘The ungodly’ is so called after he is justified. The epithet is still used by way of *Ampliatio*” (Bullinger 1968, 690).

The phrase “Even as David” (KJV; καθάπερ καὶ Δαυὶδ) shows the closest possible connection between verses 5 and 6 and is followed by the key referents discussed above. The parallel is as follows:

| Verse 5 | Verse 6 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. λογίζεται (credited) | λογίζεται |
| 2. τὸν δικαιοῦντα (Justifier) | ὁ θεὸς |
| 3. πιστεύουσι (believing) | χωρὶς ἔργων ¹⁴ |
| 4. δικαιοσύνην (righteousness) | δικαιοσύνην |
| 5. ἀσεβῆ (ungodly) | ἀνθρώπου |

The correspondence seems to underscore Paul’s point of righteousness being credited to a person who believes in God, especially by the strong contrast in column 3. The stem for “believe/faith” (πισ-) is used twice in verse 5 (πίστις/πιστεύουσι) and the idea it conveys is further defined by “without works” (χωρὶς ἔργων). A quotation now follows in which we have an exact reproduction of the Psalm 32: 1-2 (LXX).

Psalm 32 is traditionally understood to be one of seven penitential poems. However, it should be observed that there are strong elements of thanksgiving and wisdom expression found in the song. It has also been suggested that the life setting “is to be found in the Temple worship . . . , during which the Psalmist offered his song of thanks in the presence of his fellow-worshippers” (Anderson 1981, 254). The stanza which pertains to our discussion describes the happy estate of the person forgiven. But what has forgiveness to do with justification, and how do these verses from Psalm 32 serve Paul’s purpose at this point?

In connection with the quotation from Genesis 15:6, it has already been pointed out that the Apostle is in all likelihood employing a Rabbinic form of exegesis to substantiate his claim (see verse 3 above). The catch-

¹⁴ Luther: “We are not Christian because we do good works; we do good works because we are Christian” (Metzger 1997, 230).

word of the two passages is λογίζεται.¹⁵ On the one hand righteousness is credited (v.3=Gen. 15:6), and on the other sin is not taken into account (v.8=Psalm 31:2 LXX). Since Paul's use of the two Old Testament passages is not just formal but substantial, as Cranfield (1975, 233) observes, may be the Apostle is highlighting two aspects of justification: 1) the receiving of righteousness (positive side) and 2) the removal of retribution (negative side).¹⁶

Dependence of Abraham with Reference to The Rite (*Circumcision*) 4: 9-12

Having demonstrated his case from Scripture that justification is by faith alone, Paul now inquires about the scope of this particular blessing (μακαρισμός). Is it for Jews exclusively or are Gentiles as well? According to Alford (1861, 349), the particles ἢ καὶ. (“or . . . also”) are already designed to prejudice the reader in favour of the latter group. It is therefore surprising that Barrett (1957, 96) seeks to limit μακαρισμός to “the blessing of forgiveness of which David speaks.” If there is a positive and negative side to the “blessing” (i.e. justification), then the limitation, though contextually and linguistically appealing, is unnecessary. In support of this contention is the resumption of the Abraham motif in the latter half of verse 9, and to a lesser extent, the generic sense of “man” (άνήρ; “one” in NRSV) in verse 8 (Beekman and Callow 1974, 110). The blessing is both for Jews and Gentiles, whether male or female.

Again the patriarch, Abraham, is called upon to confirm another case just slightly different from the first. “Think back for a moment,” urges

¹⁵Writes Jeremias (cited in Longenecker and Tenney 1974, 259), “In Romans 4:1-12 we find, indeed, a twofold analogical deduction achieved with the help of λογίζεται. Next, at Ro. 4:3 the Scripture Gn. 15:6 is cited. The conclusion drawn from ἐλογίσθη finds its confirmation from Scripture through Ps. 32:2f. . . .”

¹⁶Verse 8 seems to summarize the concept of this removal (i.e., forgiveness), while gathering up the parallel lines of the previous couplets. The plural terms for evil within the couplets may serve to emphasize both the gravity of sin and the graciousness of the pardon that removes it. For a comparison of the LXX and Massoretic texts at this point, see Archer and Chirichigno (1983, 66-67). An emphasis in verse 8 is the double negative, οὐ μή.

the Apostle, “was he credited with the blessing while in a state of circumcision or otherwise?”¹⁷ Let me hasten to tell you: most assuredly, while still uncircumcised.” (v.10). When Abraham did receive the rite, Paul continues to argue, it became a sign or outward confirmation of the righteousness he already “possessed” (Moule 1959, 38). The telic/ecbatic clause in verse 11 serves to underscore God’s providential undertaking in the matter: God not only confirmed his earlier blessing on the patriarch through circumcision, but also made him the spiritual progenitor of both believing heathen and repentant Hebrews (vv. 11, 12, 15). The participle “who . . . walk” (τοῖς στοιχοῦσιν),¹⁸ which rounds out the description of Gentiles (v. 12), seems to be used by Paul in a stronger sense than its synonym (περιπατεῖν), both here and elsewhere (Gal. 5:25; 6:16; Phil. 3:16).

Description of Abraham in Reference to The Regulation (*Canon*), 4: 13-17

Abraham’s right standing before God was not obtained by good works. Neither was it acquired through the rite of circumcision. Surely then the law does not enter the picture (v. 15). But why does Paul introduce the law at this point?

For Judaism--or least for a vociferous and growing legalistic element with late Judaism and Tannaitic rabbinic Judaism--trust in God and obedience to the law went hand in hand in the attainment of righteousness. And though Abraham lived before the actual giving of the Mosaic Law, he anticipated the keeping of that fuller expression of God’s Torah . . . Lev, Rab. 2:10 (on Lev. 1:12), therefore, argues that ‘Abraham fulfilled... the whole Torah’ . . . (Longenecker 1977, 205).

¹⁷ The participial phrase ἐν περιτομῇ ὄντι ἢ ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ; is temporal (Dana and Mantey 1955, 226-227).

¹⁸ This interpretation follows Chae (1997, 192-195) in seeing two different racial groupings in v.12. The majority of exegetes see only one: Jews. Admittedly, the verse is quite difficult.

Paul refutes this kind of thinking by pointing out that the promise to the patriarch was not associated with Law (νόμος).¹⁹ The same thing also applies to Abraham's descendants (presumably his believing "seed"; v. 13). What is the "promise" mentioned in verse 13? In Genesis Abraham is promised: posterity (12:2), prosperity (12:3) and property (15:7).

Bruce (1985, 111) points out that when the promise is delimited in geographical terms, Egypt and the Euphrates form the southern and northern extremities, respectively. However, in the New Testament this aspect of the promise should only be understood in a spiritual sense. In his attempt to explain the clause bearing "world", Hendrickson (1981, 154-5) essentially makes the same point: "[T]he conclusion drawn by many namely, that today . . . the entire land of Canaan, in its widest dimensions, really belong to Jews, is unwarranted".

Why is such a view unwarranted? Is it not better to maintain the literal understanding of the promise without in any way diminishing its spiritual dimensions?²⁰ And if this is done, how is the expanded territorial element of the promise²¹ to be understood? The key seems to lie in the awkward phrase "or in his seed." It is possible that what we have here-- quite apart from its more patent meaning, "descendants"-- is a reference to the Messiah by way of corporate solidarity.²² It is through Abraham's seed, the Messiah, that the promise takes on cosmic dimensions (cf. Black 1973, 78).²³

¹⁹ νόμος in v. 13 is a definite reference to the Mosaic code. For other uses of the term, see Vine (1940, 2: 313-315).

²⁰ "The theme of ἐπαγγελία [promise] has central theological significance for Paul and the New Testament writings . . ." (Käsemann 1980, 118). Kaiser (1978, 255 *passim*) draws out this significance for Old Testament theology, as well as points out the literal and spiritual aspects of the promise. The articular infinitive (v.13) helps to define the promise (Burton 1976, 156).

²¹ "The promise . . . that he should be heir" should be taken epexegetically (Blass et al 1961, 206).

²² The concept of corporate personality is explained by Ellis in Marshall (1977, 212-214).

²³ Notice that even within inter-testamental Judaism the global scope of the promise seems to have been recognized: . . . ἀπὸ ποταμοῦ ἕως ἄκρου τῆς γῆς. (Sirach 44:21).

Earlier in the chapter the indispensability of faith was established. Now in verse 14, the Apostle declares that God's redemptive scheme would prove self-contradictory if the "Torah-ites" (so Black) were the exclusive beneficiaries of God's gifts. In such a case, faith becomes void of its spiritual significance and the promise is nullified (Bauer 1957, 418). Verse 15 gives a rationale for the impossibility of the law being a medium of God's blessing in this connection. The law simply is not a promoter of the divine promises but instead produces divine punishment.

Paul now reveals the reason why faith is so important in God's redemptive scheme (v.16; cf. Thomas 2006, 296-314): Faith is the only thing on humanity's part which highlights the grace of God. It also "guarantees" the fulfillment of the promise to both the Jewish and Gentile elements of Abraham's seed, for "Abraham had two seeds: one 'of the law' and the other 'of the faith.' The promise . . . is valid for both" (Earle 1986, 157). The fact that Abraham is the spiritual progenitor of Hebrew and Heathen alike is fully supported by the Old Testament, as the Apostle demonstrates by his citation of Genesis 17:5 (LXX) in verse 17.

If verses 3-8 highlight faith without works; 9-12, faith apart from circumcision; 13-16, faith apart from law (Moo 1996, 273; Osborne 2004, 113), then verses 17-21 focus attention on the true character of the faith which establishes and maintains a right relationship with God. The syntax of verse 17 is difficult;²⁴ the sense is perhaps clarified by the following rendition: "As it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations'--in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (NRSV). The latter part of the verse brings into sharp focus the object of the patriarch's faith—the wonder working God of the universe, whose role in creation and re-creation is a source of encouragement to people of faith, like Abraham.

Verses 18 – 22 turn the spotlight once again on father Abraham by defining more closely the nature of his faith and the creative/redemptive genius of the One who makes the dead come alive and creates out of nothing. Verse 18a is memorable: "Against all hope, Abraham²⁵ in hope

²⁴ For the nature of the difficulty and possible solution(s); see, e.g., Schreiner (1998, 239).

²⁵ A surrogate for the relative pronoun of the original; the NIV 'all' is an over translation.

believed" (NIV; "Ὁς παρ' ἐλπίδα ἐπ' ἐλπίδι ἐπίστευσεν). The result²⁶ of Abraham's confidence in God (v. 18b) is far-reaching: many now call him faithful father, and a great promise is fulfilled. The main verb of verse 18 ("believed") is given further explanation in verses 19-21, one of Paul's long sentences in Greek. The clause may be graphically displayed thus:

ἑκατονταετής που ὑπάρχων

κατενόησεν²⁷ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα καὶ τὴν νέκρωσιν τῆς μήτρας Σάρρας
καὶ μὴ ἀσθενήσας τῇ πίστει ἤδη νενεκρωμένον
δὲ οὐ διεκρίθη τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ
εἰς τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ θεοῦ
ἀλλ'

ἐνεδυναμώθη τῇ πίστει
δοῦς²⁸ δόξαν τῷ θεῷ²⁹

καὶ πληροφορηθεὶς ὅτι ὃ ἐπηγγέλται δυνατός ἐστιν καὶ ποιῆσαι

According to the above schema, ἑκατονταετής που ὑπάρχων (being about a hundred years) modifies the implied subject, "he" (αὐτός), of the verb "considered/contemplated" (κατενόησεν). Abraham, then, sized up the situation by confidently fixing attention (empowered in faith /ἐνεδυναμώθη τῇ πίστει) on the divine promise (*in respect of the promise of God* εἰς τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ θεοῦ v.20, emphasis original) and promise Maker (as he gave glory to God [v. 20] . . . he also was fully convinced that whatever he promised he is able to do [v. 21]/ δοῦς δόξαν

²⁶ Moo (1991, 288) mentions a couple of other options for the infinitival clause: 1) it denotes the content of Abraham's faith, and 2) it specifies purpose.

²⁷ Some manuscripts have. οὐ before κατενόησεν.

²⁸ δοῦς and πληροφορηθεὶς help to define the main verb ἐνεδυναμώθη (Robertson 1934, 86; cf. Porter 2003, 380). ἐνεδυναμώθη gives us the positive side of the patriarch faith, whereas the phrases μὴ ἀσθενήσας τῇ πίστει (v.19) and οὐ διεκρίθη τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ (v.20) point to the other side of the coin, as well as bring into sharper focus the nature of the faith that pleases God (cf. Heb. 11:6).

²⁹ The phrase "is highly reminiscent of 1:20, and may form its positive counterpart—Abraham . . . , the 'Gentile,' perceived God's eternal power and deity, and gave thanks!" (Harrisville 1980, 71).

(. . . his own impotent body and the barrenness³⁰ of Sarah's womb; v.19/τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα νεκρωμένον καὶ τὴν νέκρωσιν τῆς μήτρας Σάρρας). This is the qualitative faith that is associated with quality righteousness (v.22).

Paul is now ready to apply these pivotal moments from the Abraham cycle to the progeny of the patriarch: "The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness" (vv. 23-24a; NIV). The citation of the Genesis 15:6³¹, the main text highlighted (cf. vv. 3, 9), is an example of both intra-textual (v. 22) as well as inter-textual literary artistry³² on the part of the apostle. In fact, the intertextuality³³ of the chapter is rich, and is both overt and covert (Hays 1989, 34, 166).

The other Genesis text cited by Paul (v. 17) is from the Septuagint's version of 17:5. Here the writer's application is in embryonic form-- and skillfully chosen, since he "passes over the fact that Abraham was convulsed in laughter at the thought that he might beget a son" (Fitzmyer 1993, 387). In commenting on verse 18, Cranfield (1985, 93-94) quotes a stanza from one of Charles Wesley's pieces:

*In hope, against all human hope,
Self-desperate, I believe; . . .
Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries: It shall be done.*

The lines, as Cranfield believes, do summarize well the faith of the patriarch at the high point of his sojourn, except in one area: the laughter.

³⁰Translation of νέκρωσιν, literally 'deadness'; the term appears to be a word play along with νεκρωμένον, rendered above 'impotent', as suggested by Zerwick (1984, 343).

³¹For a listing and classification of the major OT citations in Romans, see Longenecker (1999, 92-93).

³²The creative treatment of Scripture here seems to be missed by Dodd (1932, 70).

³³This may be defined "as the study of all features that bring a given a given text into an open or hidden relationship to other texts" (Heim 1995, 231).

In fact, both Abraham (Gen. 17: 17) and Sarah (Gen. 18:12) appear to have gained some measure of comic relief³⁴ from the promise, and not at their own expense. So both incidents are, to use Fitzmyer's language, "passed over" in what may be called 'paschal silence'. This literary phenomenon is not limited to Paul. We see it, for example, in 2 Chronicles where another man (David) to whom righteousness is credited eulogized, not because he was perfect but because he was justified (cf. Rom. 4:6-8).³⁵

Later, John's Gospel (cf. 1:29 with 13:10-11; 17:6), as well as Priscilla's homily (Hebrew 11: 3ff), will employ the same literary strategy. All this seems to be another way of saying, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1), that is, "for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom. 4: 24b; NIV).

The Pascal basis for this 'Passover' blessing is once again set out (cf. 3:24-25).³⁶ "He was delivered over to death³⁷ for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (v.25; NIV). Over seven centuries later a Jewish poet penned the following lines based on the Fourth Servant Song (cited in Bruce 1951, 193):

³⁴ Walton (2001, 451) speaks of the patriarchs "bemused incredulity about Sarah's bearing a son . . .". Is it then providentially significant that 'syllables of laughter' were added to their names (*ha* [Gen. 17:5], *ah* [Gen. 17:15])? The 'syllables' are a transliteration of the Massoretic text; the spoken consonantal text would very likely give corresponding sounds, which may or may not carry the same overtone in the occidental world. There is, however, no doubt about the meaning of 'Isaac' (cf. Gen. 21:1-6). For explorations into this general area, see Ellington (1991).

³⁵ Here we see 'that historical memory is highly selective and interpretive. The popular tradition of Israel, conveniently forgetting the barbarity and disreputable incidents of David's reign, focused upon those elements which appealed to the political and religious aspirations of each succeeding age (Caird 1994, 307)

³⁶ Only this time the intertextual echo is Isaiah 53; cf. v. 12c (LXX): καὶ διὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν παρεδόθη and Rom. 4:25a: ὃς παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν.

³⁷ "to death", added by the translator (s). On the parallelism of the verse, see Winer (1872, 611, 639) and Lowe (2006).

*Messiah our Righteousness has departed from us;
 We are horror-stricken, and there is none to justify us.
 Our iniquities and the yoke of our transgressions
 He carries, and he is wounded for our transgression.
 He bears on his shoulders our sins,
 To find pardon for our iniquities;
 We are healed by his stripes.*

The antecedent of “He” in the Pauline text (Rom. 4:25a) is the “Lord” of the previous verse—the One through whom the blessing is mediated on the basis of crucifixion and resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1ff). Through these momentous events, then, is justification received, the chief benefit of which is *shalom* (Rom. 5:1).

CONCLUSION

As the Apostle Paul elaborates on his claim in 3:21 that there is an available righteousness apart from the law covenant, he also appears to address a case of (incipient?) ethno-centrism in the Roman Church. In the first four chapters of the epistle, Paul demonstrates that human beings, viewed both ethically and ethnically, have no ground of boasting before God, because they are sinners (3:23; 29ff). However, through God’s gracious hand, sinners may be justified.³⁸

The case against ethno-centrism is advanced and strengthened by invoking two prominent Old Testament witnesses – Abraham, (an ‘Iraqi’) and David (an ‘Israeli’). Through the literary device of paschal silence, both men are presented as paragons of virtue, particularly Abraham, whose walk with God “went from ‘faith to faith’” (Conner 1999, 152).

³⁸Even those who believe that the God of Abraham and David is “jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully” (Dawkins 2006. 31)

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