

# THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

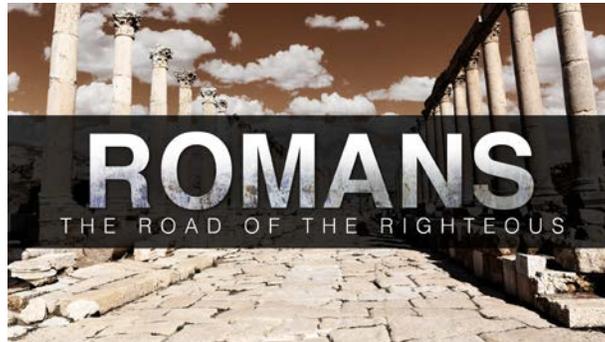
## Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 4:1-8

Written By

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**H**ow does a sinner become right in God's eyes? Or, to employ Paul's key word in Romans, How does a person born with Adam's sin get justified before God's holy throne? Is it by faith alone in the person and work of Jesus, or is it by faith in God coupled with a person's continued faithfulness to God's word and ways? This is the question of all questions, and one you do not want to get wrong since eternity hangs in the proverbial balance.

Consider how Mormons answer the question. While challenging you to believe in God on one hand to be His child, on the other their writings clearly demonstrate the believer must live a constant life of religious/moral works in order to obtain salvation. Consider various texts which support this statement:

- For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance; nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven (*Doctrine & Covenants*, Section 1:32).
- And now I command you, my servant Joseph, to repent and walk more uprightly before me, and to yield to the persuasions of men no more; and that you be firm in keeping the commandments wherewith I have commanded you; and if you do this, behold I grant you eternal life, even if you should be slain (*Doctrine & Covenants*, Section 5:21-22).  
If thou wilt do good, yea, and hold out faithful to the end thou shalt be saved in the kingdom of God, which is the greatest of all the gifts of God; for there is no gift greater than the gift of salvation (*Doctrine & Covenants*, Section 6:13).
- Stand fast in the work wherewith I have called you, and a hair on your head shall not be lost, and you shall be lifted up the last day (*Doctrine & Covenants*, Section 9:14).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this

glory (*Doctrine & Covenants*, Section 132:21). (Interestingly enough, the verse right before this says if you are obedient, you shall become a god *and* the powers of all angels will be subject to you. Is this not what Satan promised Eve in the Garden? Indeed.)

Why did I share so many texts from these so-called divinely inspired writings? For one, to demonstrate I was not just isolating one text to validate my opening point. The concept of faith in God plus works to secure salvation runs like a thread throughout these documents. For another, to demonstrate one way false theologies diverge from the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

The thinking and teaching of Mormons merely mirrors the thinking and teaching of Judaism at the time of the Apostle Paul. While Judaism and Mormonism differ in many other areas, they are on the same page when it comes to how a sinner comes to inherit God's heavenly kingdom. It is obtained by faith in God coupled with a lifetime of specific religious and moral works.

Such is not the true gospel but is a false gospel, as Paul definitively articulates to his Jewish brethren in his letter to the church in Rome. By way of review, in chapter 3 Paul laid to rest the misguided notion that obedience to the Law of Moses garners favor with God. All the Law does is to tell the sinner they are a sinner when they do not fulfill all of the mandates of the Law. The result is clear to Paul: "*Therefore, by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin*" (Romans 3:20). How is the sinner declared righteous or justified in God's courtroom? As Paul argues in chapter 3, verses 22 through 24, this holy status for Jew *and* Gentile is *only* acquired by means of faith in the person and work of Jesus. It has absolutely *nothing* to do with man's works. Period. End of story.

<sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction [between Jew and Gentile]; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. <sup>24</sup> being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus . . .

Justification is a free gift you receive by faith. It is not something you can work for, ever.

Knowing how hard it is to change one's religious paradigm from salvation by faith in God plus works to salvation by faith alone, Paul turns in Romans four to argue that this theological concept he is teaching is nothing new for it is embedded in the Old Testament. Embedded where? In the lives of sinners who became saints like Abraham and David. The Jews, like anyone who has historically held their salvation is based on faith plus works, thought Paul's teaching was heretical in relation to salvation. Paul's argument in Romans four will attempt lay to rest that justification of sinners before a holy God has always been by faith alone and never associated with faith plus works. I'm sure these were hard words for religious folks who thought they were on the path to the kingdom of God. Conversely, they were necessary words to wake them up so they could switch from the false path to the true one.

All of this might be hard for you as well because you are a firm believer in God; however, your parents, along with your grandparents, have built into your spiritual body the thought that you must believe in God and make sure you maintain a life of religious works in order to be saved. To challenge this thinking is hard, because it is what you have been given by people you trust. To question them would be to disrespect them. And if they are deceased, you might even feel a bit superstitious to even think about pondering whether what they taught you is, in fact, spiritually and biblically true. But question you should, as Paul shows, if the teaching you received does not

square with God's Word and God's gospel. If you are in this boat, know first that Paul used to be in this boat. Know also he loved you enough to tell you the spiritual truth so you could get out of a boat going over the spiritual falls. What does Paul say? He drives home one crucial point in Romans chapter 4:

## Justification By Faith, Not Works, Is God's Timeless Story Of Salvation (Rom.4:1-25)

This timeless salvific story is seen in the lives of two great Old Testament saints.

### It's Seen In Abraham and David's Simple Faith In God (Romans 4:1-8)

In order to convince Jews that salvation and justification of sinners has always been a faith issue, not a faith plus works issue, Paul first taps into the life of the patriarch of the Israelite nation, Abraham. Paul begins, as he typically does, with a Socratic question:

<sup>1</sup> What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

His question is clear: how did Abraham secure salvation? Was it by faith or was it by faith plus works? To those who thought that Abraham was saved by faith plus works Paul offers this salient point:

<sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

Translated into our vernacular Paul is saying the following: "If anybody could get into heaven based upon performance, then it will surely be Abraham."

Further, if anyone could boast about spiritual obedience and great spiritual works done before the all seeing eye God, it would be Abraham. Think about radically he lived. At God's command he moved to a foreign land when he was 75 years old (Gen. 12:5). When most would be enjoying their investments and their retirement, Abraham uprooted his family and moved across the hot, arid desert east of Babylon and settled in Palestine where he (they) didn't know a soul. Later, when he could have taken the lush land around Sodom and Gomorrah for himself and his herds, he graciously let his nephew Lot have first pick of the land (Gen. 13). When Lot became a prisoner in a military campaign by some godless warlords, the aged Abraham rose to the occasion and mustered his troops to free in family member (Gen. 14). Sometime after this when God prepared to vaporize these godless cities where Lot dwelt with his families, Abraham begged for God to spare people like Lot (Gen. 18). When God asked him to sacrifice Isaac, the son of his old age and the son of the Abrahamic Covenant, he attempted to do exactly as God asked (Gen. 22). Yes, as Paul states, if anyone could boast about religious works for securing salvation, then Abraham was the man. But he didn't boast about them, and he certainly didn't boast about them before God, because he knew that his works didn't save him.

How did Abraham get justified or righteous before God? Paul gather's his answer from a Septuagint quote from Genesis 15, verse 6.

<sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

What did Abraham believe? He believed that despite the fact he was nearing one hundred, God would give him and Sarah a son to carry on the unconditional covenant He had made with him (Gen. 12:1-3). When he believed this truth, when he had faith in God, not faith in God coupled with faith in himself, then, and only then did God credit his spiritual account with a massive amount of righteousness. The implication of this shouldn't be missed either. *If Abraham became a child of God by means of faith, then all mankind must come to God in the same fashion for this is God's way.* As a sidelight, I'd also add that since Abraham was promised, by God, to spiritually impact the whole world (Gen. 12:1-3, including Jews and Gentiles, then they, too, must secure righteousness by faith alone in God.

This has (and is) always been the way for sinners to become saints. It is based on faith in God and God's provision, not upon faith and man's works. Paul drives this point home in the next two verses:

<sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

Here, Paul establishes the contrast between works and faith. If you work for something, you expect something in return, like payment. Your employer is your debtor, as it were, since he owes you money for time served on the clock. The wage you received, then, is not “a favor,” or a gift. It is what you are legally owed based on your capability and efforts.

This, my friend, is not the way of salvation and justification. The true path is brought out in the other half of the contrast:

<sup>5</sup> But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

“Believing,” unlike work, trusts in/on the work of another. “Believing,” unlike work, results in righteousness being imputed to your once bankrupt account by God's good favor and grace. “Believing,” unlike work, is all about you receiving from God what is free, viz., justification, while work is all about you doing religious works which will never enable you to receive justification before God. Thus, just as Abraham, in his old age, trusted in God to do the unthinkable, the unimaginable by giving him a son, so now God calls us, as Paul argues, to have the same kind of faith that God can do the unthinkable and unimaginable and redeem you merely based on your faith in the person and work of His Son, Jesus. This is how sinners become saints. Is this news to you? Does this rock your spiritual world of works? Good. It just might, then, lead to moving from being ungodly, to being truly godly before God.

Paul drives home how sinners become saints by appealing to another great Old Testament person, David.

<sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered. <sup>8</sup> “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.”

Paul uses David as another illustration of how an Old Testament sinner became New Testament saint. He does this by quoting from Psalm 32, a penitential psalm. Here David looks back to what happened when committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband murdered so he could truly have her for his wife. When he didn't confess his sin, his sin began to eat away at his soul:

<sup>3</sup> When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup> For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer*. Selah (Psalm 32).

Isn't this an honest picture regarding what unconfessed sin does in your life? It eats away at you, doesn't it? You can't sleep. You can't think clearly. You know God's hand of conviction rests heavy upon your heart and. And the joy of life and living seems to just slowly drain out of your body, leaving you in a cold sweat.

But, when the sinner confesses his sin, when the sinner comes clean, then and only then, as David states, does God move in and forgive him and impute righteousness to his life.

<sup>1</sup> How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! <sup>2</sup> How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!

David didn't secure forgiveness and a right standing before the holy throne of God by his religious works coupled with his faith. No. On the contrary, he received the imputed righteousness of God by his mere faith in the God who was/is willing and more than capable of forgiving a desperate, repentant sinner. And, please, don't overlook the fact that God is the one who does all the work here to impute righteousness to the sinner based on faith. The sinner has no work in this as all, nor do his religious and moral activities mean anything to God where salvation is concerned. Salvation is His doing and it is, as we see in the case of Abraham and David, based solely upon their simple faith in God's promise and provision.

Admit it. It's so hard to believe this simple truth. Why? Because a works mindset is drilled into our lives everywhere we go. Take, for instant, the fact this is August and many of our families have students headed either back to college or they are going for the first time. Believe me, if this is the first time for your child to leave for school, my heart goes out to you. I remember when I drove eight hours back to Stockton from Los Angeles after I dropped Amanda off at Azusa Pacific University. I cried the whole way up the state. Liz kept passing me Kleenex and asking me if I was okay. No, I wasn't okay. I kept thinking . . . and saying . . . where did her childhood go? I just could not believe how quickly she grew up and went away to school.

Anyway, back the sermon. The point should be well-taken that being works oriented isn't just something we tend to buy into religiously, it is something we encounter when our kids apply to schools. Take Stanford University for instance:

Statistically, Stanford University ranks as one of the toughest schools to give an acceptance letter. The university recently updated their admission standards and stated that only five percent of applying students are accepted. In 2017, 42,497 students applied, and 2,140 were accepted.

On their website, they give students realistic answers for the question "What is the academic standard to be accepted?" An ACT score of 33 or higher will put you into the top 50 percent of applicants, however the average score for accepted students is 35. The perfect score is 36.

Accepted students will also need an average SAT score of 1520 (out of 1600), an average GPA of 4.18 (out of 4.0), plus a robust "resume" of extracurricular activities, leadership qualities, references, and recommendations. Of course new students also have to pay for Stanford at \$60,000 per year. In conclusion, if you want to get into Stanford you better be perfect or just amazing.

This is the same kind of mindset folks tend to bring over into religion. They think, "Okay, what have I got to do to gain God's favor? What do I need to give? What do I need to stay away from? How good do I have to be and for how long? How much should I go to church? Should I give money to every beggar I see on a highway median at a stop light? I think I'm doing great because I haven't missed communion in five years." And so on and so forth.

If this is you, I'd counsel you, based on Paul's words here in Romans 4, to stop and take a breath. Unlike Stanford, God isn't looking for your perfection. You can't give it to Him, anyway, because you are a sinner. And if getting into His heaven were based on works, which is it not, *none* of us would ever get there because His standards make those of Stanford look like child's play. Yes, if God had a **Spiritual Acquisition Test**, we'd all fail miserably because we could never fulfill all of His lofty laws to secure that heavenly acquisition. Why? Because we are sinners. We, by default, therefore, need the Savior who, alone, fulfilled all the requirements of the Law by living a perfect life and dying for our sin and rising from the grave a victor.

Abraham and David have been enjoying the glory and splendor of heaven for several thousand years so far. Why are they there? Because they were justified, not by their religious/moral works, but by their simple faith in God's provision for sinners. What about you? Will you be there, or are you still clinging to your works to grant you an entrance into God's presence?