

## EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #15

Romans 4:1-8

The issue of how one gets into a right relationship with God is the whole point of Romans.

**In Romans 3:21-31, Paul clearly establishes that a right relationship with God must come through faith and not works.** It is interesting that he did not expect the greatest challenge to that message to come from the heathen Gentile, but from the religious Jew.

So in these verses, Paul selects two major historical figures from Israel's history to prove his point - Abraham and David.

**BEING IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD HAS NEVER BEEN BY WORKS, BUT HAS ALWAYS BEEN BY FAITH.**

Abraham and David are two giants of the faith in Jewish history. Abraham was called a friend of God - II Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23. David was a man after God's own heart - I Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22. So the question Paul tackles here is how exactly did they get into this special relationship with God? Was it by what they did or by what they believed? Was it by works or by faith?

**EVIDENCE #1** – The evidence of Abraham. **4:1-3**

**Way #1** - The discovery of Abraham. **4:1-2**

In Genesis 12:1-3, Abraham is ordered to get out of his land and go to a land God would give him. In Genesis 12:7, God comes to Abraham and says, “This is the land I will give you.” In other words, “Abraham, you are home.” Now in Genesis 12:10-13, Abraham doubts God will provide for him, so he leaves the land God promised to him. He also doubts God will protect him so he makes up a lie about Sarah. He also disbelieves that God will give him a son, so in Genesis 16:3 he commits adultery with Hagar. Well, what do you say? Was Abraham made right with God by his works? There is no possible way. He was a man who doubted and disbelieved God; he was a man who committed adultery and he was a liar.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, said it well - “Abraham found nothing in his works just like we find nothing in ours.”

**Way #2** - The statement of Scripture. **4:3**

The Bible specifically addresses this issue in Genesis 15:6.

Now the context of Genesis 15:6 is crucial to understanding Paul's point.

- 1) Abraham was in the Promised Land (Genesis 13:14-18).
- 2) He was somewhere around 85 years old (Genesis 12:4; 16:16).
- 3) He had no physical heir even though God had promised him one (Genesis 15:2a).
- 4) He thought his slave Eliezer of Damascus would inherit all his promised blessings (Genesis 15:2b).
- 5) God came to Abraham and told him that he would father a son and produce a lineage as vast as the stars (Genesis 15:4-5).

Now here is the main point - Abraham believed what God told him and God counted or calculated that faith for righteousness (Genesis 15:6).

**Saving faith is faith that takes God at His word. Saving faith is faith that causes God to count one, to calculate one as righteous.**

Now, the main question for us is this - What has God said regarding our salvation? Does God tell us we can be saved by our works or does he say we are saved by faith ?

What did Jesus say when He was here: "...whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

What did John the Baptist say: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36).

What did Paul say: "By grace you are saved through faith ; it is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as the result of works , that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

What did Peter say: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ..." (1 Peter 1:5).

**This verb "reckoned" or "credited" is the key word of this chapter.** It is used some 11 times in these 25 verses (vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24). This verb λογίζομαι means to charge something to one's account or to judicially calculate something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 220). We could understand the word "reckon" as being a judicial, mental calculation of God in which He calculates your sin account gone.

Now here is the point. If a person believes on Jesus Christ, God makes a judicial mental calculation that he is righteous. If a person relies upon his own works or upon his own religion , God calculates that one as guilty. Your sin account will never be calculated by God as being gone by your works.

If we look to Scripture and turn to John 8:56 and Galatians 3:16, we will see something amazing. Do you see what Abraham believed? Abraham believed that through his lineage the Messiah and Savior would come. He didn't believe in any baby to save him, he believed in the most magnificent baby who would ever be born. In other words, Abraham believed in Jesus Christ, and at that moment his faith was judicially credited by God for righteousness .

**EVIDENCE #2** – The evidence of Paul . **4:4-5**

Paul was a very logical thinker. Dr. Boice said when we come to **chapter four of Romans** we have two big problems - 1) We like the new better than the old; 2) We dislike rational proofs (*Romans*, Vol. 1, p. 429). Paul draws two rational conclusions to these verses:

**Rational Conclusion #1** - If one is saved by works, he is not saved by grace . **4:4**

If one has to work for salvation, then salvation is nothing more than a wage or paycheck . If a person thinks his works save him, then one is in effect saying to God, You owe me salvation as a payment for my works. Salvation becomes the due wage for a works system.

**Rational Conclusion #2** - If one is saved by calculation, it cannot be by works . **4:5**

This verse became a favorite of Martin Luther and John Calvin and the Protestant Reformers as they fought against the Roman Catholic works system of being right with God.

Paul says - “I’ll carefully explain how this works. If a person does not do any good religious works, but believes on Jesus Christ and believes that by faith in Him God will declare him righteous, that faith is judicially calculated by God as being righteous.”

**It is the Scriptural expectation that one justified will move toward a godly behavior; however justification is not ever determined by good or bad works or by ungodly or godly behavior. We are made righteous in the sight of God by judicial calculation of God the moment one believes on Jesus Christ.** Our works have nothing to do with a judicial calculation of God.

When people wonder if they have enough faith or strong enough faith to actually save them, they have missed the point. You and I are not saved by how we feel or how strong our faith is and we are not saved by our works. We are saved by judicial calculation of God, and any person who believes that Jesus Christ is the only God/Savior who can save one from his/her sins shall be saved, regardless of feelings, level of faith or works.

**EVIDENCE #3** – The evidence of David . **4:6-8**

Paul quotes David from Psalms 32. Most scholars believe this Psalm was written after . his sin with Bathsheba. Here is the essence of the quote: “The one who is in a true blessed relationship with God is the one who has been forgiven by God and the one against whom God will not calculate his sins against him.”

**Now in the Bible there are three great imputations or mental calculations that God makes.**

- 1) God calculates Adam’s sin to all people. I Corinthians 15:21-22; Romans 5:12-22
- 2) God calculates a believer’s sins to Jesus Christ. II Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13
- 3) God calculates Christ’s righteousness to the believer. Romans 3:25-26

What Paul is theologically wrestling with right here in this Davidic quote is this - Is the imputation of righteousness the same as the non-imputation of sin? In other words, at the moment God calculates a person righteous is that the same moment God no longer calculates him as sinful?

The answer to that question is an emphatic - Yes! The imputation of righteousness is the same as the non-imputation of sin. When God calculates one as righteous, He no longer calculates that one as being sinful, deserving His wrath.

Now the question comes, since David had so terribly sinned against God, how could he enter into this great judicial calculation? By faith!

I am so thankful to God that we are saved by His judicial calculation. Because when you see those you love die and they weren't as faithful as you would have liked, or you see your children wander away on paths that are wrong, you may still know with certainty that if they believed, they are saved. And when you spot those low moments in your own life when you don't feel or act in exactly the way a believer ought, you may know you are still God's property. For you see, none of us have ever been saved by our works but by Christ's work.

There is absolutely nothing we can do to save ourselves. But if we will totally rely upon Jesus Christ to save us and take God at His word that by believing on Him we shall be saved, we will be saved. Salvation has always been by faith and not works - just like it was with Abraham and David.