

## Righteousness from God, apart from law

At Romans 1:16, Paul declares that the gospel says everyone is saved on the same basis – by believing.

**I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16. *NIV used throughout*)**

Paul immediately reaffirms his position that righteousness is wholly and completely dependent on faith.

**For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” (Romans 1:17)**

At Romans 3:9ff, Paul argues that no one – neither Jew nor Gentile – is righteous, that all are under the power of Sin.

**Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. (Romans 3:9)**

In view of this, Paul argues at Romans 3:20 that no one will be declared righteous by observing “the” law.

**No one will be declared righteous in [God’s] sight by observing the law. (Romans 3:20)**

After he condemned all as being under the power of Sin and unable to be declared righteous through observing “the” law, Paul returns to the “gospel”, since it provides the solution. At Romans 3:21, Paul declares that righteousness comes from God quite apart from “law”, and that the “Law and Prophets” (the Hebrew Scriptures) do preach this message.

**But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. (Romans 3:21)**

Paul goes on to explain that righteousness comes from God on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ.

**This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all ... are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. ... A man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. (Romans 3:22-25, 28)**

Paul then shows that “righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ” upholds the teachings of “the law”.

**Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. (Romans 3:31)**

In the verses that follow, Paul shows that by “the law”, this time he means all of the Hebrew Scriptures. He answered his question with the examples of Abraham and of David. Abraham preceded the giving of “the law” at Sinai while David’s writings appear in the “writings”.

Regarding Abraham, Paul says that God accounted him righteous on the basis of belief, not works.

**If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” ... To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (Romans 4:2-3, 5)**

In regards to David's message from "the law", Paul reasons:

**David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." (Romans 4:6-8)**

At Romans 3:21 Paul wrote of "a righteousness from God, apart from law". At Romans 4:6 Paul expressed this as "God credits righteousness apart from works". This shows that the expression "apart from law" is simply a way of describing works of obedience which are employed by a person to achieve favor with God, in an effort to be deemed by him as being righteous.

Paul then shows that although these examples of "righteousness apart from works" from Abraham and David are conveyed in the Scriptures of the Hebrews, they apply equally to the uncircumcised. This is shown in the fact that Abraham was credited as righteous before he received the rite of circumcision (Romans 4:9 – 12).

Paul continues his theme that Abraham was credited with righteousness on the basis of his faith, and not through works.

**Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. ... It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless. (Romans 4:9, 13 – 14)**

Here, "law" is contrasted against "faith".

Next, Paul says all that "law" brings is wrath, but not righteousness. The wonderful insight is then given that since there is no law, transgression can no longer exist. What wonderful relief!

**Law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. (Romans 4:15)**

Paul then repeats his message that the promised righteousness on the basis of faith is made to those who are of "the law" (Jews) and to those who are of Abraham, since he is the father of all, circumcised and uncircumcised.

**The promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. (Romans 4:16)**

Paul then returns to the topic of the gospel:

**The words "it was credited to him" were written not for [Abraham] alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. (Romans 4:23-25)**

Being given righteousness on the basis of our faith, Paul says we are at peace with God's righteous requirements.

**Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5: 1 – 2)**

Thank God we are not saved on the basis of obedience (through “law”), but “through the righteousness that comes by faith”.

Our righteousness does not rely on our feelings, emotions, doctrinal correctness, or eschatological accuracy. It relies on the completed work of God, and our acceptance of it, through faith.

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I am reminded of an illustration I heard in a sermon.

The scene is a market, where slaves are being offered to the highest bidder. The next slave on offer is a very powerfully built man.

The auctioneer calls for bids, but each time a bid is made, the slave mutters, “I will not work”. The bidding goes higher, but with each bid, the slave tells them, “I will not work. I will not work”.

After a while, no further bids are made, and the slave is sold.

When the successful bidder comes to the slave, he again repeats “I will not work”.

The successful bidder removes the chains from the slave and says, “I paid the price so that you can go free. You are no longer a slave.”

At this, the former slave falls to his knees and says, with tears rolling down his cheeks, “I will serve you all the days of my life and I will do whatever you wish”.

God forgives because the price has been paid. The forgiven believer then works because they have been rescued, not in order to gain freedom.

Doug Mason