

**Intro:**

In our study of Romans, we are racing through the book at a snail's pace. Or, perhaps better, at a 'glacial pace'. As I study the scriptures, I find them full of rich truth that I want to communicate to you, so I adopt a very incremental method of exposition.

Even more importantly, I believe that by taking time, by repeating themes as we carefully work through each section, that your spiritual understanding can grow in ways that it could not if I were to go faster. I can, for example, take the time to teach you the meaning of 'propitiation' in Rm 3.25.

(Who remembers what 'propitiation' is? – Making someone (God) propitious, *i.e.*, favorable, to us, so we have access to His presence in the Holy Place.)

The point of this method is to build you up in your holy faith.

What is the disadvantage of this method? You can't see the forest for the trees! Too much detail... or 'TMI' as my daughter says... 'Too Much Information'

What I want to do this Sunday is to step back a bit and preach a general message from Rm 3.21-4.8. I want you to see how the argument is progressing and where we are going with all of this so far. We will probably do a similar message once we get to the end of chapter 4.

Part of my purpose today is to increase the *relevance* of the details we have been talking about. Each individual piece of the teaching is important, but you need to see the argument as it is progressing to get the benefit of the whole.

In other words, this is a 'So What' kind of message.

The first point in support of the proposition of justification by faith alone is this: justification is not obtained by works. Or, justification is by faith, not works.

To that point, we want to say, 'So what?' And I hope to show you in this message something of the 'So what' of this point:

*How 'No Works' Works for You*

Read Rm 3.21-4.8

Before we get into the survey of the passage, I want to emphasize the theme. We are going to work our way through the words that speak of 'No-Works':

- 'without the law' KJV; 'apart from the Law' NAU; 'without-law' lit. (3.21) [Note: no article, describes righteousness
- 'by faith' (3.22) [or 'through faith']
- 'unto all who believe' (3.22)

- 'freely'; 'grace' (3.24)
- 'redemption ... in Christ' (his work provides the redemption, redemption is not in us) (3.24)
- 'remission of sins' (3.25)
- 'justifier of the one who has faith' NAU; 'of him which believeth' KJV (3.26)
- Boasting excluded 'by faith' (3.27)
- 'without the deeds of the law' (3.28)
- 'God ... shall justify ... [Jews *and* Gentiles] by faith' (3.30)
- 'through faith' (3.31)
- 'Abraham believed ... counted ... for righteousness' (4.3)
- 'worketh not, but believeth' (4.5)
- 'faith is counted for righteousness' (4.5)
- 'without works' (4.6)
- 'forgiven ... covered' (4.7)
- 'not impute sin' [sin not counted] (4.8)

Do you agree that the major theme running through these verses is salvation *without works*?

Faith is not a work – we are taught this explicitly in 4.5. Faith does nothing, it simply accepts, believes, relies on something in order to gain justification.

**Proposition:** Salvation by faith, without works, works for you because it relies on the work and Word of Someone Else.

Review the 'Chair Illustration' – chair can hold me up, it has the capacity to hold me, just one reason it isn't holding me: I'm not sitting in it.

The illustration is fine as far as it goes, but when I have used it at least, I think its impact hasn't been effective because I haven't explained it in light of the alternative: that is, the attempt to make salvation work by works.

So now, let's review our passage and see if we can understand better...

### *How 'No Works' Works for You*

## **I. Theological foundation: the judicial declaration of righteousness (3.21-26)**

A. This is the language of the courtroom

1. All of Rm 1.18-3.20 has been the argument of the prosecuting attorney: guilty, guilty, guilty – there is no defense

2. Notice v. 19
  - a. Every mouth is shut
  - b. All the world is guilty
3. Foundation of the charges (20)
  - a. No one is justified by the works of the law
  - b. The Law only reveals guilt of the sinner

Works don't work

- B. The voice of the attorney for the defense rests on these propositions
1. There is a different kind of righteousness (21)
    - a. It is a 'without-works' kind of righteousness
    - b. It has been known right from the beginning in the Law and the prophets and is fully manifested now
  2. This new kind of righteousness is available to all who believe (22)
    - a. We concede that all are guilty (23)
    - b. But all who believe are justified by means of a redemption secured in another person: Jesus Christ (24)
    - c. The work of this Jesus has made God favorable (propitious) to men (25a)
  3. God is absolutely just in allowing this defense, both for the sins of the past and the sins of the present (25b-26)
    - a. He is just because the penalty of the law is met: death
    - b. He is just because the verdict has been passed: guilty
    - c. He is just because no one has gotten off scot-free: penalty paid

This is the theology on which "No Works" faith rests.

It is quite clear, God says he is willing to accept the verdict exercised in the death of someone else in place of your own condemnation and death *if you will believe*.

## II. Personal advantages: for every man, to all men, under the Law (3.27-31)

### A. No boasting (27-28)

1. Not dependent upon the quality of one's own life
2. Not dependent upon the quantity of one's own works

### B. No privilege (29-30)

1. Personal pedigree is irrelevant
2. Personal 'connections' are no benefit

### C. No ongoing legal demands (31)

1. The law is not nullified or set aside
2. The law is satisfied

What this means is that anyone can come who believes – you don't need to be better than anyone else, you don't need to come from the right family, you aren't subject any more to any legal requirements.

Just come to Christ.

Just believe.

## III. Primary evidence: God justifies saints without works (4.1-8)

### A. Abraham did not work to have righteousness imputed to him (1-5)

1. Consider the life of Abraham (go back to Gen 15)
  - a. Jews in their pride of race even attributed to Abraham 'law-keeping' before there was a law

"Abraham was held up particularly as a model of obedience to God. His righteousness and mediation of the promise were linked to this obedience, it even being argued that he had obeyed the law perfectly before it had been given."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 256.

b. Abraham's fearfulness and weakness

- 1) Lied about his relationship to Sarah to Pharaoh – just after having travelled from his father's house to promised land at the promise of God (Gen 12)
- 2) Lied about his relationship to Sarah to Abimelech – just after having received the promise of God concerning Isaac [at 99 years of age] (Gen 20)

The point of mentioning these events is to show some of Abraham's faults, but also to highlight that we don't see a man keeping the Law in these accounts.

2. Abraham is a man who believed God (Gen 15.6, et al)

- a. We consistently see this stated in Genesis
- b. We see Abraham specifically declared righteous in our passage (Gen 15.6)
- c. We see Abraham acting consistently with that belief (Gen 16.1-3)
  - 1) Abraham's action here was consistent with his culture
  - 2) Abraham's action was consistent with his faith (although inconsistent with the fulness of God's promise)

But again, we don't see Abraham trying to gain God's approval, he simply is acting like a man who believes God – even though he is a man who doesn't measure up to God's standards, God has accepted him on the basis of No-Works, *i.e.*, faith.

B. David did not work to have his sins *not* imputed to him (6-8)

1. David is a man who has the right religion

- a. He is a man who is privileged to reign in national Israel “post-Law” (after the Law has established the nation)
- b. He is a man who is privileged to contribute inspired liturgy to the worship of God under the Law (many Psalms)
- c. He is a man who is privileged to prepare the nation for constructing the center of worship, the Jerusalem Temple

All that to say that David is a man under the Law and well familiar with the works of the Law

2. David is a man who is completely condemned by the Law
  - a. Guilty of adultery
  - b. Guilty of murder
  - c. Subject to death
3. David is a man who does nothing to regain his standing before God
  - a. Note his declaration of his sin not being counted against him (Ps 32.1-2)
  - b. Note his response to the prophet's rebuke of his sin: confession (2 Sa 12.13a)
  - c. Note God's judicial decree (2 Sa 12.13b)
  - d. Note David's next act (2 Sa 12.14-23)
    - 1) For what is David praying? For his own sins? No – they are forgiven
    - 2) What is David's final reaction? Acceptance of the Word of God – believing his sins to be forgiven

David is doing no works to atone for his sins, he is acting as if his sins are forgiven.

- Abraham believed the promise.
- David believed the prophet.
- We believe the Saviour.

## Conclusion:

I want to go back to the chair illustration if I might.

When we worked our way through the sin section of Romans 1-3, what argument is the moral man making to God?

- My morality justifies me, you can't condemn me.
- He is building a chair of his own morality and he is resting in it.

Later on in the argument we come to the religious man. What argument is the religious man making?

- My religious works justify me, you can't condemn me.
- He is building a chair of his own religious works and he is resting in it.

You see, they are exchanging in their minds the grace of God that says you can't justify yourself, you need to believe me, for works of their own devising.

- The opposite of faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation isn't just a refusal to believe in Christ (a denial that the 'chair' of Christ's perfect righteousness exists).
- Instead, it is a replacement of human works as self-justifying. It is building a chair out of material that pleases man, not God.
  - One man will please God with his morality, "I'll have faith in that," he says.
  - Another man will please God with his religion, "I'll have faith in my prayers, in my church attendance, in my baptism, in my saying the right words to God once in the sinner's prayer." He builds a chair out of his own works.
  - Another man says, "I'll have faith in my stone idols, my images, I won't admit there is a true God, I'll just make up my own God, I'll have faith in that." So he makes a chair that pleases him and he has faith in that.
- Each one of these attitudes is the same thing: faith in works, not God.

God says he'll have none of it!

Here is our title:

*How 'No Works' Works for You*

And here is our proposition:

**Proposition:** Salvation by faith, without works, works for you because it relies on the work and Word of Someone Else.

How do you know if you are constructing a "chair of justification" by your own works?

When your answer to this question starts with "I": "When you stand before God, and if he were to say to you, 'Why should I let you into heaven?' what would you say?"

- I've always been pretty good
- I've gone to church
- I've prayed

That kind of faith won't work. It is faith in self, and it profits you nothing.