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Romans

For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Romans 4:3

Paul returns to Scripture - to the Old Testament - in order to prove his just-made statement. If Abraham was justified by works, then he would have something to boast about, but not before God. The verse Paul selects is Genesis 15:6 and the timing of the occurrence in Abraham's life is as important as the words used. When taken in context and analyzed properly, today's verse disproves the Calvinist doctrine of regeneration and it also shows that "faith" is not a work it all.

The previous verse said, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God." It is clear then that what is stated in today's verse, "Abraham believed God..." is not a work. Paul began with "for" to demonstrate this. He is placing "works" and "belief (or faith)" in opposition to each other; therefore "faith" cannot be considered as "work."

Quoting the noted Bible scholar Albert Barnes, "Faith is uniformly an act of the mind. It is not a created essence which is placed within the mind. It is not a substance created independently of the soul, and placed within it by almighty power. It is not a principle, for the expression a principle of faith, is as unmeaningful as a principle of joy, or a principle of sorrow, or a principle of remorse. God promises; the man believes; and this is the whole of it."

As Barnes notes, "It is not a created essence which is placed within the mind." In substantiation of this, Barnes reviewed every passage on which the corresponding Hebrew word was used in the Old Testament, and then again every corresponding time the Greek was used in the New Testament. His conclusion was that "there is not one in which the word is used in the sense of reckoning or imputing to a man what does not strictly belong to him; or of charging on him what ought not to be charged on him as a matter of personal right."

This completely and entirely demonstrates that the doctrine of regeneration as submitted by Calvinism is wrong. Faith, which comes from within the man, results in justification. A man is not "regenerated" first in order to believe, as if God were injecting man with something externally in order for the act to occur. Further, to demonstrate that "faith" is not a "work" we can contemplate the following argument -

1) Deeds of the law, or works, do not lead to justification (as noted in Romans 3:28).

2a) "Faith" is not something required within the context of the law. The law is of works and demands perfect obedience (Romans 3:19, 20 & Galatians 3:11).

2b) But by faith a person is justified and declared righteous (Romans 3:28, Galatians 3:24)

3) Therefore, because the law demands works, and faith is not a requirement under the law, then faith cannot be a work; it is something entirely different.

It is completely evident, fully supportable, and biblically correct to note from this one verse that 1) belief is an act of the free will of man; 2) it is not placed in man

through a nebulous process of being "regenerated to believe" by which he then believes; and that 3) this faith is in no way considered a work.

Therefore, the truth of Scripture indicates, from the first pages of Genesis, that man has been granted free will and that He must exercise that gift in faith. Further that this faith must be properly directed and in line with the revealed light which God has provided.

Now to address the second issue of today's verse - the timing of God's declaration. Genesis 15:6, which today's verse from Romans cites, occurred several chapters and many years before the sign of circumcision. Circumcision was mandated in Genesis 17 when Abraham was 99 years old and when Ishmael was 13. However, Genesis 15 was prior to the conception and birth of Ishmael. Therefore, the declaration of righteousness was at least 14 years earlier, possibly more. Further, Abraham's offering of Isaac in Genesis 22 and which is noted in James 2 came many long years after that.

Because Abraham's faith was credited to righteousness prior to either of these acts, then neither of them can have any bearing at all upon his declaration of justification.

Life application: When reading the Bible, make sure you take time to stop and think through why ideas and concepts are introduced. God is revealing His light to us and to quickly pass over what is being said will cause you to miss the point of the passage. And be careful to not rely too heavily on commentaries. Reading them is fine, but be sure to compare them with what God has laid out, when they conflict with the word, they need to be disregarded.

Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

Romans 4:4

Paul now brings up the subject of wages. When a person goes to work in a job as an employee, it is under the premise that he will receive payment for his efforts and that the pay will be comparable to his level of output, skill, knowledge, etc. Some people may work for their food and a place to sleep, some may work for currency, some may work for a precious metal like gold, etc. The first time "wages" are mentioned in Scripture it was work in exchange for a bride -

"Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?'" ... "Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, 'I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.'" Genesis 29:15 & 18

An agreement was made and the wage was paid based on the work performed (with a little cunning on the part of Laban...)

The concept of earning something for accomplishing deeds is found throughout Scripture and it is found throughout human history. The word for "work" in today's passage indicates the doing of something by which something else will result. The word for "wages" is translated exactly as noted, wages. It is dues paid for working. The word for "counted" is also well chosen. It is to reckon, impute, or account. And the word for "grace," which is found throughout the New Testament speaks of unmerited favor; it is "getting what one doesn't deserve." Finally, "debt" is something that is due - either for the sake of what is just or what is legally necessary; something is owed.

Taking all of these words and considering them from what Paul has been teaching us, there is a contrast between working to receive wages and demonstrating faith in order to obtain grace. A person who attempts to be justified by deeds of the law feels that God somehow owes him and that he has merited good standing in His presence; his salvation is earned. On the other hand, a person who understands that God's grace cannot be earned places his trust completely and

entirely in the hands of God, knowing that what he deserves is condemnation, but what he seeks is God's pardon.

This is the contrast between the two - 1) Wages - The law looks to a trial based on merit. The trial will be perfectly fair and it will lead to condemnation. 2) Grace - Faith in Jesus seeks God's favor through the work of another and the receiving of a pardon based on His accomplishments.

Life application: The choice is given to all - will we attempt to merit God's favor by our own works, or will we place our trust in the work of Jesus? The biblical record stands - Jesus fulfilled the law on our behalf if we are willing to accept it. Either way we will be judged by the same standard - it will be fair and it will either condemn us or justify us. Choose wisely. Choose Jesus.

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,... Romans 4:5

This is the amazing truth of the gospel revealed in its glory. The ungodly, the sinner, is justified by faith, not by works. This takes us back to Romans 3:31. Jesus fulfilled the law for us, and therefore when we place our trust in Him and what He did, we establish the law by faith. The righteous requirements of the law are met in Him and His righteousness is imputed to us through faith in that.

This brings us to an important concept though. If we attempt to be justified through works of the law and fail at them, then of course we can never be justified. But just as important is an attempt to be justified by deeds not recorded in the law - trusting in our own law.

If we attempt to establish our own righteous standards by adding to God's word, then we are guilty of exactly that - adding to the word of God. This is what Jesus

condemned when addressing the scribes and Pharisees. He repeatedly makes a distinction between the Word of God and the traditions of men -

"Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

'This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.
And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.”

He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.” Mark 7:6-9

As God's word is truth, and because God is love, then the proper proclamation of God's word, no matter how painful or cutting, is a loving action. It establishes the law of God. Truth and love are not at war with each other, they compliment each other. This is why properly handling the message of Christ is so important. When we attempt to be justified by our own deeds, we actually set aside the grace of God. When we teach others to do so, we bring condemnation, not salvation, to those who follow suit; it is the most unloving action imaginable.

God justifies the ungodly by faith. It is counted to them for righteousness. Let us believe this truth and not attempt establish our own righteousness before Him.

Life application: It is either the Bible or the teachings of man which brings salvation; the two are incompatible with each other. In our walk we must decide who we will follow and why. Let us never fail to stand on God's word alone lest we be found to have fallen short of His grace.

...just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: Romans 4:6

Today precedes two verses which form a quote from the 32nd Psalm. In this quote Paul will show how "David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works." In other words, in a masterful insight into the heart of the doctrine of justification by faith, Paul will go to David, a man under the law, to show how righteousness is attained. It is by imputation from God "apart from works."

Not only was David a man under the law, but he was also the King of Israel and the one through whom the promise of the Messiah would come (2 Samuel 7:12-16). If anyone had a reason to boast before the Lord, it would certainly be David. As the author of a large portion of the Psalms and the one who received the instructions for the building of the temple directly from Lord (1 Chronicles 28:19), David had an intimate relationship with God. He had a grasp of the intent and the purpose of the law and it is apparent through his words that he knew that the righteousness of God came not from the law itself, but from the One who gave the law in the first place.

How could David know this? Because the law not only promised life to the one who lived by it (Leviticus 18:5), but it also promised punishment and death for those who failed to do so. And David, this great and noted king, failed. When he was faced with his own sin, which under the law was worthy of death, God's prophet spoke these words to him, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

The Lord's mercy was bestowed upon David apart from the law. David thus deduced that if this occurred, then God's other divine attributes were also to be realized in our relationship with Him only apart from the law. The law then must have had another purpose than to bring man into a right relationship with God.

Although David didn't have a full comprehension of the work of the Messiah, he did understand the blessedness of man who received God's righteousness apart from the law.

In the book of Galatians, Paul will show that the law was a tutor to lead us to Christ "that we might be justified by faith." Somehow, in his ponderings of the work of God, David understood this, even if in a limited way. The quotes Paul uses from David's hand will clearly show this.

Life application: God authored the law which is finite in its scope and so it cannot be the full extent of our relationship with Him. However, it is eternal in its purpose; it must be fulfilled, and yet we cannot fulfill it. Therefore, the righteousness of God must come to us apart from our deeds under the law. It must come from Jesus who embodies the perfection of it. In Him alone can our righteousness be found. Be sure to give God the glory for doing through Jesus what we could never do.

**Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
And whose sins are covered;** Romans 4:7

This is the first half of Paul's quote from the 32nd Psalm. Paul, citing David, shows the state of blessedness or happiness of those who are forgiven of their misdeeds. Paul changes the quote from singular to plural. David's original words said, "Blessed is he whose..." This thought then covers all who are included - male and female, Jew and gentile.

In the forgiveness of lawlessness and the covering of sin, a person stands justified and free from guilt even though the offense(s) actually occurred. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and was responsible for the death of Uriah. Moving forward in time means that these actions cannot be undone. What has

occurred is over. A finite crime thus infinitely separates man from an infinite Creator; we can never undo our deeds.

But God, the Creator of time, has the ability to do what we cannot. Thus it is the truly blessed person who obtains access to this infinite fountain of grace and mercy. When forgiveness occurs, the sins are "covered." They can never be seen again. The Bible repeatedly confirms this -

As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103:12

You will cast all our sins
Into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:19

For You have cast all my sins behind Your back. Isaiah 38:17

These and other metaphors are intended to show the complete and eternal nature of forgiveness and justification. When a transgression is covered, it is forever gone. When forgiveness is granted, it becomes a garment of righteousness. And when a person is justified by faith, it stands forever as a seal and a promise from God that a right relationship again exists.

Life application: The blood of Jesus Christ purifies us from all unrighteousness and ungodliness. What has been cleansed by Him is forever clean and holy. As proof of this, the believer in Jesus Christ has been given a deposit, the Holy Spirit of promise. When you err and fall short of God's glory, remember this. Despite your faults, you are eternally safe and secure in the hands of God.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. Romans 4:8

Paul again quotes David from the 32nd Psalm.

"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit."

There David noted that the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin is blessed. However, the law demanded that his sin be tried and punished. He had committed adultery and murder - both capital offenses and transgressions against God. He couldn't go back in time and undo what he had done; time is ever-moving forward. And yet, God provided atonement for him and for those who put their faith in Him through sacrifice and repentance.

The question is, "Did the sacrifices - such as those on the Day of Atonement - take away the sin?" The answer is given in both Testaments and it is "No." The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. (Psalm 51:16, 17, Hebrews 10:4, etc). So what provided the atonement? It was faith that God would withhold His wrath for the sins committed. The sacrifices merely pointed to the final sacrifice of Jesus, even if the people didn't know that this was the case. It was faith in God and His promises and a humble walk before Him. Passages such as Micah 6:6-8 show us this -

With what shall I come before the Lord,
And bow myself before the High God?
Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings,
With calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
Ten thousand rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has shown you, O man, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justly,
To love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God?

The questions Micah asked demanded a negative response. All of the sacrifices and offerings in the world were useless without a heart for God and without faith in His providence. It is through faith that the blessedness is received. When faith is exercised, the sins are pardoned and felicity between God and man is restored.

Life application: Have faith in God's promises which come through the Person and work of Jesus. This is what pleases God, not church attendance or charitable giving. After your faith is established, then these things have meaning, but without it they are just vapor which fades away.