

God's Way of Salvation is Not a New Way

Romans 4:1-8

Romans 4:1-8 - *"What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?"² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.*

⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,⁶ just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

⁷ "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,

And whose sins are covered;

⁸ Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

Background Notes

The Epistle to the Romans not only proclaims the gospel, God's good news of salvation for mankind, but it also explains the gospel. If anyone ever asked you, "How can a holy God save unholy people?" your answer should be: "Read the book of Romans!" Romans is a systematic presentation of God's plan of salvation for people who are sinners, and that includes everyone!

First Paul showed that all the world is guilty before God and deserving of eternal separation from God. That's the content of the first 2 1/2 chapters of Romans. Then God's wonderful plan of salvation for the human race is presented at the end of Romans 3. What is that plan? The plan is doesn't require God to lower His standards, and the plan doesn't require God to sweep sin under the rug! God's plan for the salvation of sinful mankind is that **God Himself** would pay the penalty for the sins of the world -- and God, in His grace, did just that. He did that when the Lord Jesus, God's only Son, died on the Cross at Calvary. Now all we have to do is believe, by faith alone, because salvation is a gift from God. We don't earn it, but we receive it by faith, trusting in the Lord Jesus as personal Savior.

Now the first logical question might be raised by readers of Romans (in the first century and today) is, "Wait a minute! What about the Old Testament believers? What about the people who kept the Law of Moses? Has God changed His way of salvation?" What is the answer here? No, God has not changed His way of salvation. God's way of salvation has always been the same – **by grace through faith**, even in the Old Testament. God's grace and man's faith in this God of grace. In order to prove his point, Paul used two Old Testament believers as illustrations, or examples, or "exhibits," as in a court of law. The two Old testament examples are Abraham and David.

Doctrinal Points

1. Abraham was justified by grace through faith.

Do you remember what the word **justified** means? It means to be **declared righteous**. Now look at verse 3: "*For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."* This verse quotes from Genesis 15:6. So even Abraham, the great Old Testament man of God who was chosen by God to be the father of the Jewish people -- even Abraham was not justified by his works. He was justified, by God's grace, through faith alone.

Look look at verse 2: "*For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.*" Do you see the point here? If a person is saved by works, or even partly by works, then that person would have something to boast about -- "Look at me! Look at what I did for God!" However, mankind will have absolutely no opportunity for boasting for God, because salvation is by grace alone. Listen to those well-known verses, Ephesians 2:8-9: "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*"

Now look at Romans 4:4: "*Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.*" Do you see the point here? If good works are involved in salvation, then earnings and wages are involved -- and if wages are involved, then salvation can't be by grace alone! Grace is God's **unmerited** and **unearned** favor towards mankind.

Here's an illustration. Suppose you take a job and you work for a week for a certain payment -- not an hourly wage, but a set payment for the week. At the end of the week, your boss pays you ten thousand dollars (you should be so lucky!!). Now is that grace, or is it a wage? (Careful now!) Answer: It's a wage! It's a very generous wage, but it is still a wage. Why? Because you **worked**. Your boss is "in debt" to you until he or she pays you something.

To take this illustration farther -- suppose you're in debt and you have no money to pay the debt, and you can't work -- yet you're still given ten thousand dollars! That would be grace. Now suppose that you're not only in debt, have nothing to pay, you can't work, you don't even qualify for the job and you have no chance of getting qualified -- and yet the boss still gives you ten thousand dollars! You deserve nothing and yet you're given everything! That's amazing grace!

Look at verse 5: "*But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness...*" Those who are justified are the ungodly, and all of us are ungodly! Everyone who is justified by God and declared to be righteous must come to that point. We must realize that, before a holy God, we are ungodly and **we don't qualify in any way** for salvation. When we realize this, God can save us by His grace alone, without our salvation being distorted and contaminated by human works.

So Abraham was justified by grace through faith. But here's another question: Does Romans 4 contradict James 2:21, which says, *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?”* That sure sounds like a contradiction, doesn't it? But it can't be a contradiction, because Scripture doesn't contradict itself! So how do we harmonize this? Answer: James was speaking of the **evidence of Abraham's faith**. Abraham was declared righteous by God in Genesis 15, many years before taking Isaac to the place of sacrifice in Genesis 22. Abraham's **works** then showed that he had the **right kind of faith**. His works of obedience **proved the reality** of his faith. James 2:23 says, *“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God.”* So Abraham was justified by grace through faith, and not by works.

2. David was justified by grace through faith.

Now Paul turns to his second example from the Old Testament – King David. At least three things are significant about his use of David as an example.

a. King David, the great king of Israel, was handpicked by God -- but even King David was saved by grace through faith alone.

b. David lived after the Law had been given. Abraham came before the Law, so someone might say, "Well, the reason Paul used Abraham as an example is that people who lived before the Law were an exception." No! God says there are no exceptions, before the Law or after the Law. Abraham lived before the Law was given, and David after the Law was given. God's way of salvation has always been the same – by grace through faith alone.

c. David had committed sins that were punishable by death under the Law, and yet David was declared righteous. He certainly wasn't declared righteous because of his works! How then was David justified, or declared righteous? Answer: by God's grace, through faith alone. Look at verses 6-8 again: *“just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered...”*

Here Paul quoted from Psalm 32, a psalm that David wrote **after** his sins of adultery and murder: *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.”* David was justified by grace through faith.

Practical Application

Remember, righteous means righteous!

Last week I had lunch with a man who recently became a true believer, so I was doing a little discipling and explaining all that was involved in the concept of justification. I told him that when he became a Christian he was not only forgiven for his sins, but he was justified – that is he was **declared righteous**. I told him that he was now just as righteous as St. Paul! He looked at me, his eyes got big, and he exclaimed, “**Really?!**” Yes, really! And that is true of every believer -- we're as righteous as St. Paul!

Although we still sin in practice, our **status** in God's "account book" is "Righteous." We've been justified -- we've been declared righteous. How righteous is righteous? Righteous is **righteous** -- 100%! Notice how David put it in verses 6-8: David describes the joy of the person to whom God imputes righteousness, apart from works. “*Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.*”

Do you see what's involved here? **All** sin is removed from the believer's charge account and put on Christ's account! No longer is sin imputed to us. Our Lord took our sin upon Himself at the cross, and now on our charge account, no longer do we find sin -- our account is stamped "Righteous"! When we trust the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation, God imputes, or puts on our account, **righteousness** -- apart from our works, apart from anything we could do to earn it. Remember, righteous means righteous.