

### Salvation is Apart from Any Rituals and Rules

#### Romans 4:9-15

Romans 4:9-15 - *“Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. <sup>10</sup> How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. <sup>11</sup> And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, <sup>12</sup> and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. <sup>13</sup> For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, <sup>15</sup> because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.”*

#### Background Notes

The first three chapters of Romans clearly show that God doesn't owe salvation to anyone. The whole human race is guilty before God. Romans 3:23, a well known verse, says that we **all** have sinned and and we **all** fall far short of God's standard of perfection. But God, in His amazing grace, has made salvation possible for us, not by lowering His standards (because He **must** be just), and not by some combination of God's grace and human good works (no way!). Human works can't earn salvation, because then salvation would not be by God's grace alone. To be 100% pure grace, there can't be good works involved, or salvation is partly earned. Salvation is a **gift** from God; it is **not earned in any way**.

Furthermore, if salvation were partly earned by human good works, then people would boast. “I got to heaven by being a faithful husband and a good family man” or “I got to heaven by being a good mother, and not yelling at my kids all the time!” or “I got to heaven by helping in all the good and worthy humanitarian projects.” (On and on we could go here!)

So good works have **no** part in salvation. Good works are good, and they can give evidence of salvation, but they're not the **means** of salvation. **The means of salvation is faith** -- faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for all of our sins, and all of our ungodliness, and all of our unrighteousness. Now God can declare us righteous, if and when we believe in Jesus. Thus, God remains just, as well as being the Justifier of those people who believe in Jesus. Look at Romans 3:26: *“to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”* So that is God's plan of salvation, and it's God's **only** way of salvation.

In Romans 4 we learn that God's way of salvation is the same in the Old Testament as it is in the New Testament – by grace through faith alone. We have seen two leading figures from the Old Testament who are used as examples – Abraham and David. Now in verses 9-15, the apostle Paul answers another possible question that might arise concerning God's way of salvation.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Justification is not by religious rites.

At this point in Paul's argument for God's way of salvation, someone might say, "Well, Paul, you certainly proved your point – justification is by grace through faith alone. And you have certainly shown by your examples of Abraham and David that this was God's way of salvation even in Old Testament times, whether it was before the law or after the law. But you must admit, Paul, that both Abraham and David were Jews! They had the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, they were circumcised, they were the chosen people, so they were in a place of privilege. So Paul, it looks like God's grace is not **pure** grace after all. Doesn't it favor the Jews over the Gentiles, the circumcised over the uncircumcised?"

What would Paul's answer be to this question? "No way! God doesn't favor the Jews over the Gentiles when it comes to the way of salvation. When was Abraham declared righteous --after he was circumcised, or before he was circumcised? Clearly, it was **before** he was circumcised. In fact, in Genesis 15:6 Abraham was declared righteous at least fourteen years before Genesis 17, when Abraham underwent the Jewish ritual of circumcision. So justification has **nothing** to do with the privilege of being a Jew, or having undergone the Jewish rite (ritual) of circumcision."

Look once again at verses 10-12: *"How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised."*

Do you see the point? Abraham is the spiritual father of **all** the faithful, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Justification is not based on any religious rite like circumcision, as if that puts you into a special privileged class. Justification is by means of faith, regardless of place, privilege, or religious rite.

Let's apply this for today. Some people think that they're Christians and they're going to heaven because they have undergone a specific religious rite -- like baptism, for example. Nothing could be further from the truth. Baptism is good, but it does **not** save a person. Paul clearly distinguished between baptism and the gospel, or salvation, in 1 Corinthians 1:17. *"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...."* (People who believe that baptism is necessary for salvation have a tough time with this verse.) Baptism follows salvation in the life of an obedient believer, but it is **not**

**necessary for salvation.** Justification is not by baptism -- or by any other religious rite. Justification is not by religious rites.

## **2. Justification is not by religious rules.**

Verses 13-15: *"For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression."* Paul anticipated that the question of the Law would be brought in again. Back in Romans 3:28 he made the emphatic statement that a man is justified by faith **apart from the deeds of the Law**. So the point here in Romans 4:13-15 is that Abraham came before the law, and therefore God's promises to Abraham could not possibly be based on Abraham keeping the Law, or even the privilege of having the Law.

Furthermore, if you bring in the Law as far as justification goes, you have problems. The problems are:

a. Faith is made void: *"For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect..."* (v14). If you put justification on the basis of having and keeping the Law, then out the window goes any idea of faith in the promise of God -- because faith in the promise and law-keeping don't mix. It is either promise or rules -- you can't have both.

b. The law brings about wrath. *"because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression"*(v15). As long as there is no Law, there is no transgression. Once you have the Law, there are consequences to breaking it. So while it was a privilege for the Jews to have the Law, it certainly wasn't a factor in Abraham's justification -- or anyone else's justification! Abraham's justification came through his faith in God. Verse 13: *"Abraham believed the promise of God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.* Verse 9, once again: *"For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness."* Abraham believed the promises of God and God accounted that to him for righteousness.

We are not justified by keeping religious rules -- not by making rules, or having rules, or trying to keep the rules. God doesn't justify people because they religiously go to church every Sunday. God doesn't justify people because they pray every day. God doesn't justify people because they read the Bible every day. God justifies people by grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Justification is not by religious rules.

## Practical Application

### Remember the initials "BMOC."

I don't know whether those initials mean anything to you, but back when I was a student at Rutgers University they meant "Big Man On Campus"! Our application today has nothing to do with being a Big Man On Campus. The application has to do with God's way of salvation, but these four letters have helped me to remember the four points about God's way of salvation.

**B – The Basis of salvation:** God's **basis** for man's salvation has always been the same -- the finished work of Christ at Calvary! It was on this same basis that people were saved in Old Testament times, or New Testament times, or are saved today. Yes, the Lord Jesus died in history, but God is not bound by time. The basis of salvation has always been the same: the finished work of Christ.

**M – The Means of Salvation:** God's **means** of salvation has always been the same throughout human history. We are saved by the grace of God, through faith alone.

**O – The Object of faith:** The **object** of man's faith has always been the same -- the one true God, the God of the Bible.

**C – The Content of faith –** The **content** of man's faith has **not** always been the same, however. The content of faith at any time is what God has revealed at that time. The content of faith in New Testament times is certainly more than what it was in Old Testament times. The Lord Jesus Christ has come, gone to the Cross and died, rose from the dead, ascended, and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed. Today there is much more content to what God has revealed and done in history than there was in Old Testament times.

So the content of faith at any time is what God has revealed. When a person responds in faith and believes what the true God has revealed, then that person is saved. That's why Genesis 15:6 is quoted here in Romans 4. Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness. What did Abraham believe? It certainly wasn't the information or content that we have now, but he believed all that the one true God had revealed to him, and God accounted that faith to him for righteousness.

So maybe these initials will be helpful for you to remember these four great points about God's way of salvation. Remember the initials, **BMOC**.