

STUDY GUIDE 5 – ‘Studying the precedents’

Read **Romans 3:27-4:25** in the dramatised script and/or in another version.

(1) What two <i>laws</i> are there? Which one <i>excludes boasting</i> ? (27)	
(2) Which <i>law</i> did Abraham follow? Explain why. (1-3)	
(3) What was the result for Abraham? (3)	
(4) What kind of <i>God</i> is <i>faith</i> dealing with? (5)	
(5) Who else found this to be true? on what occasion? (6)	
(6) What does <i>blessed</i> mean? Who are <i>blessed</i> ? (7-8)	
(7) How can we enjoy the same <i>promise</i> ? (16)	
(8) What three things is God <i>able</i> to do? (17, 21)	
(9) In the light of all this, what does <i>credited as righteousness</i> mean for us? (23-24)	
(10) What does Jesus' resurrection demonstrate? (25)	
(11) Read Genesis 12:1-4; 15:1-6 . These are the promises made to Abram (Abraham's earlier name) by God. God promises him a land, a nation and a worldwide blessing – all this will come through a 'seed' or offspring, his own son. This in a nutshell is the plan of salvation in the Bible as a whole, culminating in Jesus. Too OT? Test your faith against Abraham's!	
• Has God spoken to me? How?	
• What has he said?	
• Have I believed him?	
• How have I translated this faith into action?	
• Have I had to wait for this promise to be fulfilled?	
• Are God's words in 15:1 also Jesus' words to me?	
• Is 15:6 true of me? How do I feel as a result?	

(A) Read the dialogue overleaf. Abraham's faith seems so certain and unshakeable, compared to ours. From what we know about Abraham, did he have problems? Why don't we find faith all that easy?	
(B) Go through the Romans passage (<i>omitting 9-15</i>) and find several things it tells us about what God is like and what he can do.	
(C) In smaller groups, look up the following and report back on what they teach us about faith: <i>Mk 9:23-24; Jn 20:29; Mk 11:22-24; Rom 10:17; 2 Pet 1:1, 4</i> .	
(D) Look at vv23-25 again. What do the death and resurrection of Jesus tell us about sin?	
• Is there one point about God that I have understood in a new or deeper way?	
• Is there one practical step I could take as a result of studying this section of Romans?	
• Is there something in this section which I could turn into praise or prayer to God?	

'I HAVE MY DOUBTS' by Paul Glass (slightly adapted)

(Two friends are sitting together. One of them is writing.)

- CHRIS Wotcha doing?
PAT Writing.
CHRIS I can see that. (Pause.) Wotcha writing?
PAT None of your business.
CHRIS Oh, now don't be like that.
PAT It's private.
CHRIS Let's have a look. (Grabs the piece of paper.)
PAT Give me that
CHRIS It's a letter. (Reads.) 'Dear God...' You're writing a letter to God?
PAT Yes.
CHRIS Why on earth are you doing that? I mean, you're hardly going to get a reply, are you?
PAT It helps me put my thoughts in order.
CHRIS What thoughts are those, then?
PAT Don't try to be funny.
CHRIS Sorry. Can I read it? Please, please, please!
PAT Oh, all right.
CHRIS (Reads.) 'Why is it that you seem so far away, so distant sometimes? I cry and scream out for help and you're never there.'
PAT See, I told you it was private.
CHRIS So, what are you trying to do with this?
PAT I'm trying to express some of the doubts that I have.
CHRIS Is that a good thing?
PAT Oh, you're not going to be one of those, are you?
CHRIS One of what?
PAT One of those people who say that having doubts is wicked, terrible. It shows a weakness of faith and a questioning attitude that can only get you into trouble.
CHRIS Well, does it really help?
PAT Absolutely. Talking about my doubts, being honest about them is vital for me. If I can't face up to the things I find difficult, what hope have I got?
CHRIS But shouldn't we believe?
PAT I do believe. But I can't ignore my questions. They're not going to go away just because I pretend they're not there – they're going to get bigger and worse.
CHRIS And writing them down helps?
PAT It helps. I can see them. I have to put them into words.
CHRIS And do you get answers?
PAT Sometimes yes, sometimes no.
CHRIS What happens when you don't find an answer?
PAT I go on asking the question, I go on looking, and I go on believing.
CHRIS It all sounds very unsettling.
PAT Nobody ever said that having faith was going to be easy.

RIGHT THROUGH ROMANS

'Studying the precedents' (3:27-4:25)

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The cross changes everything. It shifts the whole basis of my relationship with God away from what I do to what Jesus has done. This good news is completely new to most people; but it is not a novelty invention of Paul or the early church. It is there in the ancient scriptures, as Paul is now going to show us. He takes two key OT players, Abraham and David, and shows how the idea of God 'justifying the ungodly by faith' (4:5) has been there all the time.

3:27-31 Some questions answered (b). 27 Boasting..excluded. The idea that we have got to achieve heaven by our own merits is deeply ingrained in us. We would like to be able to wave our exam results triumphantly in God's face and say 'I've passed!' This is the same human pride that made us want to be independent of God in the first place. But what if the pass-mark is 100%?

28 Justified by faith apart from observing the law. The nub of Paul's argument. The 'law' of 100% achievement by us is replaced with the 'law' of 100% achievement by Christ for us.

4:1-8 Abraham and David: righteousness by faith (a). 3 Abraham believed God. This is quoted from Gen 15:6. God has promised Abraham offspring, but they haven't arrived, he is very old and it now seems impossible. But because God has said it, A believes it. This and this alone gives A *righteousness*; as we would say, he's made it with God. Not because his life was a shining example (it wasn't), but because he trusted God's word. **3-5 Credited.** This word occurs no fewer than twelve times in our present section. If my bank balance is empty, I have no resources to buy anything or pay what I owe; but if a millionaire says 'Use my account as your own,' I need never run out of cash again. **5 God who justifies the ungodly.** But this is the one thing God cannot and will not do! (Exod 23:7, 'I will not acquit the guilty,' uses the same words as Paul here.) Is he being untrue to his own nature? No – because as Isa 53:11 declares, 'My righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities'; Jesus has borne our guilt instead, and has wiped our account clean. (If we have problems understanding the cross, Isaiah 53 explains it all.)

6 David. The story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11-12 is a horrifying tale of adultery, murder and deceit. How could God possibly acquit such a person? Yet Nathan says, 'The Lord has taken away your sin; you are not going to die' (2 Sam 12:13), not because David is someone special, but because he admits his guilt without trying to justify himself. Ps 32 (quoted in 7-8) is a song of heartfelt thanksgiving for having this sin-record erased from his account.

4:9-15 A technical point about Abraham's status (c). Once again we have to pass over this part of Paul's argument, but as we saw in 2:25-29, having a 'badge of faith' such as circumcision counts for nothing; A wasn't even circumcised when this promise of righteousness was made to him.

4:16-17 Abraham the faith-father of all (a). 16 So that it might be by grace. Grace is a free gift conferred by a rich giver upon one who doesn't deserve it in the slightest. In my teenage days I ran hopelessly into debt; my father could have told me to work to pay it off, but instead he came into my room and without saying a word plonked the full sum (and more) down beside me. That's how God acts, says Paul, not only to key figures like Abraham, but even to outsiders and no-hopers like us. **17 Gives life to the dead.** This introduces the next key point: God does the impossible – from death, life; from nothing, everything.

4:18-22 The quality of Abraham's faith (b). 18 Against all hope. He and Sarah should have been great-grandparents by now! Yet he hung in there, still hoping, still clinging to the name he was given ('Father of many nations'). **20 Promise.** This word occurs five times in vv13-21. Faith without a promise is like a smile without a Cheshire cat; it may look good but there's nothing behind it.

21 Fully persuaded. Faith depends on who God is and what he has said he will do.

4:23-25 What this means for us today (a). 24 But also for us. Abraham didn't know about Jesus' resurrection, though the story in Gen 22 of his son Isaac 'coming back from the dead' is a kind of pre-echo of Easter. If Jesus had stayed dead, we would never know that he had conquered sin; but because he rose again, leaving our sins buried in the tomb, we can be absolutely certain that the penalty is paid and we are free to live a new life with him.