

HOW TO BE ACCEPTED BY GOD

Part 8

Romans 4:1-16

Rick Edwards

1. TWO IMPORTANT WORDS

* "JUSTIFIED" is to be completely accepted by God, as if I'd never sinned. God makes us as if we'd never broken any laws. He sees us perfect and complete.

* "CREDITED" God calculates our sin and God calculates what Jesus did on the cross and computes them together and says one cancels out the other

2. HOW CAN I BE ACCEPTED BY GOD?

Abraham shows us ...

- We don't become acceptable to God by doing good works Romans 4:1-8
 - ∨ 2 - No bragging
 - ∨ 3 - We are saved by faith See Genesis 15:1-6
 - ∨ 4-5 - wages versus a gift

Wages are something you deserve. A gift is something you don't deserve. God justifies us as a gift.

Why would God justify the wicked? Because that's all there is! There aren't any righteous people around.

∨ 6-8 - David agrees with Abraham

- We don't become acceptable to God by religious rituals. ∨ 9-12
 - Compare Genesis 15:6 with 17:23
 - Which came first? Faith!
 - Circumcision is a symbol of your faith, not a cause of your faith
 - ∨ 12 Paul is saying that God said to Abraham, "You're OK. You're righteous because of your faith"

- We don't become acceptable to God by by keeping the law. Romans 4:13-15
 - The purpose of the Law was never to save anybody; it was to show that we needed to be saved. ∨ 14

See Galatians 3:17-25 for a full explanation of the Law's purpose:

- The only way we are acceptable to God is by faith. ∨ 16-17

III. WHY DID GOD MAKE OUR ACCEPTANCE BASED ONLY BY OUR FAITH?

1. To demonstrate God's grace ∨ 16
2. To demonstrate God's power ∨ 17

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I want to talk about the issue "How can I be accepted by God?"

That's a very crucial question. It's asked many different ways. Some people would phrase it like this:

- How do I get to heaven?
- What will I do that will please God?
- How can I be right with God?
- How do I become justified?
- How can I find myself acceptable so that God will accept me as part of His family and into His kingdom?

When you consider all the many ways that people try to save themselves you can see a lot of variety. Baptism, communion, going to church, keeping the Ten Commandments, being a moral person...

There are basically three different ways that people try to get to heaven:

1. Earn it.

Work hard, follow rules, regulations, rituals. Most of the world thinks this. If I just work hard enough and my good outlasts my bad then I'll make it to heaven.

2. Belong to the right group.

Salvation by affiliation. "I'm a ... (and they give their label)". If you belong to the In group, you get in.

The Bible teaches that you are accepted by your faith. It's a matter of belief and trust in Christ. That's the message of Romans. Faith alone saves us. Nothing else. Not, Faith plus baptism or Faith plus church. Just faith alone.

Romans 3:28 summarizes this principle. *"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."* The only way we can be accepted by God is by faith.

Paul, being a master teacher, uses a very effective teaching tool to reinforce this truth. It's called an illustration. **Paul knows we learn by illustration. The life of Abraham is Paul's example.**

He chooses Abraham, a man all of us can relate to.

- **Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. 4:1 – He is our forefather, the original Jew. Through Isaac, Abraham's son, all the Jewish nation was born.**
- **Abraham was also the father of the Arab nation.**

He's also the father of all the Arabs, the Moslems. All the feud in the Middle East is really just a family feud -- between cousins. Arabs and Israelites are really related. They both can trace themselves back to Abraham.

Abraham is the father of Islam and Judaism.

- **As we get into this chapter, we'll see he's also the father of Christians.** Three great religions look back to Abraham. He was the father of faith.

Abraham was born in the city of Ur in the Mesopotamian valley. Ur of the Chaldees.

In Ur, he was a moon worshiper. That's what they worshiped in Ur -- the moon. It wasn't out of rebellion; it was out of ignorance.

One day God, the one and true God, spoke to him and said, "Abram, take all your family and move." **Abram said, "Where are we going?" God said, "I'll tell you when we get there."**

On faith he moved. God promised out of this one man He would make a great nation -- the nation of Israel.

Paul knew that the Jews regarded Abraham as a pattern. He was the perfect example to prove that you're not saved by works, but only by faith.

I. TWO IMPORTANT WORDS

There are two key words:

Justified -- to be completely accepted by God. To enter into a right relationship with God. God becomes my friend, not my enemy. I'm right with Him. James 2:24 *"Abraham believed God. It was accounted unto him as righteousness. He was called the friend of God."* Wouldn't you like to be God's friend? How do I become acceptable to God? How do I become friends with God rather than an enemy? **Justified -- Just as if I'd never sinned. God makes us as if we'd never broken any laws. He sees us perfect and complete.**

Credited -- in the KJV it's the word "reckoned" or "counted". Other translations use "set down". The Greek word is the word we get our word logic. It's a bookkeeping term, an accounting term. It literally means to compute, to calculate. The word is used 41 times in the New Testament. It's a very important word. 39 times by Paul, 19 times in Romans and 11 times in this very chapter. This can be called the computer chapter of the Bible.

God calculates our sin and God calculates what Jesus did on the cross and computes them together and says one cancels out the other. God looks at our sin and then looks at what Jesus did and calculates them together and says -- it's even. He looks in the debit column at our sins and the credit column at God's righteousness through Jesus and the books balance at the end.

II. HOW CAN I BE ACCEPTED BY GOD?

We'll see the importance of these two words in Abraham's life. How can I be accepted by God? Abraham shows us how. Paul clears up any misunderstanding about how we're saved.

v. 1 *"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works he had something to boast about but not before God."*

1. We don't become acceptable to God by doing good works.

That's not the way to do it. Paul uses a "what if" argument. Just suppose you could be saved by doing good. **If you could be saved by working for it then you could brag about it.**

Listen!! Can you imagine what heaven would be like if you could earn your way to heaven?

You can always tell when somebody is trying to work their way to heaven -- they tell you about it. They brag about it.

They may do it subtly, dropping a hint about something they think is impressive so you'll ask more about it. If you could be saved by good works then you could brag about it.

V2 *"...but not before God."* You may be able to brag about it before people. They may be impressed and they may even applaud it, but God's standards are still so much higher that you could never measure up to it. **It doesn't impress God. You don't impress God! No matter what you do, you don't impress God!**

Why? Because He knows our motives. He knows no matter what we're doing in public He knows how we are in private. God is not impressed.

God says, Sorry, you don't find your self worth, your acceptance in achievements or accomplishments. That's not the way to feel good about yourself. If you build your self worth on your record, your performance, somebody is going to do better and then you're in trouble.

You may impress other people but you're not going to impress God. You cannot find your self worth just on what you accomplish because there's always somebody that's doing better.

There is another way to find acceptance before God.

v. 3 *"What does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was accredited to him as righteousness."*

Genesis 15:1-6

It was Abraham's belief, his faith, that made him righteous.

Genesis 15 is the actual account of how God dealt with Abraham. *"After this the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. God said I'm going to make you a great nation."*

Abram was 85 years old and didn't have any kids and God says you are going to be a great nation. v. 5 *"God took him outside and said, `Abram, look at the heavens and count the stars if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be."*

Abram, being 85 and no kids, V 6 "Abram believed the Lord and it was accredited to him as righteousness." Circle "believe".

That's the first time the word believe is used in the Bible.

One of the principles of Bible study is the first place where the word is first used sets the pattern for how it is to be used throughout the scripture. **The word in Hebrew is literally "to say Amen".**

Amen means "so be it... I agree".

- **God gave Abraham a promise and Abraham said, "Amen, God."**
- **God said, "Abraham you're going to have a lot of kids, a lot of descendants." Abraham said, "Amen, God. So be it."**

He believed God. It was his belief that credited him righteousness.

Credited. Computed.

Abraham didn't deserve it. Did Abraham earn this privilege? The Bible says God just chose him. He said, "I'm going to use you to be the father of a great nation."

How would you respond if you were 85 years old and God said you're going to have a kid? We know how Sarah responded.

She was over 80 years old. She laughed. We know she didn't believe God because an 80 year old woman, if she found out she was going to have a child, would not laugh -- she would cry! God says "This is kind of funny, a couple of old foggies having a kid so let's name the baby Isaac" because Isaac means laughter.

Why did God give them a baby? Because Abraham believed.

Romans. God says, You want to know how to get acceptable to God? Don't look at works.

- Abraham wasn't saved or justified by works. He believed. He had faith.

V 4 Then Paul adds another illustration. v. 4 *"When a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."*

Those of you who go out to work, you work your 8 hours a day and at the end of the week your boss gives you your paycheck.

How could salvation be a gift if you work for it? Then it's something you work for, you didn't earn it. But the Bible says in Romans 3:23 *"The wages of sin is death".*

We get our condemnation the old fashioned way -- we earn it! *"But the gift of God is eternal life."*

Wages are something you deserve. A gift is something you don't deserve. God justifies us as a gift.

V 5 "However to the man who does not work but trusts to being acceptable before God who justifies the wicked."

Why would God justify the wicked? Cause that's all there is! There aren't any righteous people around.

**If He only justified the righteous... anybody here perfect?
God justifies the imperfect. His faith is credited as righteousness.**

When you have faith it goes in the credit column. That faith in Christ cancels out all of the negative things, the sins in your life.

the very way we are saved is the very way we continue the Christian life. It's a gift.

- **The bottom line is this: There is nothing that you can do that is going to make God love you any more.**
- **If you're a Christian there is nothing you can do that can make God love you any less. That's an amazing truth!**
- **God loves you just as much on your bad days as on your good days. It's credited according to your faith, not according to your works.**

If that's the case why don't I just go out and live any way I want to live? Just try it. God will still love you.

That doesn't mean He won't discipline you.

I love Rick, Chris and Natalie but do you think I used to let them get away with stuff? No. I disciplined them because I loved them.

V 6 David says the same thing.

Paul is pulling out the heavyweights.

Abraham is kind of like the George Washington of the Hebrew nation. David is the Lincoln.

These are the double heavyweights in Jewish history. There is no one else he could appeal to with strong argument. David says the same thing when he speaks about the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works. **"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven [blessed means happy] whose sins are covered. Happy is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."** This is a quote from Psalm 32:1-2

Psalm 32 is one of the Psalms of confession after David had murdered Uriah and committed adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. **David said, I got myself in such a mess because of my sin but God cleared my record just because I believed.**

Not because I deserve to be forgiven simply because I believed. Happy is the man whose sins are wiped out, whose slate is clean. Not because he worked for it, earned or deserved it. But simply because God honored his faith.

The guilt is canceled, forgiven, forgotten. If you're a believer, God does not hold your sin against you. It says they are covered.

They are not counted against you. "You mean when I get to heaven God's not going to say anything about all those bad things I did?" No, He's not.

God keeps a record of your works for rewards but God does not keep a record of your sins if you're a Christian.

Because they've all been covered by the cross. Every sin you'll ever commit has already been paid for.

Then what is the purpose of confession? Simply for fellowship here and now. It doesn't do anything about heaven. **Confession puts you in fellowship with God right now.**

Paul, using Abraham and David, is simply saying, You don't become acceptable to God by doing good works.

- **We don't become acceptable to God by religious rituals. V 9-10**

Paul talks about circumcision. We discussed the Jewish rite of circumcision in chapter two. **In review, circumcision was the most important symbol of the Jewish nation.** The Jew said, it doesn't matter who your parents are, if you're not circumcised you're not a Jew. Even if you're born to Jewish parents.

They thought circumcision -- this ritual -- was a passport to heaven automatically. Paul says that's an error for two reasons.

V 9-10 *"Is this blessedness only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised? We've been saying that Abraham's faith is credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited. Was it after or was it before?"*

Genesis 15:6 *"Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

- **Abraham was still not a Jew at this point.**
- **Abraham didn't become a Jew until he was circumcised.**

When did that happen. Chapter 17:23 'On that very day, Abraham took his son Ishmael and all whose born of his household or bought with his money, every male, and circumcised them as God told him.' He did this Jewish ritual.

What is the difference? In chapter 15, Abraham is 85. In chapter 17, Abraham is 99.

It's fourteen years later. When did God say to Abraham, "Abraham, you're OK."?
When he was 85 -- fourteen years before this whole ritual was even developed.

Paul is blowing the minds of the Jews that believed the only way you get to heaven is by being circumcised.

He's saying, "Read your Bible. God said to Abraham, you're OK, 14 years before this ritual was even developed." Abraham was a Gentile and then he became a Jew. He came out of Ur of the Chaldees.

Romans 4:11. The second reason why this ritual doesn't work is in v. 11 "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then he's the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised in order that righteousness might be credited to them."

Circumcision is a symbol, not a cause. It's a symbol of your faith, not a cause of your faith.

In Good Housekeeping they have a seal -- A Seal of Approval. In meat, hamburger, pot roast, it says USDA -- a seal on the meat. That is a seal. **Does the seal make the meat acceptable or show that that meat is acceptable? That's what all rituals do.**

The modern counterpart of circumcision is baptism.

- **Baptism doesn't make you a believer, it shows you are a believer.**
- **Baptism is like the wedding ring of the Christian life.**
- **This ring doesn't make me married, it shows that I am married.**
- **What makes me married is the commitment in my heart.**
- **The ring is the outward sign of the inward commitment.**

v. 12 *"And Abraham, he is the father of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."*
Abraham became a believer before he was a Jew.

Paul is saying that God said to Abraham, "You're OK. You're righteous because of your faith" -- 14 years before he became a Jew. Therefore he is not only the father of the Jews, he's the father of everybody who believes whether he's gone through a Jewish ritual or not.

We are not acceptable to God by our works, by our religious rituals.

- **We don't become acceptable to God by keeping the law.**

V 13 Paul has already talked about this. He uses Abraham again as an example. v. 13 *"It is not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heirs of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith."* Keeping the Ten Commandments won't get you to heaven.

Why does he use Abraham as an example of somebody who was saved without keeping the law? Because Abraham lived 430 years before the Ten Commandments were given.

How could Abraham be saved by keeping the Jewish law when there wasn't any law until 430 years later when Moses gave it?

He's using Abraham to say, Those of you who think you're going to make it to heaven by keeping all the rules of the Bible, realize that Abraham had it made before the laws were even given!

What is the purpose of the Law? v. 14

"For if those who live by the law are heirs, faith has no value. And the promise is worthless. Because the Law brings wrath. Where there is no Law there is no transgression."

If there is no law to break then you don't have any lawbreakers. There is something about human nature that the moment a law is established they have a desire to break it.

It's like when God told Adam and Even, "You can eat anything in the entire garden except one little tree." Which one did they want to go taste? They immediately headed for that one.

It's like when you see a sign that says, "Don't touch the wet paint!" or "Keep off the grass." Where there is no law there is no transgression. The only way we can keep from breaking the Law is to have no Law.

The purpose of the Law was never to save anybody; it was to show that we needed to be saved.

It was just to show how we don't measure up. The Law doesn't save anybody. It just shows us where we blow it! Where we make mistakes.

Galatians 3:17. Here is a much fuller description of what Paul is saying in Romans 4. *"What I mean is this. The Law introduced 430 years later [after Abraham] does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise."* What is the promise?

That he'll become a great nation. One of that seed will bless the entire world. That promise was not based on Abraham keeping the Law. The Law hadn't been given. It was an unconditional promise. v. 19 *"What then is the purpose of the Law? It was added because of transgression until the seed, the promise referred to, has come."*

He goes on and talks about that the purpose of the Law is simply to show us where we fall short.

We can't be acceptable to God through doing good works and we can't be acceptable to God through ritual and we're not made acceptable to God by keeping the Laws.

- **There is only one way we can be acceptable to God. That's faith.**

It's your faith that saves you but how do you know that you've got any faith if you don't see any actions? Faith is obedience.

Like the story of George Blondin many years ago in the 1930's. He was a famous tight rope walker. He stretched a cord across Niagara Falls. He was going to walk across Niagara Falls on a tight rope. Nbody had ever done it before. On the day, there were crowds on both sides. He walked across back and forth several times.

Every time, they would shout and cheer. Every time, he'd say, "I'm going to do it again." Finally, he pushed a wheelbarrow full of dirt across. He walked across pushing the wheelbarrow. Blondin sets the wheelbarrow right in front of a tourist. **He said, "I believe you could do that 150 times." Blondin says, "You really believe in me? Get in the wheelbarrow."** (McGee Commentary) Page 235

III. WHY DID GOD MAKE OUR ACCEPTANCE BASED ONLY BY OUR FAITH?

Romans 4:14ff *"If those who live by the Law are heirs, faith has no value."*

It's one or the other. You either live by faith or you live by legalism. Why did God make our acceptance based only on faith? Why couldn't we earn it? Why couldn't he make it that we could work for it?

Two reasons why God has established that the way you're made acceptable to him is by believing and trusting:

1) To demonstrate God's grace. v. 16 *"Therefore the promise comes by faith so that it may be by grace and that it may be guaranteed to all Abram's offspring not only those who are of the Law [Jews] but also to those who are of the faith [us, those who believe] of Abraham, he is the father of us all. It's of faith so that it may be of grace."* Circle "promise".

There are two Greek words used in the New Testament for promise. One word literally means a conditional promise: If you do this, I'll do that. The other word is the word that's used here.

It's means an unconditional promise:

I'm going to do it just because out of the goodness of my heart whether you respond or not. That's the promise of God. It's not based on your performance. Your salvation is not based on a conditional promise of if you keep working then I'll keep saving. It's a promise, You accept it by faith and it's yours, whether you ever perform or not!

What's the beauty of an unconditional promise? It's not based on performance. It is guaranteed. It comes by faith so "...that it may be by grace and that it may be guaranteed ... Your salvation is guaranteed. If your acceptance were based on your performance how could you ever be certain that you were going to be saved? How could you ever have an assurance? You'd always be wondering, Have I done enough?

What if I stop working for 10 seconds and then die during that 10 seconds?

What if I sin and then all of a sudden die in the middle of the sin? Your acceptance is based on grace so that it is guaranteed.

Man is inconsistent. Our performance is unreliable.

If your salvation were based on your performance could you guarantee that tomorrow you'll act the same way you're acting tonight? Could you guarantee that next week you'll be as committed to God as you are tonight? No. You would have no assurance you'd ever make it to heaven. You'd have no guarantee. You would live in constant fear of, "I wonder if I'm doing enough? How little is too little?"

Aren't you glad for God's grace? Otherwise you could never be sure of your salvation. You could never be sure that you were accepted. Grace guarantees what works can't. The guarantee is based on God's character not your performance. That's good news!

2) To demonstrate God's power. That is for next week!

v. 17 *"As it is written I have made you a father of many nations in the sight of God in whom we believe, the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that were not as they were."* Next week we're going to talk about, How do you believe God for a miracle?