Jewish Community in Rome

- Jews:
  - Jews: Jewish by birth
  - Proselytes: Jewish by legal conversion
- Gentiles:
  - Idolaters: Under Roman law, illegal not to worship gods
  - God-fearers: Gentiles who worshipped the God of Israel

The Argument

Paul teaches that God-fearing Gentiles need not and should not undergo conversion to become Jewish. The believing community in Rome believes that God-fearing Gentiles should undergo conversion.

Paul’s Terms for Jewish Status

- Jewish: legal member of nation of Israel
- Circumcision: A proselyte or proselytizer
- In the Law: Jewish or proselyte
- Under the Law: Jewish or proselyte
- Works of the Law: Distinctive signs of Jewish identity
  (i.e. conversion, circumcision, identity marking commandments)
- Works: “Short for Works of the Law”

A False Premise:

Do We Overthrow the Torah?

3:28 For we [apostles who proclaim my Gospel] hold that one is justified by faith [in/of Yeshua] apart from [becoming Jewish through the] works of the law.

29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,

30 since God is one--who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith [in/of Yeshua].

31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith [in/of Yeshua]? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Another False Premise:

Forefather According to the Flesh?

Roman 4:1 What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh [i.e. physically]?

“What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?” (Lloyd Gaston)

2 For if Abraham was justified [and declared innocent and righteous in the heavenly court] by works [of the law, namely the disincentive signs of Jewish identity, such as circumcision], he has something to boast about [because he obtained his righteousness through ceremonial acts that he performed], but [in reality, Abraham had nothing to boast about] not before God.

Abraham Believed God

3 For what does the Scripture say [in Genesis 15:6]?

"Abraham believed God, and it was counted (chashav) to him as righteousness."

4 Now to the one who works [by undertaking conversion to obtain Jewish status because he believes that will earn his justification before God], his wages [of becoming Jewish and therefore justified] are not counted as a gift [on the basis of favor] but as his due.

The Efficacy of Faith

5 And to the one who does not work [to obtain Jewish status] but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is “counted as righteousness,”

6 just as David also speaks [in Psalm 32:1] of the blessing [asher] of the one to whom God “counts” righteousness apart from works:

7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;

8 blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count (chashav) his sin."

Abraham Counted Righteous before Circumcision

9 Is this blessing [asher] then only for the circumcised [Jews and proselytes], or also for the uncircumcised [God-fearing Gentiles]? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.

10 How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after [Abraham’s circumcision], but before he was circumcised [that God counted his faith as righteousness].

11 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he [already] had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose [for receiving circumcision only after he was already counted righteous] was to make him the father of all [the God-fearing Gentiles] who believe without being
circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,
and to make him the father of the [the Jewish people who are] circumcised [and] who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

And the father of the circumcision; father not only to those of the circumcision but also to those who follow in the footsteps of the trust our father Abraham had in a state of uncircumcision. (Lloyd Gaston)

The Promise
For the promise [in Genesis 12:3 and 22:17, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice,” was given] to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world [but this promise] did not come through the law [at Sinai or through legal conversion to be Jewish] but through the righteousness [counted to him because] of faith.
For if it is [merely the Jewish people,] the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null [because it requires no faith to become legally Jewish] and the promise [to bless all nations] is void.
For the law brings wrath [upon the Jewish people because they have specific additional obligations to the covenant and specific punishments and curses for disobedience to those obligations], but where there is no [specific] law [incumbent upon a person] there is no transgression [or punishment].
That is why it [i.e. the promise] depends on faith [rather than being Jewish], in order that the promise may rest on grace [and favor] and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the [Jew or proselyte, the] adherent of the law but also to the one who [merely] shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,
as it is written [in Genesis 17:5], "I have made you the father of many nations"—[the promise was guaranteed to all his offspring] 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.

As Good as Dead
In hope he believed against [any reasonable] hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told [in Genesis 15:5], "So shall your offspring be."
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.

Fully Convinced
No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,
fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.
That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."
But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,
but for ours also. It will [also] be counted to us [both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles] who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,
who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.