

# Abraham's Faith in Romans 4:3

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**[Abstract]**

Some scholars contend that faith of Christ in Romans 3:22 and the faith of Abraham in Romans 4:3 are covenantal faithfulness. Paul's focuses Abraham's covenantal relationship in Romans 4:3. The flow of Paul's thought in Romans 3:21-4:25 is covenantal rather than forensic. Abraham's faithfulness following Christ' faithfulness is based on God's covenantal faithfulness, which is God's righteousness. The forensic justification by faith is not pivotal in Paul's argument. This thought, Abraham's faithfulness, concerning justification by faith is opposed to Reformers' sola fide. Martin Luther asserts, "Abraham believed God, and it, this very believing even without works, was reckoned to him, by God, as righteousness, so that through this he should be righteous before God. And thus it is not a matter of him who works but of God who accepts his faith as righteousness." Paul's emphasis is believing in God, while some contemporary scholars emphasize the faithfulness of Abraham. In this article, I will first examine Abraham's faith in Romans 4:3 against contemporary scholars who assert that this verse refers to Abraham's faithfulness. First, Abraham represents justification of the ungodly who are justified by their faith in Jesus Christ. Their faith does not correspond to Abraham's faithfulness in terms of the covenantal relationship, since the ungodly are excluded from the Mosaic covenant. Second, the nature of Abraham's faith in Genesis 15:6 which is quoted in Romans 4:3 is believing in the Lord rather than his covenantal faithfulness.

**Key Words:** Justification by Faith, Romans 4, Abraham's Faith, Covenantal Faithfulness, Faith of Christ, Faith and Faithfulness

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## I. Introduction

Bavinck describes “justification by faith” as follows:

Accordingly, those who believe in Christ are justified *through* faith (Rom 3:22, 25, 30; Gal 2:16; 3:26; Eph 2:8; Phil 3:9; 2 Tim 3:15), *on the ground of* faith (Rom 1:17; 3:30; 5:1; 9:30, 32; 10:6; Gal 3:8, 24), *by* faith (Rom 3:28). This faith does include the acceptance of the testimony of God (Rom 4:18ff.; 10:9, 17; 1 Cor 15:17; 1 Thess 2:13) but consists further in heartfelt trust in God's grace in Christ, a personal relationship and personal communion with Christ (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 6:17; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17). It is a living, not a dead, faith that excludes all work, merit, and boasting (Rom 3:28; 4:4; 11:6; Gal 2:16; Phil 3:9) but nevertheless proves its power in love (Gal 5:6). This faith is reckoned to people as righteousness (Rom 4:3, 5, 9, 11, 22; Gal 3:6).<sup>1</sup>

However, some scholars contend that faith of Christ in Romans 3:22 and the faith of Abraham in Romans 4:3 is covenantal faithfulness.<sup>2</sup> In this view, Paul's focus in Romans 4 is Abraham's fatherhood of covenantal relationship rather than Abraham's faith. The flow of Paul's thought in Romans 3:21-4:25 is covenantal rather than forensic. Abraham's faithfulness following Christ's faithfulness is based on God's covenantal faithfulness, which is God's

<sup>1</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003-2008), 4:186.

<sup>2</sup> Richard B. Hays, “Have We Found Abraham to Be Our Forefather according to the Flesh? A Reconsideration of Rom 4:1,” *NovT* 27, no. 1 (January 1985): 76-98; D. A. Campbell, “False Presuppositions in the *Πιστις Χριστοῦ*: A Response to Brian Dodd,” *JBL* 116, no. 4 (1997): 718; N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 848-51.

righteousness, in Abraham's family. The forensic justification by faith is not pivotal in Paul's argument.

This thought, Abraham's faithfulness, concerning justification by faith is opposed to Reformers' sola fide. Martin Luther says, "*Abraham believed God, and it, this very believing even without works, was reckoned to him, by God, as righteousness, so that through this he should be righteous before God. And thus it is not a matter of him who works but of God who accepts his faith as righteousness.*"<sup>3</sup> Paul's emphasis is believing in God, while some contemporary scholars emphasize the faithfulness of Abraham for God. John Calvin asserts,

Hence Abraham, by believing, embraced nothing but the favour offered to him, being persuaded that it would not be void. Since this was imputed to him for righteousness, it follows, that he was not otherwise just, than as one trusting in God's goodness, and venturing to hope for all things from him. ... It is necessary, in order to form an opinion of righteousness, to understand this relation between the promise and faith; for there is in this respect the same connection between God and us, as there is, according to the lawyers, between the giver and the person to whom any thing is given, (*datorem et donatarium*—the donor and the donee;) for we can no otherwise attain righteousness, than as it is brought to us, as it were, by the promise of the gospel; and we realize its possession by faith.

According to Calvin's argument, as Abraham's faith shows, believers' faith can make them possess God's forensic righteousness.

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 25 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 35–36.

Additionally, God's righteousness is imputed to them by faith.

In this article, I will first examine Abraham's faith in Romans 4:3 against contemporary scholars who assert that this verse refers to Abraham's faithfulness. I will support Abraham's faith in Romans 4:3 with exegesis of some texts concerning justification by faith. In addition, I will analyze Abraham's faith in Genesis 15:6 which is quoted in Romans 4:3.

## II. Justification by Faith in Romans 4:3

A parallel between the Messiah's faithfulness and Abraham's faithfulness is asserted in Romans 4, the central theme of the passage is that the justification of sinners is accomplished through faith in the Messiah rather than through the faithfulness. The justification of Abraham by faith is presented as an example of believers' faith in Christ to be justified in Romans 4, and it is not a model for the Messiah's faithfulness in this chapter.

Romans chapter 4 opens with a question concerning Abraham's faith in a diatribe style, which is closely related to Romans 3:27-31. From this diatribe style, it is presupposed that Romans 4 is closely connected to the previous chapter. The continuity between Romans 4 and 3:21-31 is supported by most commentators based on textual and terminological evidence. It is demonstrated that Romans 4 continues the themes of 3:27-31.<sup>4</sup> As Paul does not understand that the justification of Abraham is based on his faithfulness, justification

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<sup>4</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 100; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC 38A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 198.

of the ungodly by faith is focused on in Romans 4. Abraham's faith was "reckoned to him as righteousness" (4:3, 5; Gen 15:6). This concept is totally different from the Jewish understanding of the eschatological verdict for the faithful.<sup>5</sup>

Abraham's Faithfulness? Concerning faith in Romans chapter 4, some scholars believe that "faith" refers to the faithfulness of Abraham, which is a prefiguration of the faithfulness of the Messiah (4:16).<sup>6</sup> In the Second Temple literature, the justification of Abraham is pronounced based on his faithful action in his trials (*Sir* 44:19-20; 1 Macc 2:52; *Jub* 19:8-9 cf. 23:9-10; CD 3:2-4; *Jos. Ant.* 1.233-4; *m. Kidd.* 4.14; *m. Ned.* 3:11.).<sup>7</sup> Campbell believes that the faith of Abraham should be understood as his faithfulness, as taught Judaism. And, he understands that the term *πιστεύω* merely does not define "confidence in or reliance to God but it is shown as one's firmness in faithfulness to God based on his reliability."<sup>8</sup> It is not just trusting in God but is also faithfulness in covenantal relationship.<sup>9</sup>

Abraham's faithfulness is his obedience in Judaism. It is his obedience in terms of devotion to the Torah and therefore he is separated from the Gentiles. In Wright's understanding, Abraham is not a model of faith. In Paul's line of thought, the point of God's promises to Abraham is that "God has in the Messiah unveiled his

<sup>5</sup> S. J. Gathercole, "Justified by Faith, Justified by His Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21-4:25," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, WUNT 2.140 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 156.

<sup>6</sup> Hays, "A Reconsideration of Rom 4:1," 97-98.

<sup>7</sup> See further G. Walter Hansen, *Abraham in Galatians: Epistolary and Rhetorical Contexts* (JSNTSup 29; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 175-9.

<sup>8</sup> Campbell, "False Presuppositions," 718.

<sup>9</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 848-51.

covenant faithfulness.”<sup>10</sup> Additionally, he says,

This highlights once more the theme we saw earlier: the faithfulness of the Servant-Messiah as the quality through which all this has been accomplished. It is because of this faithful act that the Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled, bringing the ‘ungodly’ into the single covenant family, as in chapter 4 and as is summed up in 5:6–11.<sup>11</sup>

God accomplishes the covenant through the faithfulness of the Messiah, “giving them the same badge that Abraham himself had, namely *pistis*, and ‘faith’ of a particular sort: faith in the creator God, the life-giving God (4:17–25).”<sup>12</sup> Thus, God’s covenantal faithfulness is revealed through the Messiah’s faithfulness, “which led to and climaxed in his self-giving to death.”<sup>13</sup>

The framework of Paul in Romans 4 is apparent with the repetition of “righteousness,” which is God’s covenantal faithfulness: God has accomplished his promises to Abraham, “namely that the world described in 1.18–2.16 would be put right at last, would be rescued – through the call of Israel (as in 2.17–20) to be the light that would shine in the darkness.”<sup>14</sup> In this view, God’s righteousness, which is questioned by the failure of Israel, is effective through the faithfulness of the Messiah in the covenantal relationship.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 848.

<sup>11</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 999.

<sup>12</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 849. Wright understands that faith is the badge of covenantal membership, so that it is part of covenantal language.

<sup>13</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 998.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 998.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 998.

Abraham's faith, in Paul's thought, follows the faithfulness of the Messiah,

Faith, in Paul's sense, is the Messiah-badge, because it was his faithfulness in the sense of his faithfulness to the covenant, his obedience unto death, that accomplished the divine purpose; and also because it is the belief that the one God raised him from the dead. ... It then becomes, as with Abraham, the sign of truly human life, giving glory to the powerful creator and believing that he does what he promises. And it becomes, in particular, the sign of the new covenant, the true 'doing of the law.'<sup>16</sup>

He also argues,

The stress on Abraham's faith/faithfulness also contrasts powerfully with the faithless Israel described in 2:17-3:20, notably at 3:3. Abraham was given grace to be in faithful covenant relation with the true God and thereby to embody and exhibit, initially in his faith and subsequently in his fruitfulness, the marks of genuine humanity.<sup>17</sup>

In Wright's view, πίστις is covenantal faithfulness, which is Israel failed to exhibit in its covenantal relationship with the Lord, rather than faith in Christ or Creator God. It is supposed to be understood as covenantal language. Paul's argument in Romans 4 is that while Israel was unfaithful to the covenantal relationship with God, the Messiah is faithful to unveil God's faithfulness.

However, since the wording in Romans 4:2-3 is balanced and

<sup>16</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 952.

<sup>17</sup> N. T. Wright, *Romans*, in vol. 10 of *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 500.



contrasting, it limits the sense of “faith” to belief.<sup>18</sup> The contrast is “between what the worker is due and what is given as a complete favor.”<sup>19</sup> Working and believing are described as contradictory. Paul’s disputation, which is contrasted with the first-century Judaism, is not with an idea of the divine recompense and reward for the covenantal faithfulness in Romans 4.<sup>20</sup> The faithfulness of Abraham cannot exclude obedient works, which Paul contrasts with grace in 1:18–3:20. Gathercole argues, “Despite attempts to show the contrary, the picture of reckoning according to obedient ‘works,’ according to what is ‘due,’ is an accurate picture of the understanding both of Abraham’s justification as well as the soteriological patterns applied more generally in Second Temple Jewish literature.”<sup>21</sup> Paul’s rejection is of all possibility of justification by works (cf. Rom 4:3–5), and all boasting before God or people.<sup>22</sup>

### III. Christ’s Death and Resurrection

Justification by faith is clearly shown in believing in Christ’s death and resurrection. Justification by faith can be explained by Christ’s death and resurrection for our justification (Rom 4:25). Seifrid rightly says,

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<sup>18</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 204.

<sup>19</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 204.

<sup>20</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 204. The divine recompense and reward for covenant loyalty are described in 4 *Ezra* 8:33, which was later characteristic of Pharisaic Judaism. For rabbinic Judaism, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 117–47.

<sup>21</sup> Gathercole, “Justified by Faith,” 157.

<sup>22</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 261.

As a prime example, it is instructive to recall Paul's description of Abraham's faith in Romans 4:12-25. He speaks of faith as 'Abraham's footsteps' in which we are to follow, characterizing it from the outset of this passage as an act of obedience (verse 12). In sharp contrast with Jewish tradition, Paul focuses his attention entirely upon God's word of promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:1-6. ... Abraham is driven outside himself by the word of promise to the God who raises the dead and who by his word alone calls into existence that which is not (verse 17).<sup>23</sup>

Thus, Abraham never accomplished anything, but he is counted righteous. The being of Abraham "is marked by nothingness and requires an act of creation, and God's act of creation is his forgiveness and his justifying judgment."<sup>24</sup> Paul's statement characterizes creation and the establishing of a new being.<sup>25</sup> This is in accord with the concept that God is the Creator 'who makes alive the dead, and calls into being the things which are not' (4:17). Justification is a divine reckoning which makes us righteous, so it is necessarily a creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>26</sup> It is "not by transforming us, but by recreating our persons in God's sight."<sup>27</sup>

This corresponds to the preaching of the gospel, that God raised Jesus from the dead. In the natural order, Abraham cannot

<sup>23</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, NSBT 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 136-37.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Schliesser, *Abraham's Faith in Romans 4: Paul's Concept of Faith in Light of the History of Reception of Genesis 15:6*, WUNT 2.224 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 335.

<sup>25</sup> Schliesser, *Abraham's Faith in Romans 4*, 337.

<sup>26</sup> Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness*, 68.

<sup>27</sup> Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness*, 68.

accomplish the promise, but “these had to be acknowledged for what they were: respectively, too old to work (with Abraham *ἐκατονταετής που ὑπάρχων*) and dead (*τὴν νέκρωσιν τῆς μητρᾶς*).”<sup>28</sup> Abraham was giving God glory in believing (4:21-22), and this is in contrast with sinners who do not give God his due (1:21). His believing is wholehearted trust in God who has “the power not just to promise but also to accomplish what he has promised (*ὅτι ὁ ἐπήγγελλται δυνατός ἐστιν καὶ ποιῆσαι*, 1:21).”<sup>29</sup> Gathercole questions the new-perspective reading concerning Abraham’s faith in Romans 4.<sup>30</sup> Gathercole mentions,

Faith in Pauline terms perceives (as in the *κατενόησεν* of 4:19) the reality of the status quo, and believes what God has said. This strengthened faith of Abraham is constituted by (or at least, accompanied by) worship of God as the true God, and by full conviction of his power. We will see in more detail below the correspondence between Paul’s depiction of faith and his God-language.<sup>31</sup>

Faith is a response to the gospel, which is the divine word of promise and includes the death and resurrection of Christ (4:24-25). The narrative of Christ’s death and resurrection supports the objective genitive of *πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* (Rom 4:23-25; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 15:3-4, 11; 1 Thess 4:14.).<sup>32</sup> Christ’s resurrection is the main

<sup>28</sup> Gathercole, “Justified by Faith,” 161.

<sup>29</sup> Gathercole, “Justified by Faith,” 161.

<sup>30</sup> Gathercole, “Justified by Faith,” 163.

<sup>31</sup> Gathercole, “Justified by Faith,” 161.

<sup>32</sup> In this case, Paul uses the first and second person forms of *πιστεύειν* to refer to the *πίστις* of Christians, not of Christ. The objective reading of *πίστις* is expressed “in *ὅτι*-clauses (Rom 10:9, 1 Thess 4:14), a prepositional phrase (Rom

point in these verses, so *πίστις* summarizes the narrative of the Messiah's resurrection. The faith that Paul writes in Romans is accompanied by trusting in the divine promise, since God is capable of bringing about what he has promised.

In addition, the language of faithfulness is unfamiliar in justification by Christ's death and resurrection. In Romans, the main role of Christ in Romans, which is closely related to his death and resurrection, is as the agent of God's judgment (Rom 2:16). In Romans Christ's death and resurrection rather than Christ's faithful obedience or believers' faithfulness in Romans make believers justified.<sup>33</sup> In Romans 1:3-4, Christ's death and resurrection are described as his messianic role as the Davidic king promised in the Old Testament. In Paul's gospel, the Davidic Messiah has the role of the judge according to God's judgment (Rom 2:16). His death accomplishes God's forensic righteousness (Rom 3:21-26). Through his death and resurrection, many can be justified without any works of the law (Rom 4:25). After the resurrection, the main role of Christ Jesus is that of intercessor for believers' justification in the Heavenly court (Rom 8:33-34). In relation to Christ's death and resurrection, Abraham and believers' faith is for God's forensic righteousness rather than their covenantal faithfulness following Christ's faithful obedience. There is no faithful obedience or faithfulness of Abraham or believers in Romans 4 especially for their justification.

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4:24), and a main clause that Paul gathers up and inserts into another statement with *οὐτως* (1 Cor 15:11)." Robert M. Calhoun, *Paul's Definitions of the Gospel in Romans I*, WUNT 2.316 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 212-3.

**33** See M. Kim. "God's Judgment through the Davidic Messiah: the Role of the Davidic Messiah In Romans 1:18-4:25," (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999).

#### IV. Justification of the Ungodly

There is a strong strand of thought that Abraham represents the whole people of God. All people “would be vindicated not only on the basis of election by God, but also on the basis of obedience to him.”<sup>34</sup> It is legitimate that a “mirror-reading” of Romans 4:4 is acceptable, since there is a description of the Jewish idea of salvation described “as something ‘due’.”<sup>35</sup> Paul’s declaration is that God’s justification of the ungodly by grace through faith extends to Jews and Gentiles.<sup>36</sup> Bassler rightly says, “In Romans it dovetails nicely with Paul’s insistence on the equality of these two groups and serves as further evidence of a persistent interest in this aspect of the message of justification.”<sup>37</sup> God’s justifying righteousness is acceptance of the ungodly, which brings about a new reality.<sup>38</sup>

Schreiner rightly mentions,

Paul does not intimate that Abraham was righteous by works in the presence of human beings. He says, if Abraham were justified by works, then boasting would be fitting. It is not implied or even suggested that Abraham was in fact righteous in the sight of human beings. Whether the if-clause is a reality is not communicated by the if-then construction. Nor is it at all plausible

<sup>34</sup> Gathercole, “Justified by Faith,” 158.

<sup>35</sup> Gathercole, “Justified by Faith,” 158.

<sup>36</sup> Gathercole, “Justified by Faith,” 158.

<sup>37</sup> M. Bassler, *Divine Impartiality: Paul and a Theological Axiom*, SBLDS 59 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 159.

<sup>38</sup> Gathercole, “Justified by Faith,” 157.

that the term was justified (*edikatiothe*) relates to Abraham's status before human beings. Paul invariably uses the term to refer one's status before God.<sup>39</sup>

Paul's statement concerning Abraham in the flow of his argument in Romans supports the idea that Abraham was not righteous before God.<sup>40</sup> The flow of the argument corresponds to Paul's argument in Romans 4. Abraham was justified by believing (Rom 4:3), and he is categorized as one of the "ungodly" (Rom 4:5).

The Old Testament, especially Isaiah 40-55 is in accord with Paul's idea of justification in Romans, since divine justification of the ungodly is present in the Old Testament.<sup>41</sup> Justification is the fulfillment of the promise in Jesus Christ, which is shown in Abraham's justification.<sup>42</sup> The Messiah's death is presented for the justification of the ungodly in Romans 4:25, which is an allusion to Isaiah 53. Abraham's faith corresponds to believers' faith in God who raised the Messiah from the dead for justification of the ungodly.

In another example, David, who is a wicked man, is reckoned as righteous without works before God.<sup>43</sup> Gathercole rightly mentions,

The works here cannot refer merely to the badges that positively mark out Israel as the people of God or the boundary markers that negatively define Israel over against the other nations (particularly Sabbath, circumcision and food-laws.). Rather the

<sup>39</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 119.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 119.

<sup>41</sup> Otfried Hofius, *Paulusstudien*, WUNT 51 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989), 79.

<sup>42</sup> Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness*, 68.

<sup>43</sup> Gathercole, "Justified by Faith," 158-59.

reckoning of righteousness without works here refers to the divine declaration of righteousness despite the fact that David has acted unrighteously.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, all boasting is excluded as Paul mentioned in the previous chapter (Rom 3:27–28). People, both Jews and Gentiles, boast since they think that their works have satisfied the standard of righteousness, although they fall short of God's glory.<sup>45</sup> However, Paul reminds the recipients of Romans that boasting has no foundation, because all human beings are sinners.<sup>46</sup> Thus, it is seriously mistaken to believe that Paul follows the Jewish understanding of obedience and justification.

The righteousness of God is a gift for the ungodly, which is through faith in the Messiah, as shown in Paul's statements in Romans 3:21–26. It is also a judgmental term rather than a covenantal term in Romans 4. Righteousness is not from human beings' faithfulness, since it is "an alien righteousness granted to us by God's grace."<sup>47</sup> It entirely "accords with Paul's concern to portray justification as a free act of God that has no basis in a person's works."<sup>48</sup> The reckoning of righteousness represents the forgiveness of sins, which is requested in David's declaration (verses 6–8; Ps 31:1–2).<sup>49</sup> The verb "reckon" or "count" (*λογίζομαι*) has "law-court terminology in view (Rom 3:28; 4:3–6, 8–11, 22–24; 9:8; cf. Gal 3:6)."<sup>50</sup> It fits "terminology for

<sup>44</sup> Gathercole, "Justified by Faith," 158–59.

<sup>45</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 120.

<sup>46</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 120.

<sup>47</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 215.

<sup>48</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 266.

<sup>49</sup> Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness*, 68.

<sup>50</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 204.

a judge who determines whether legal ‘accounts’ have been settled.”<sup>51</sup> The forensic meaning of righteousness is clearly presented in designating believers’ new status, which is received as “the gift of righteousness” (Rom 5:17).<sup>52</sup> Schreiner also rightly states, “Indeed, the message that the righteousness is obtained by believing rather than doing demonstrates that righteousness is a gift given to the ungodly (Rom 4:5).”<sup>53</sup> David’s saying is about “the blessing of righteousness apart from works,” since he is a sinner who failed to do the works of the law and he needed forgiveness from God.<sup>54</sup> A. A. Das argues,

Paul emphasizes Abraham’s believing apart from his works/accomplishments. The verses that follow strongly imply that Abraham was, in fact, “ungodly.” Abraham’s God is described in v. 5 as one who “justifies the ungodly” (τὸν ἀσεβῆ). This implies that when he received the promise and believed, Abraham was “ungodly.” The psalm Paul cites in Rom 4:7–8 speaks of the sinner whose sins are covered and are not reckoned but forgiven. Paul applies the psalmist’s language to “those who whom God reckons righteousness apart from works” (v.6). In vv.9–10 Paul applies the language of the psalm to Abraham. The implication is that Abraham is one whose sins have been forgiven and not reckoned to him. ... If this understanding is correct, then even “faithful Abraham” was not faithful enough (cf. Gal 3:10 and the requirement of perfect obedience). God therefore justifies apart from human activity or faithfulness.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 204–5.

<sup>52</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 205.

<sup>53</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 120–121.

<sup>54</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 120.

<sup>55</sup> A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson



The righteousness reckoned apart from “works” needs grace through faith where retribution and punishment should be executed.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, in this view, righteousness by faith is reiterated in Romans 4:5. It is a declaration that sinners are right and receive forgiveness of sins (Rom 4:6-8).<sup>57</sup> Thus, covenantal faithfulness in Romans 4 is unfamiliar to justification of the ungodly. Also, faithfulness is not able to explain the ungodly, since the ungodly, who are people beyond the covenantal boundary, cannot be faithful to God.

## V. Abraham's Faith in Genesis 15:6

Jewish tradition introduces Abraham's faithfulness. He is “perfect in all his deeds before the Lord” and “pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life” (Jub 23:10). “None has been found like him in glory; he has kept the law of the Most High” (Sir 44:19-20), and God implanted “the unwritten law” in his heart (2 Apoc. Bar. 57:2). First Maccabees relates Abraham's faithfulness to his sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, which is closely connected with Genesis 15:6 in 1 Maccabees (2:52). However, the nature of Abraham's faith is “believing in the Lord” in Genesis 15:6. Additionally, while Paul's idea contrasts with the idea of justification in Second Jewish Judaism, it is not totally invented by Paul.<sup>58</sup>

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Publishers, 2001), 209-11.

<sup>56</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 623.

<sup>57</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 204.

<sup>58</sup> Hofius, *Paulusstudien*, 79.

In Romans 4 Paul does not emphasize a theology of merit and reward in Jewish tradition. While the Second Temple Jewish writings shows God's recompense for covenantal faithfulness (4 Ezra 8:33), Paul's employment of Genesis 15:6 is not "payment due."<sup>59</sup> Dunn argues, "Where (Abraham's) faith is in view, the righteousness is surely reckoned in terms of grace, not of payment due."<sup>60</sup> N. T. Wright is too ready to equate Abraham's faith with his covenant faithfulness.<sup>61</sup>

The term "ἐπίστευσεν" (believed, in LXX Gen 15:6) refers to trust in God, who would give salvation for his people in the wilderness and bring them into Canaan (Exod 14:31; Num 14:11; Deut 1:32; Ps 78:22).<sup>62</sup> While there is a previous relationship between God and Abraham, reckoning Abraham's believing as righteousness in Genesis 15:6 is not based on his previous covenantal relationship with God.<sup>63</sup> The use of "πίστευεν" corresponds to the Hebrew word **יָמַן**, which means trust in God (Gen 15:6; Deut 1:32 etc.) and God's words can be believed (Ps. 106:12, 24).<sup>64</sup>

The Hebrew word **יָמַן** in Genesis 15:6 supports Abraham's trusting in God. The hiphil of **יָמַן** with **אֵל** makes God the object of the preposition.<sup>65</sup> When God's acts, commands and promises appear, the word **יָמַן** is employed in the Pentateuch. Exodus 14:31 says, "Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so

<sup>59</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 204.

<sup>60</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 204.

<sup>61</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 204.

<sup>62</sup> Frank Thielman, *Romans, ZECNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 230.

<sup>63</sup> Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 78.

<sup>64</sup> R. Bultmann, "Πίστευεν," in TDNT, 5:197.

<sup>65</sup> Alfred Jepsen, "יָמַן," in TDOT, 1:292; J. J. Scullion, "Righteousness (OT)," in ABD, 5:742; R.W. L. Moberly, "יָמַן," in NIDOTTE, 1:427.

the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord (ויאמינו ביהוה) and in his servant Moses.” The word אמן shows the believing of Israelites in God’s action and power against the Egyptians rather than their covenantal faithfulness to God.

God asks, “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me (אמינו־לֵא בִי), in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?” (Num 14:11) Numbers 20:12 describes Moses’ disobedience as his unbelief. Moses points out that the Israelites refused to believe God’s word, although God saved them from Egypt and promised to fight for them (Deut 1:32). In these cases, this word אמן means “confidence in the reliability of God and his word, i.e., trusting him to do as he says. In the other texts where this construction appears, the idea is the same.”<sup>66</sup> The word “האמין” suggests, “acknowledgment of the promise and of God’s power to fulfill it, and it also denotes the implied worship of God as the almighty Lord (Num 20:12).”<sup>67</sup> The meaning of requirement and promise are established in האמין (Exod 4:1, 8; Ps 106:24).<sup>68</sup> The word has the same meaning in Genesis 15:6.<sup>69</sup> Abraham’s faith is his believing in God—believing in the truth of God’s promise, because he can do what he promised.<sup>70</sup> Frank Thielman argues,

The term “believed” (*ἐπίστευσεν*) translates a Hebrew verb (*he’emin*) that often refers in the OT to trust that God would sustain his people in the wilderness and bring them into the promised land, a trust that God desired from his people but that they typically

<sup>66</sup> Vickers, *Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness*, 77.

<sup>67</sup> Bultmann, “Πιστεύω,” 187.

<sup>68</sup> Bultmann, “Πιστεύω,” 187.

<sup>69</sup> Bultmann, “Πιστεύω,” 187.

<sup>70</sup> Bultmann, “Πιστεύω,” 187.

lacked (Exod 14:31; Num 14:11; Deut 1:32; Ps 78:22). The forefather of the Jewish people, however, displayed this type of trust in God.<sup>71</sup>

Genesis 15:6 asserts Abraham's believing in God's promise and it is his response to the Lord's word.<sup>72</sup> The promise to Abraham can be presented to believers in Romans 4.<sup>73</sup> Abraham's faith is an act of holding fast to God's promise.<sup>74</sup> The Jewish tradition, which shows Abraham's virtue and meritorious work, is unfamiliar with Abraham's faith in God's promise.<sup>75</sup>

While some scholars assert Abraham's faithfulness following the Messiah's faithfulness in Romans 4:3, the wording "Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ" designates Abraham's believing in God. It is supported by the employment of Ἐπίστευσεν in the LXX Genesis 15:6 and some texts in the LXX Pentateuch. Thielman says, "The LXX translates these instances of the term with "believe" (πιστεύω), except in Deut 1:32 where they render it with the closely related expression "trust in" (ἐμπιστεύω; cf. LSJ 545, s.v. ἐμπιστευσίς)."<sup>76</sup> The Hebrew word אָמַן also supports the idea of the faith of Abraham rather than his covenantal faithfulness. It is mainly employed in describing faith in God's action, promise, and power for salvation of his people.

<sup>71</sup> Frank Thielman, *Romans*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 230.

<sup>72</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 230.

<sup>73</sup> G. Barth, "Πιστεύω," in *TDNT*, 95.

<sup>74</sup> Barth, "Πιστεύω," 95.

<sup>75</sup> Barth, "Πιστεύω," 95.

<sup>76</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 240n14.

## VI. Conclusion

As Luther mentions, “God, *who justifies*, through grace, *the ungodly*, that is, one who of himself is nothing but wicked before God, *his faith*, such trust, *is reckoned*, freely, by God, *as righteousness* so that he is righteous before God, according to the purpose, that is, according to the predetermination, of the grace of God, an expression which is not in the Greek text.”<sup>77</sup> Justification by faith is unmerited grace of God. If Abraham's faith is his faithfulness, the ungodly cannot follow the footsteps of Abraham's faithfulness.

Faith is the response to Christ's death and resurrection, which is the narrative of Paul in Romans 4:25. Faith is trusting in the divine promise that God will bring about what he has promised. So, Abraham's faith is shown in that he did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb (4:19). Like Abraham's faith, the narrative of Christ's death and resurrection supports the objective genitive of *πίστις*. This objective genitive is far from Abraham's faithfulness. Justification for the ungodly does not fit with covenantal faithfulness in Romans 4, since the ungodly are justified by their believing in God rather than by their covenantal faithfulness. This corresponds to the use of “*πίστειν*,” which is the translation of the Hebrew word *אמן*. Thus, Abraham's faith rather than faithfulness of Abraham is Paul's main concern. Abraham's faithfulness does not fit with the thrust of Romans 4.

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<sup>77</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 35–36.

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## Dissertation

Kim, M. "God's Judgment through the Davidic Messiah: the Role of the Davidic Messiah In Romans 1:18-4:25." Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019.

## [초록]

## 로마서 4장에 나타난 아브라함의 믿음

김명일(시온성교회, 부목사, 신약신학)

일부 학자들은 로마서 3:22절의 그리스도의 믿음과 로마서 4:3의 아브라함의 믿음을 언약적인 신실성으로 이해한다. 이러한 관점에서, 바울의 초점은 로마서 4장에서 바울의 초점은 아브라함의 믿음보다는 아브라함의 언약적 관점에서 조상이다. 로마서 3:21-4:25에서 바울의 사과의 흐름은 법정적이 아니라 언약적이다. 그리스도의 신실성을 따르는 아브라함의 신실성은 하나님의 언약적인 신실성을 기초로 한다. 하나님의 언약적 신실성을 하나님의 의로 이해한다. 즉, 법정적인 이신칭의는 바울의 논증에서 중요하지 않다. 이신칭의와 관련된 아브라함의 신실성이라는 사과는 종교개혁자들의 솔라 피테에 반대한다. 마틴 루터는 다음과 같이 주장한다. “아브라함은 하나님을 믿었으며, 행위 없는 바로 그 믿음은 하나님 앞에 의로 여겨졌다. 그러므로 이것을 통해서 하나님 앞에 의롭게 된다. 그러므로 이것은 행위를 하는 사람의 문제가 아니라 믿음을 의로 여기는 하나님의 문제이다.” 일부 현대 학자들은 하나님에 대한 아브라함의 신실성을 강조하지만, 바울의 강조점은 하나님을 믿음이다. 필자는 이 소논문에서 로마서 4:3의 아브라함의 믿음은 일부학자들과의 견해와 다르게 이신칭의와 연관된 하나님을 믿는 믿음이라는 것을 밝히려고 한다. 첫째, 아브라함은 예수 그리스도를 믿음으로 의롭게 되는 불경건한 자들의 칭의를 대표한다. 그들의 믿음은 언약적으로 신실한 행위를 포함할 수 있는 아브라함의 신실함과 다르다. 왜냐하면 불경건한 자들은 모세언약에서 배제되었기 때문이다. 둘째, 로마서 4:3에서 인용된 아브라함의 믿음의 성격은 주 여호와에 대한 믿음이지 언약적 신실성은 아니다.

**키워드:** 이신칭의, 로마서 4장, 아브라함의 믿음, 언약적 신실성, 그리스도의 믿음, 믿음과 신실성

