

# THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

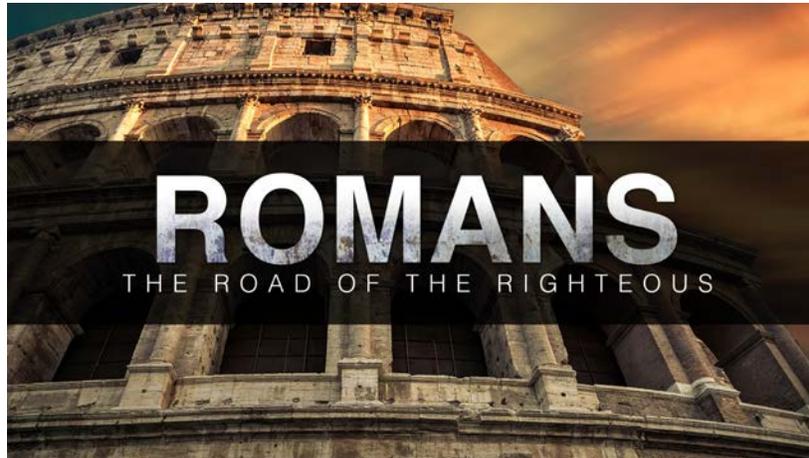
## Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 4:9-25

Written By

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**F**alse religions are typically composed of three things: (1) They have a holy book or books which are either superior to or replace the inferior or untrustworthy Holy Scriptures, (2) There must be a main prophet/prophets or holy men, and (3) Salvation and/or redemption is based on a divine being(s) coupled with a life of perpetual works which will garner the favor of the divine being(s). The last component assures the longevity of the religion in question for adherents are fearful of walking away from the teachings lest they forfeit whatever the given religion's concept of heaven is. This third motif also creates rich soil in which the seeds of superstition can grow and flourish. Again, this reality makes it difficult for worshippers to break free from the religion in question for fear of what the god or gods might do to them. Have you bought into any of these misguided, misinformed beliefs? Sadly, man have.

Hindus, for instance, place a premium value on a person's works. Within classic Hinduism, man's chief problem is he is clueless about his divine status, or that he is an extension of Brahman, or god. The possession of this false knowledge about reality is called *maya*, or an illusion. This argument is self-defeating for how could someone know reality is not real unless he understood reality in order to make the assertion? But let that go. What matters is for man to meticulously follow the three paths of Hinduism to secure total and final enlightenment that he is, in fact, divine. Ron Rhodes details them for us in his book *The Challenge of the Cults and New World Religions*:

- (1) *Karma marga* (the way of action and ritual—involving prescribed ceremonies, duties, and religious rites);
- (2) *jnana marga* (the way of knowledge and meditation—one must dispel ignorance and come to experientially know that

the only reality is Brahman), and (3) *bhakti marga* (the way of devotion— involving private and public acts of worship). Whichever way one attains enlightenment, the goal of such enlightenment is for one's separate self or ego to lose its separate identity in Brahman, the Universal Soul.<sup>1</sup>

Sounds daunting, doesn't it? Let's break it down further.

In Hinduism, man is caught on the endless and ruthless cycle of birth and rebirth, which is called *samsara*.<sup>2</sup> As such, reincarnation is not a positive concept, promising life beyond the grave. Conversely, reincarnation is a cruel, blind, unfeeling "master" causing one to either move toward enlightenment by means of good karma, or by thrusting one down to a less than optimal life form (i.e., cockroach, worm) or an arduous human existence because of the presence of bad karma in a prior existence. Within karmic doctrine, each person then receives in this life what he did or did not do in his last life. Tragically, one can perform good works and do well in pursuing the three paths to enlightenment, but one infraction can cause one to be reborn hundreds of times to settle the karmic debt assigned to this infraction. The whole concept of reincarnation is, therefore, not positive, but highly negative for a person's continual birth and rebirth demonstrates they have yet to achieve a final state of total enlightenment regarding their divine relationship to the eternal Brahman.

Hinduism is far afield from what Paul teaches about man's problem. In Romans chapters 1 through 3, Paul drives home the truth that man's problem is sin, not the failure of man to realize he is divine and one with an impersonal, eternal deity. Further, as we have studied in Romans chapter 3, verses 23-24, only a holy God could, and did, intervene to help man out of his sinful predicament:

<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; (Rom. 3:23-24).

Man's issue isn't ignorance of his divine status, but his sinful status inherited from Adam (Rom. 5:12-21). The only way he can possibly move from a status of being sinful to being righteous in God's court of law is to receive, by faith, the gift of the redemptive work of Jesus, the Son of God. Christ did all the work to settle the Father's anger toward sin. Man cannot, therefore, contribute anything to Christ's perfect work. He is, then, left with one choice: Place his faith in the gift of the gospel of Jesus to be deemed righteous in God's court. Have you done this? Many have not, but the door is open for you.

As we have discussed, the Jews of Paul's day struggled like Hindus do today with how man can know God. Indeed, there are many dissimilarities between Judaism and Hinduism, but where the concept of redemption is concerned they both are similar in their emphasis upon personal works. Paul waxes eloquent Romans 3 regarding how Jews and Gentiles are both sinners incapable of saving themselves by means of works. But still he knew the Jews would have a hard time breaking free from their works-based salvific system, so in chapter 4 he turns to drive home this jaw-dropping and inexorable theological truth:

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<sup>1</sup>Ron Rhodes, *The Challenge of the Cults and New World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 174.

<sup>2</sup>Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 278.

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

By way of review, in the first eight verses, Paul substantiates his theological premise regarding true salvation with this truth about salvation being acquired only by means of faith in God's redemptive provision:

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

Both Abraham and David moved from being sinners before God to being saints, not by means of their personal works, but by means of their simple, trusting belief in the living God. Abraham believed God could fulfill the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant by giving him and Sarah a son in their old age. Yes, Abraham believed God could do the impossible, that God could do what he could not do for himself. The moment he evidenced that depth of belief, he became righteous. Likewise, David's sins were not washed from his soul until he came, by faith, to the throne of the living God, asking for forgiveness. Again, David believed God could do the impossible, and the moment he believed this his faith cleansed his soul, not his works.

Knowing how clever are resilient works-based people, like Jews, can be in guarding their system from collapse, Paul offers more arguments to move them from spiritual/theological error to theological truth where salvation and justification is concerned.

### It's Seen In The Limitations Of Religious Ritual (Rom. 4:9-13)

First, let's read Paul's argument, and then we will dissect it:

<sup>9</sup> Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."<sup>10</sup> How then was it credited? 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 uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,<sup>12</sup> and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

As you know, there is nothing like a well-trained Socratic question when it comes to moving a non-Christian toward the truth of Christianity. Questions force the person in question to defend what they think about the concept at hand. Questions can take the argument out of the discussion because you, like a skilled detective, are merely and passionately looking for the facts. Questions take a person who has retreated into the citadel of rude rhetoric because their argument is tenuous and it challenges him to contemplate truth. Questions help you guide the discussion instead of losing it to the other person. Questions show you respect the person you are speaking to because you are thoughtfully interacting with what they think. Tactically, this is a great method is apologetics and evangelism, and Paul had mastered it without a doubt. Have you?

Verse 9, the implication of the question is clear: How did Abraham obtain a righteous standing before God? Was it by means of circumcision? Better yet, Is this coveted status only available to Jews who've performed the rite of circumcision, or can Gentiles get in on it? Of course, Paul strategically poses this question because he anticipated Jews would argue against salvation

by faith by focusing on the fact that one must, in their thinking, be circumcised to be saved. Again, I ask, Do you anticipate the questions the lost will ask you so you can formulate good questions and answers to help guide them to theological truth.

Paul knew the Jews placed a premium value on the rite and ritual of circumcision. The ancient Jewish pseudepigraphic book of Jubilees put Jewish thinking on this matter in crystal clear focus:

<sup>25</sup> This law is for all the generations forever, and there is no circumcision of the days, and no omission of one day out of the eight days; for it is an eternal ordinance, ordained and written on the heavenly tablets. <sup>26</sup> And every one that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, belongs not to the children of the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham, but to the children of destruction; nor is there, moreover, any sign on him that he is the Lord's, but (he is destined) to be destroyed and slain from the earth, and to be rooted out of the earth, for he has broken the covenant of the Lord our God (*Jubilees*, 15:25-26).

Paul, who used to believe this prior to his conversion (Phil. 3:5), could not have disagree more now that he knew Jesus, the Messiah.

With verse 10, Paul starts to unravel this erroneous and spiritually destructive teaching:

<sup>10</sup> How then was it credited? 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 uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them . . .

Hold that thought.

Paul moves from the Socratic question to employing a chronological argument regarding Abraham. To paraphrase, Paul states, “Say, tell me. When did God credit Abraham’s spiritual life with righteousness? Was it before or after his circumcision?” I’m sure many Jews gulped at that point. Everyone knew the answer to the probing question: Abraham was declared righteous before God instituted circumcision to merely be an outer rite to demonstrate that Jews were part of God’s covenantal people.

The chronology of Abraham’s life in Genesis proves the point. According to Genesis 17:23-25), Abraham was circumcised when Ishmael was thirteen and he was ninety-nine. Yet, Abraham was declared righteous back in Genesis 15 when he was around seventy-five. Put differently, for at least thirteen years Abraham was seen as righteous before God by faith, not by the rite of circumcision. Further, since Abraham did not receive circumcision until he was ninety-nine, it also represents there were twenty-four years between this event and him being declared righteous by faith alone (99-75=24 years). Either way you look at it, the rite and ritual of circumcision had absolutely NOTHING to do with Abraham becoming a man with the imputed righteousness of God Almighty. That was God’s free gift to him at the moment of simple faith in God’s provision to do the inexplicable and impossible.

Why did God set up Abraham’s righteous imputation by faith prior to his circumcision? The infinitive clause, denoted by the presence of *einai* (εἶναι) in the Greek and “so that” in English, gives us the coveted answer: “so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them.” God purposefully allowed Abraham to become righteous by

faith prior to the work of circumcision to permit Gentiles to come to Him on the same terms. I'm sure Jews who prided themselves in their relationship to Abraham (Luke 3:8; 16:24, 30; John 8:39, 53, 56; Acts 7:2), swallowed hard on this statement. Paul, however, did not mince any words when it came to truth. On the contrary, he boldly and lovingly said what needed saying. Do you? Will you? Or do you keep quiet so as not to offend anyone?

Are you putting way too much stock in the religious rituals you perform in order hopefully be saved one day? According to Paul, you had better think again for those observances will not save you, ever. Faith in Christ's person and work saves. Period. This is the passionate and pointed drives home throughout this chapter. Are you getting it? Are you willing to embrace it in order to be truly saved?

There's still more Paul has to say regarding the timeless nature of justification by faith and not works.

### It's Not Related To The Mosaic Law (Rom. 4:13-17)

Once more Paul employs a powerful chronological argument to prove his point that Abraham's righteousness preceded a divinely ordered work. As before, we'll present the text and then make some salient observations:

<sup>13</sup> For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not 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 is nullified; <sup>15</sup> for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. <sup>16</sup> For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, <sup>17</sup> (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

First, Paul substantiates the point that the Abrahamic Covenant, with its foundation based on the pure, unadulterated faith of Abraham, came *prior to* the Law of Moses. It came, in fact, 430 years before the giving of the Law on Sinai (Gal. 3:17). Again, Paul's latent point is Abraham was righteous before God, as were all who followed in his steps of faith, for hundreds of years prior to the revelation of the Law. Righteousness, therefore, does not come by means of adherence to the Law . . . even if you had thousands of lifetimes (which you do not) to seek to accomplish this feat. Did you law-lover get that? God is attempting to arrest your spiritual attention. Law-keeping, be what it may be based on the given theological system, will never be able to provide redemption and salvation for you.

Second, Paul definitively argues starting in verse 14 that if righteousness is by means of observance of the Law, then the way of faith and grace is, *ipso facto*, nullified. Ostensibly, this would mean Christ's redemptive mission on the cross was for no avail. It would also mean the Abrahamic Covenant, which is based on God's pure promise to Abraham would be abolished as well since law-keeping has nothing to do with an outright divine promise. In addition, Paul underscores, again, that the Law merely shows a sinner his sin and that he's under God's wrath. It could not, did not, and cannot, save him. The presence of the Law reveals sin, and it also moves rebellious sinners to sin. A vacant lot near my home in California was garbage free for years. Right before the a developer built a shopping center on the site he erected a "NO DUMPING" sign. You

can guess what occurred. Someone drove their pick-up full of junk and dumped it at the base of the sign. Such is the nature of the Law, and this is why it cannot save. God, on the other hand, designed salvation to be based on faith alone so that Jew and Gentile would have equal access to secure divine forgiveness for their sin (v. 16). The fact this verse has no verb, by means of ellipsis, shows how passionate Paul was about this point. Salvation is a gift freely given to repentant sinners, and this gift of belief in God's salvific provision came long before the Law was a gleam in the eye of Moses.

### It's Based Entirely On Faith (Rom. 4:17-25)

We'll continue our pedagogical method by reading the text and then making some pertinent, practical applications. As we read this lengthy text, don't get lost in the detail but do pay attention to the kind of faith Abraham possessed. This is the type of faith which causes a sinner to be declared righteous in God's eyes:

<sup>17</sup> (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. <sup>18</sup> In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." <sup>19</sup> Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; <sup>20</sup> yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup> and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

Permit me to paint the picture behind these verses.

At seventy-five years of age, God called Abram to be his man to form a new nation through which the Messiah would come (Gen. 12). Abram, whose name means 'the father is exalted,' faithfully waited for God give him a son so the covenant God made with him could be fulfilled. For eleven years he waited for the son, and when his wife didn't get pregnant, he, based on Sarah's coaching, went ahead of God and had a son through a servant named Hagar. He was eighty-six when the boy was born, but this was, according to God, not the right boy. The promised son was still to come, and Abram chose to believe God could make the impossible happen. God made him wait patiently for another thirteen years to test and hone the quality of Abram's faith. When he was ninety-nine is when God finally came and told him He was going to change his name from Abram to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude" (Gen. 17:1-60. God even went so far as to say He would personally make Abraham fruitful (v. 6), and give him countless descendants (v. 7) to rule over the land of promise, Palestine (v. 8). A year later, when Abraham was one hundred, Isaac arrived as God has promised (Gen. 21). They named him Isaac for good reason because the name in Hebrew means either "he laughs" or "laughter." With parents this old there was much to laugh about, right?

What's the point of all of this? Sure, Abraham made a misstep with Ishmael; however, by and large he chose to be a man who believed God could and would do the impossible, the unbelievable, and the medically unheard of thing by making a really old couple proud parents of promised baby boy. This is why Paul mentions that God gives life to the dead. Looking at his body, Abraham must have thought, "God can take this almost dead body and make it live so I can have a child if He so desires." This is why Paul says that Abraham hoped against hope. He believed God could and would do the impossible when Abraham was completely unable to make sure his

aged wife would get pregnant. This is why Paul says that Abraham had so much faith he believed that God could and would take his wife's barren womb and miraculously give her a promised child to fulfill the unconditional covenant (v. 18). This is why Paul says that Abraham lived to give glory to God because he had unwavering faith God could and would do something off-the-charts and beyond the explanation of, say, what we'd now call science and medicine.

This, my friend, is the kind of faith which causes a sinner to be declared righteous in God's holy throne room. It's the kind of faith which says, "God, I know I am a sinner and completely incapable of saving myself by my works and efforts. God, I know I am utterly helpless to deal with my sin problem. And God, I know that you are the only one who can step into this dire, dismal situation and do the impossible by giving me your righteousness at the moment of my faith in your ability to do so." Do you have that kind of faith? It's the kind of faith which has saved sinners since man's fall in the Garden.

What happened when Abraham evidenced an unwavering faith in God to do the impossible in his life to fulfill His promise to him? Paul restates it again in familiar words:

<sup>22</sup> Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

At that moment of trusting faith in God, Abraham became a man when a spiritual ledger sheet full of God's righteousness.

Nothing has changed in the last 4,000 years since Abraham. Sinners are still justified by the same kind of faith, but now that faith looks not to the promise of the One to come, but it is focused entirely upon Him:

<sup>23</sup> Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, <sup>24</sup> but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup> He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

In the person of Jesus, the Son of God, God the Father did the impossible.

- His Son left glory so we'd have the prospects of glory.
- His Son came down so that we could go up.
- His Son bore our sin on the cross so we don't have to bear them anymore.
- His Son died physically so that we might live spiritually.
- His Son rose from the grave unto life so that we might rise from death unto life.

The moment you, as a desperate sinner, realize this is true for you, you, too, move from being a sinner to being a saint. And with all of your lungs you can sing the old hymn:

*Verse 1*

I will sing of my Redeemer, and His wondrous love to me  
On the cruel cross He suffered from the curse to set me free.

*Verse 2*

I will tell the wondrous story how, my lost estate to save  
In His boundless love and mercy He the ransom freely gave.

*chorus*

Sing, O sing of my Redeemer, with His blood He purchased me. On the cross He sealed my  
pardon, paid the debt and made me free.