

The previous segment (3:21-31) has already partially supplied the answer to this question, particularly in 3:24-25. The basis on which God declares us to be righteous is Christ's redemption.

God credits (imputes) Christ's righteousness to us, and declares us righteous!

This suggests an alternative scenario, something like the following

- (1) God sees that we have no righteousness, but that we do have faith.
- (2) God credits us with faith through which Christ's righteousness is imputed to us.
- (3) God credits a right standing to us on the basis of Christ's righteousness.

But if our own imperfect works and our own imperfect faith are not credited to us as though they were righteousness, and to the contrary, if Christ's atoning work is credited to us as righteousness, then how shall we understand the statement of verses 3, 5, 9, and 22? If faith is not the basis of our justification (or of Abraham's), then what role does faith play in God's declaring us righteous?

In Romans 1:17 ("a righteousness that is by faith"), 3:22 ("this righteousness from God comes through faith"), and 5:1 ("since we have been justified through faith"), faith is portrayed as the means or instrument through which God joins us to Christ's atoning work, on the basis of which atonement He declares us righteous. God uses our faith instrumentally to join us to Christ. Since Christ's righteousness and death, not our faith, is the basis of our justification, then I would suggest that we translate verses 3, 5, 9, and 22 as follows:

verse 3 -- "And Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him unto righteousness" (i.e., God declared him righteous through his faith)

verse 5 -- "his faith is credited unto righteousness" (i.e., God declares him righteous through his faith)

verse 9 -- "faith was credited to Abraham unto righteousness" or "faith unto righteousness was credited to Abraham" (i.e., God declared Abraham righteous through his faith, or, faith through which God declared Abraham righteous was credited to him.)

verse 22 -- "And therefore it was credited to him unto righteousness" (i.e., God declared Abraham righteous through his faith.)

Thus this fourth chapter is a chapter on imputation, specifically the crediting of righteousness to those who believe in the Savior and salvation that God provides.