

God's Faithfulness, Not Abraham's Faith

The Greek noun *pistis* translated as "faith" throughout the New Testament actually means "faithfulness." Here in Romans, "For what if some did not believe [*trustin*] shall their unbelief [*distrustin*] make **the faith [*pistis* 4102] of God** without effect?" (Rom 3:3), "the faithfulness of God" (ASV, NET, NKJV), "God's faithfulness" (CSB, NIV), Paul was talking about God's faithfulness to keep His promise to Abraham: "**By myself have I sworn**, saith the LORD ... That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply **thy seed** as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and **thy seed** shall possess the gate of **his enemies**" (Gen 22:16-17). That "his enemies" is singular indicates "thy seed" isn't many people but only one person, "He saith not, And to **seeds, as of many; but as of one**, And to **thy seed**, which is **Christ**" (Gal 3:16). It's God's faithfulness to send His Son as promised.

Paul went on to teach, "his righteousness for the **remission of sins that are past**, through the **forbearance of God**" (Rom 3:25). Because God would be faithful to keep His promise of sending His Son as the Lamb, "God will provide himself a lamb" (Gen 22:8), therefore He forbore the sins of the past which would later be remitted by the sacrifice of His Son. What Paul taught here in chapter 3 about God's faithfulness laid the groundwork for what he taught in chapter 4 about Abraham.

The Greek verb *logizomai* in "Abraham believed [*trustin*] God, and it was counted [*logizomai* 3049] unto him for righteousness" (Rom 4:3), means "to conclude," "to esteem," or "to think," as it's typically rendered throughout the NT. But when concerning Abraham in Romans 4, it's always translated "counted," "imputed," or "reckoned," with the meaning of equivalence. It's that God counted Abraham's faith as equivalent to righteousness, and likewise if we simply have faith or believe!

However, the same statement about Abraham, "And he believed [*trustin*] in the LORD; and he **counted [*hāšab* 2803] it to him for righteousness [*š'ḏāqā* 6666]" (Gen 15:6), was also made of Phinehas, "Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed. And that was **counted [*hāšab* 2803] unto him for righteousness [*š'ḏāqā* 6666]" (Psa 106:30-31). What Phinehas did was "**took a javelin in his hand; And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through**, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly" (Num 25:7-8). This had nothing to do with faith. God simply concluded or esteemed****

Phinehas' actions as right in that immoral circumstance. Likewise, that "Abraham believed [*trustin*] God, and it was counted [*logizomai* 3049] unto him for righteousness" (Rom 4:3), is that God esteemed Abraham's actions as right. Since Abraham trusted God to be faithful to His promise, therefore God forgave him based upon the sacrifice His Son would one day make.

The Greek *ergon* simply means "actions," whatever actions the context requires. In "For if Abraham were justified by works [*ergon* 2041]" (Rom 4:2), it's his actions of building altars to offer sacrifices and call upon the name of the Lord: "there **builded he an altar** unto the LORD ... there he **builded an altar** unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD" (Gen 12:7,8), "Unto the place of **the altar**, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD" (Gen 13:4), "**built there an altar** unto the LORD" (Gen 13:18). But he abruptly stopped building altars and began trusting God to provide the sacrifice for his sins, "And he believed [*trustin*] in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:6). This is what Abraham found or discovered, "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, **hath found?**" (Rom 4:1).

David found the same, "**Even as David also** describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth [*logizomai* 3049] righteousness **without works [*ergon* 2041]**, *Saying*, Blessed are they whose **iniquities are forgiven**, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will **not impute [*logizomai* 3049] sin.**" (Rom 4:6-8). In Psalm 32, "I **acknowledged my sin** unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will **confess my transgressions** unto the LORD; and **thou forgavest** the iniquity of my sin," David was forgiven by confessing his sins and said nothing about the actions of offering a sacrifice. And in Psalm 51, he even said that he didn't offer a sacrifice, "For thou desirest **not sacrifice; else would I give it.**"

That "his faith [*faithfulness*] is counted [*logizomai* 3049] for righteousness" (v. 5), "faith [*faithfulness*] was reckoned [*logizomai* 3049] to Abraham for righteousness" (v. 9), "it was imputed [*logizomai* 3049] to him for righteousness" (v. 22), is that God's faithfulness was considered to Abraham for righteousness. This had nothing to do with Abraham's faith. The issue was how sins could be forgiven prior to Christ's sacrifice, "the remission of sins that are past." The answer is that "through the forbearance of God," God considered His faithfulness to provide His Son's sacrifice as good as done. Therefore, His faithfulness was considered righteousness.