

Romans 4:1-8

“Righteousness; Received Or Worked For?”

Potentially the only downside that I can fathom to teaching through the bible the way we do is the fact that often times due to time constraints we find ourselves closing our time together before the portion of scripture we're studying is finished developing the principle or precept at hand. and So we find ourselves the next week catching back up to the context in order to press and plow on through the particular premise that the Word of God would impart to us. But I suppose the only way to avoid that entirely would be to sit down and go through a book in its entirety.

As we approach ch 4 Paul has been developing the principle of justification through faith alone. He's blown out every other option there may be showing man to be utterly sinful in his own nature therefore there's no way that I can achieve righteousness in my own efforts. Because even my best attempts at righteousness are skewed *by* my sin nature that they're filtered through, and that was why the law was given. To drive the final nail in the coffin of man's audacity in thinking that he could somehow achieve his own righteousness before God. Because a proper understanding of the law simply shows me for the sinner that I am, and once I'm acclimated to that fact, I realize that I'm in a desperate way before God. Because #1 the very core of who I am is tainted/stained by sin, and #2 there's no way that I can somehow do something in order to make right the wrongs that I've committed, be it in my attitude, actions or intent. and So what the law does is get me to look outside of myself for a remedy, once I come to the point that I realize that there's nothing I can do in and of myself to somehow save myself or make myself right before God, I'm open to other options outside of myself. That's where Christ comes in. The bible says, “...*the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*” Gal 3:24 The purpose of the law was to show us in our desperate disposition that we might be driven to Christ. and Once we've come to Christ, the purpose of the law towards us has been established, that's where we left off last week.

That's the premise that Paul has been developing, the fact that we're made righteous in the sight of God by grace through faith. and As you study God's word it seems that for ever NT principle that you find, that there's an OT picture, the principle being displayed in the practical. and One thing that Paul is emphatic about is the fact that this premise of justification through faith is in no way contradictory to the OT law or the prophets. But to the contrary it correlates perfectly when the scriptures are portrayed in their proper context. This isn't some novelty, some new thing that he's come up with, but rather it's a theme that's displayed consistently throughout the totality of the scriptures. Even from the very beginning of who they were as a nation and God's ordaining them to be His own, it was never because of, or by anything they did, but rather it was due to the work that He had done on their behalf and them just believing Him for it.

For the practical picture of the principle at hand Paul journeys all the way back “Exhibit A” to Ab. The very founder of their nation, the one whom God plucked out of Ur of the Chaldeans to make of him the founder, the father of the nation of Israel. and There’s a # of reasons that Paul selected Ab no doubt, as I said God selected him to be the originator of the nation of Israel so it seems only right to study *his* relationship to God. I mean if he was acceptable in the sight of God, and he’s the spearhead of the nation, than we do well to see how it was, or on what basis that God accepted him.

Outside of that he lived around 2,000 yrs before Paul wrote this letter so Paul was demonstrating the fact that salvation, or righteousness through faith rather than by works is nothing new Judaism, to the contrary the very foundation is laid on it. and To ice the cake you have to realize that Ab lived about ½ a millennium before the law was ever given, so how could he be saved by the works of the law? and Ab is such a supreme example because the Jews prided themselves immensely on the mere fact that they were the lineage and offspring of Ab. Because though there may’ve been confusion as to the facts, the 1 fact *they all* agreed on is that Ab was the scriptures supreme example of a godly, righteous man who was acceptable to the Lord. (Notice)

Vs1-3

Well, that kinda hammers home the point doesn’t it? But back in vs 1 Paul is in essence saying, “Since we all agree that Ab is the quintessential example of a man justified in the sight of God, lets see what *his* life has to say about the issue. What did Ab discover about being righteous in sight of God?” and This phrase, “According to the flesh” could modify “Ab our father” or the verb “has found.” In other words Paul could be simply referring to Ab as their patriarchal physical forefather, or he could be specifically referencing this idea of Ab discovering the fact for himself of by what basis God justifies an individual. “What did he find out about righteousness according to the flesh, or on the basis of what I do and don’t do?”

Vs2

He’s setting the stage, if a man could be justified on the basis of doing *this*, or perhaps not doing *that*, than he would have something to boast in. Ab could be all, “I left Ur, I traveled with out direction as a sojourner, left my extended family (well most of them, brought my dad and my nephew) gave up everything, all my security, was even willing to offer up my own son, I’m a righteous man.” But God’s not going to have that, “Not before God” God’s not going to allow that kind of thing, why? Well, #1 Ab may be able to boast in himself, but just as sure as he did some incredible things, he blew life a lot too. Yeah he left most of his family, but God had told him to go alone, just him and his wife, he didn’t do that, so right off the bat he disobeyed. Yeah he journeyed as a stranger in an uncertain land, but when confronted with the Egyptians (where he wasn’t supposed to go in the 1st place) he willfully gave up Sarai to be a part of the Pharaoh’s harem, even told her to lie to him and tell him that she was his sister. (Now God protected her and worked it all out,) but the point is that the only boasting he could do would be through his own perverted perspective of self-exaltation, but not before God because God knew the truth of it all.

We have this tendency to often times see ourselves in a better light than what the truth would reveal, the problem is that God deals in truth, so there's just no boasting before Him. But then also #2, God won't have any of that because inadvertently or not, the fact is that when we boast in ourselves (hear me on this) we eclipse/or overshadow the glory of God and the work of Jesus Christ on the cross by taking credit unto ourselves rather than placing it on Christ where it rightfully belongs. Or to understand that another way, if what I do or don't do could make me right before God, than why did Jesus even come? So when I begin to place the emphasis on my own works, than I begin to take the emphasis *off* the work of Christ on my behalf. Or as Paul put it in the book of Galatians, "*I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.*" Gal 2:21

You no doubt recall that scene in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before Jesus' crucifixion, He's there praying to the Father, on His face before God, so stressed out that He's sweating drops of blood. and He says, "*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*" Matt 26:39 Translation: "If there's another way that man can be saved outside of the cross, let's go that route."

"Be it through keeping the law *outwardly*, being a good person *basically*, going through ascetic religious rituals *regularly*, or any other thing, than don't lay the sin of the world on Me, don't separate Yourself from Me." But as we all know Jesus went to the cross, that was the Father's answer; that there's no other way. That no man can come to the Father but through Christ. So when I begin to boast in what I do, it takes the focus and the praise off of what Christ has done, and God will share His glory with no man, the bible puts it like this, "...*God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" Gal 6:14 You see to *Him* belongs the glory, the honor and the praise, not to you, or to me, some work of our flesh.

Vs3

Now this whole vs could be underlined in your bible, but I want you to make sure that you draw attention to at least the 1st question in this vs, "For what does the *Scripture* say?" If people would tune in, and pay attention to that 99% of their doctrinal confusion would disappear, and a good chunk of our personal problems would be taken care of. I mean some things just happen because we live in a fallen sin infested world. But there's a significant percentage of issues we get ourselves into because either A) we don't know what the bible says, or B) we know what the bible says we just choose not to do it. But how many people place credence in what their pastor says, or what some religious guru says, or perhaps what they heard on TBN or whatever. Listen, you don't care what I say (well I hope you care what I say, but you understand what I'm trying to say), you don't care what some guru has to say, what the televangelist has to say on TBN, what you care about is, "What does the *Scripture* say?" I can't tell you the # of people who are so persuaded on certain doctrinal positions because that's what they've always been taught growing up, that's what their church has always said.

There's just a blind sense of trust that because some guy stands behind a pulpit, "He must be the authority, or know more than I do so I'll take his word for it." Don't take his word for it, search it out for yourself, see for yourself what the Scripture says, because it's amazing the spiritual gobbledygook that people teach that Scripture doesn't say. How many times I've heard, "You should talk with my pastor" because when I'm speaking to someone about a question they have, I tell them what I believe and show them the scripture (in it's context) to support it and when they're challenged to do the same, they can't. You know why, because support for their position doesn't exist, the Scripture doesn't say it. So they're all, "Well, you should talk to my pastor because I know it's there." I don't want to talk to your pastor; I want you to search the scriptures for yourself. Don't just assume that because it comes out of my mouth it's always 100% on the money. Will I ever knowingly steer you wrong? Absolutely not, but I'm not impervious to error. Remember the testimony given to the Bereans? "...*they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*" Acts 17:11 In other words they'd listen to Paul preach, then they'd go home and see if the bible really supported his exposition. Now if the apostle Paul was subjected to a healthy sense of skepticism, how much more should you guys be making sure some guy like me, or some tele-evangelist or whoever it is that's sharing God's word with you is telling you the accurate truth?

What does the Scripture say? "Ab *believed* God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." That's a quote from Gen 15:6 after God promised Ab he'd have a son and that his descendants would be as innumerable as the stars in the sky. But it's very direct, it nowhere, or in no way shape or form ever even alludes to the fact that Ab did something that caused God to credit him with righteousness. Ab *believed* God, and *it*, (what), his belief, or faith was accounted to him for righteousness.

Even at that it wasn't a perfect faith, it had plenty of flaws, so but God in His grace accounted to him for righteousness. That term "accounted" is a legal term meaning "to credit." It other words we're all born in the debit side of the ledger, we're not even on zero as so many would like to think. But God in His mercy takes the imperfect faith that we place in Him and in the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf and by that not only zeros our account, but actually places us in the plus side with respect to righteousness, we now have a credit drawn out of the account of the righteousness of Christ. What makes that transaction? Faith, remember we spoke of this last week, faith in and of itself can't save me, the bible says no where that faith saves, the bible is very clear that it's by the *grace of God* that we're saved, faith is just the "vessel" (if you will) through which the saving grace of God flows into my life. You see Ab placed his confidence in the word of God, the promise of God for His life, it wasn't perfect faith, it was flawed, it wasn't the greatness of his faith that saved him, it was the greatness of God and His redeeming grace that saved him.

The object of our faith is critical, I can trust in my church attendance all day long, it'll never save me, or my baptism, or the fact that I tithe, none of those things will save me. But to place my faith in Jesus Christ and the power of His redeeming grace is an altogether different story. So we understand that faith is never the reason, or the basis of my justification before God, it's simply a *channel* through which the redeeming grace of God flows, so it's absolutely essential that my faith be tapped into the right resource, i.e. the person of Jesus Christ that His saving grace might flow into my life and His robe of righteousness might *cover* my life.

Now there's one other thing we should see here real quick, notice that when you believe God, not in the sense that you believe God exists, that Jesus lived just like Ab Lincoln lived. But that you truly trust *in* Him and resolve to surrender all that you are *before* Him for the salvation of your soul, that God counts you, or imputes to you, or reckons you as righteous. It does not say that you now *are* righteous. Here's what I'm trying to say, Ab was counted as righteous, but he was flawless from that point forward in the flesh, you're *counted* righteous, not *made* righteous, we touched on this last week, 1 is positional, the other is practical. Positionally in Christ, the moment you receive Him, you're righteous in the sight of God, He looks at you and sees the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ robing you. But practically He's working that righteousness into you day by day, little by little, transforming from glory to glory into the image of Jesus Christ and It will culminate on that day when you see Him face to face, the bible puts it like this, "*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*" 1 John 3:2 When you see Him you will be like Him, but until then you're a work in progress.

So Ab didn't do any spectacular work to somehow cause God to account that to him for righteousness, but rather he merely believed the Word of God, by faith and God reckoned that as righteousness on his behalf. and Obviously the point that Paul is driving home is that God is the same yesterday, today and forever, the way you were reckoned as righteous then, is the same way you're reckoned as righteous now.

Vs4

See these mutually exclusive terms that Paul is using, we're talking about "work and wage" vs "grace and gift" it can't happen both ways. and The idea here is that if you could work for salvation, it wouldn't be God's gracious gift to you, it'd be a debt that He *owed* to you. The audacity of man to actually think we could place the only Righteous Sovereign Creator God into *our* debt. "I've done all this God, now You *owe* me."

How many of you work all week, then expect nothing in return, and when your pay check shows up you say to your boss, "How gracious of you, I wasn't expecting anything, you don't owe me a thing, what a precious gift!" You don't do that, you've worked, you demand a wage, now if he slapped a big fat bonus on top for no reason at all, that part would be grace, a precious gift, but anything less than that, you've worked for, he owes you.

Well man likes to take this same mindset with God, but the bible makes clear that God will be a debtor to no man, the only thing God rightfully owes us is an eternity in hell, that's the only wage we've earned. Because the bible says, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Rom 6:23 You see, "The gift of God, the grace of God" is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, not giving us what we deserve, but being gracious instead in Christ. Is faith required for salvation? Yes, Does faith in itself have the power to save? No, it's not of works lest we should boast and eclipse the glory of God by placing focus attention and praise on ourselves.

Vs5

In other words if you don't try to earn God's favor, but simply/humbly receive His favor through faith in Christ, He will consider that and accredit *your* faith for righteousness just like He did for Ab. He'll take *imperfect* faith from you and exchange that for a *perfect* righteousness from Him.

But what I want you to see in this vs is the type of person God justifies, "The ungodly" did you see that there? So here's the great news, if you're an ungodly person, you serve as the perfect candidate for salvation, because that's the type of person whom God justifies. Remember Jesus said, "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*" Matt 9:12 He went on to say, "*For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*" Matt 9:13 Why? Is it because those who are righteous have no need? No, it's because there are none who are righteous, there are none who are godly. So it's not that God favors the ungodly over the godly, as though He's all, "Oh look someone ungodly yippee I can justify Him." No, it's not because of our ungodliness, its despite our ungodliness that He justifies us. Even Ab himself he wasn't a godly man therefore God justified him, he was an ungodly pagan idolater that God sovereignly by His own wisdom and foreknowledge chose to draw to Himself. We read in Joshua 24, "*Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.'*" Josh 24:2-3

Translation, "There was nothing in the family of Ab that caused Me to lead *him* out as opposed to anyone else as far as some sort of personal righteousness they had that others didn't." His family was steeped in idolatry, we don't read anywhere that he was some how or in some way seeking after God. God just selected him, revealed Himself to him, and was gracious unto him, archaeologists have discovered that Ur of Chaldea was populated by perhaps as many as 300,000 people during the time of Ab, they were a polytheistic society serving several gods, primarily the moon god.

But nowhere does the scripture give a reason for which God selected Ab, it was just the resolve of His own divine will, we serve a God who justifies the ungodly, how does He do it?

By grace through faith as we believe His Word, that Jesus died on the cross for you, laid down His life in sacrificial atonement for your sin, and through faith in Him you can receive the forgiveness of sin and the blessing of everlasting life. The question is do you believe His word toward *you*, the promise He's extended to *you*. Ab believed, and it was accounted to Him for righteousness.

But it wasn't only Ab, Paul now substantiates his claims regarding Ab by pulling out of the scriptures another highly esteemed patriarch of the OT, David, the greatest king Israel ever knew.

Vs6-8

To the nth degree, because the one to whom God doesn't impute sin, the one who's lawless deeds are forgiven is what? Saved, righteous in the sight of God, this is in essence saying that salvation is the blessing of forgiveness through faith, no wonder "By faith" forgiveness is such a blessing. The word "Blessed" just doesn't seem to capture it does it? I don't think there is a word that can capture the essence of understanding what it means to be forgiven by God, I suppose "Blessed" works as well as any other.

But David knew what it was like to transgress, to be under the weight of such crushing conviction that sin brings into our lives, and how it just quantifies when we try to cover it up. As you read on in that Ps it says, "*When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.*" Ps 32:3-5 Of course John said, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" 1 John 1:9 As you read Ps 51 that Ps that David wrote shortly after he was confronted regarding his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, it's just as clear there that justification in the sight of God doesn't come by obedience to the law, let's look quickly at Ps 51. (Vs1-17)

This is a guy that's looking for grace, who readily acknowledges that the cleansing of his heart comes not by the keeping of the law, or doing some right on work to make up for it, but solely by the lovingkindness, and multitude of tender mercies from God, from being washed by *Him* cleansed by *Him*, that a new heart comes from *Him* and His grace poured out upon our lives. So David readily agrees with Ab that righteousness, forgiveness, justification before God is something that's imputed, it's a grace that's given, not a wage that's worked for. So be it before the law, or during the law, or after Christ came and fulfilled the law, it's always been the same, righteousness is and always has been *received* through faith, not a wage given that's worked for.

Oh the blessing of having our lawless deeds forgiven, of having the Lord not impute sin to our account. He imputed our sin upon Christ, that He might impute Christ's righteousness upon us. If you haven't received the blessing of the forgiveness of sin, of being robed in the

righteousness of Christ, not because you deserve it, but because of the tender mercies and grace of God, do that today, enter into the blessing of righteousness received through faith.

Prayer Points:

God we're so thankful for Your grace, that we don't have to do anything to earn Your righteousness, but that all we can do is humbly receive Your righteousness through faith. God increase our faith, help to not take attention *off* of You, by trying to glory in any other thing *apart* from You.

Today if you want to discover the blessing of God's forgiveness, there's no better time than right now, let God bless your life through the forgiveness of sin and the accrediting of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to your account. Your faith won't save you, but if you place your faith in Christ, He'll save you that's for sure. The bible says that if any man be in Christ he's a new creation, old thing pass away behold all thing are made new. Clean slate, purged of sin, purified before God, doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done, God loves you, wants to forgive you, but you have to let Him, He won't force the issue. Why not surrender to Jesus today?

