

Romans 4:4-5

- I. **ROM 4:4-5** is commonly explained as teaching that the sinner's faith is not a work on his part since *work* is there contrasted with *belief*. This study corrects that and proves that there is a kind of faith that is *counted for righteousness*. Not all faith is valid. **JAM 2:19; ACT 15:5**.
- A. The reward of heavenly inheritance (**COL 3:24; 1PE 1:4**) is of grace, not works or debt.
 - B. Many affirm that the spiritually dead sinner *becomes* quickened/regenerated, *procures* righteousness and life, and *obtains* forgiveness of sins, all *conditioned* upon his belief.
 - C. If **ROM 4:5** is teaching that the sinner's faith is such a condition, then it is also teaching that a person should never do good works, since righteousness is "...to him that worketh not, but believeth..."
 - 1. Thus, if the sinner should ever do a work like *repentance* (which is a work, see **MAT 12:41 c/w JON 3:10**) in conjunction with belief, he would be disqualified from righteousness, since righteousness is expressly "...to him that worketh not, but believeth..."
 - 2. This, though, would be in flat contradiction with other plain Scriptures. **MAR 1:15; ACT 20:21**.
 - 3. **JAM 2:17-23** sets forth a faith *with* works that is counted for righteousness.
 - 4. Yet **ROM 4:5** is setting forth a faith *without* works that is counted for righteousness.
 - D. Obviously there is a "workless faith" scenario under consideration in **ROM 4:5** that does not contradict a "work-filled faith" scenario in **JAM 2:23**. Both derive from Abraham's good example and both are "counted/imputed for righteousness."
- II. To deny that human faith (*belief, trust, reliance, confidence in*) is a work is to deny the definition of *work*.
- A. work: Something that is or was done; what a person does or did.
 - 1. **MAT 23:23** and **ACT 16:30-31** show that belief/faith is something that one *does* and is therefore a work.
 - 2. Work is anything one does, good or evil. **ROM 9:11**.
 - B. Believing on Jesus Christ is a commandment. **1JO 3:22-23**.
 - 1. Keeping commandments is a righteous "doing" on our part. **DEU 6:25**.
 - 2. Thus, "...works of righteousness which we have done..." (**TIT 3:5**).
 - 3. Therefore, believing on Jesus Christ is a work on the sinner's part.
 - C. **HEB 4:1-10** sets forth belief as the means to enter into rest.
 - 1. This is described as *labouring* to enter into rest in v. 11.
 - 2. Labour = work. **EXO 20:9**.
 - 3. Therefore, our belief is a work.
 - 4. This entering into rest is by ceasing from works through the work of believing.
 - 5. This perfectly accords with Jesus' words in **JOH 6:28-29**.
- III. Consider v. 4.
- A. Two concepts of acquisition are set forth.
 - 1. Acquisition may come through establishing the other party's indebtedness to you through your work (something *you do*).
 - 2. Or acquisition may come through grace, which forbids the idea of the giver having to discharge a debt to you (an obligation on His part).
 - 3. Therefore, grace flatly excludes the idea of God discharging a debt to a sinner.
 - B. Men are justified **FREELY** by grace. **ROM 3:24**.
 - 1. free: (Of a gift) Given out of liberality or generosity, (not in return or requital for

- something else).
2. grace: Favour, favourable or benignant regard or its manifestation (now only on the part of a superior); favour or goodwill, in contradistinction to right or obligation, as the ground of a concession.
- C. If **v. 5** is teaching that eternal life/righteousness is *acquired* through God rewarding you for your belief (You believed, therefore God was obliged to reward you), **v. 4** is meaningless!
 - D. Grace is as antithetical to *debt* as it is to *works*. **ROM 11:6**.
- IV. It is also commonly assumed that the phrase “counted for righteousness” (**vs. 3, 5**) means “obtained righteousness / became righteous.”
- A. Thus, in **v. 3**, where it says, “Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness,” it is assumed that Abraham became righteous and obtained eternal life *because he exercised faith*: his faith was the *effective cause* of both.
 - B. This idea is then made into a universal formula or condition for the acquisition of righteousness and eternal life.
 - C. However, this theory is proven wrong by numerous points.
 1. **ROM 4:3** is quoted from **GEN 15:5-6** where God promised Abraham that he would have a seed as numerous as the stars of heaven.
 - a. Abraham had already exercised faith years previously when he left Ur of the Chaldees. **HEB 11:8**.
 - b. Scripture affirms that “...the JUST shall live by faith” (**GAL 3:11**). It is a just (justified) man who lives by faith.
 - c. justified: Made just or right; made or accounted righteous...
 - d. Abraham was a just man many years earlier and accounted righteous.
 - e. Did Abraham obtain righteousness and eternal life when he left Ur (**GEN 12**) and later lost it but regained it in **GEN 15**?
 - f. If Abraham's belief in **GEN 12** (according to the theory) did not then result in his obtaining righteousness and eternal life, why not? The factors are the same: God spoke, Abraham believed, Abraham acted accordingly.
 2. The expression, “Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness” is also rendered:
 - a. “...reckoned...for righteousness.” (**ROM 4:9**).
 - b. “...accounted...for righteousness.” (**GAL 3:6**).
 - c. “...imputed...for righteousness.” (**ROM 4:22; JAM 2:23**).
 3. If it is true that this phrasing is setting forth a condition which Abraham fulfilled in order to obtain righteousness and eternal life, it must be noted:
 - a. That expression refers to at least three different events in Abraham's life:
 - (1) When he received the promise of an innumerable seed. **GEN 15:6**.
 - (2) When he conceived Isaac. **ROM 4:22**.
 - (3) When he much later offered up Isaac. **JAM 2:21-23**.
 - b. Does this therefore mean that Abraham obtained righteousness and eternal life three times after he had already left Ur by faith in **GEN 12**?
 4. Also, if this phrasing is setting forth a condition to obtain righteousness and eternal life, then it must likewise be doing so in **PSA 106:30-31**.
- V. When something is a *counter*, as when a poker chip is used instead of cash at the table or when faith is counted for righteousness, it is to be understood as a *token*.
- A. An analogy: If you had nothing with which to purchase a train ticket out of a doomed city and someone out of sheer mercy and love paid the price for you and gave you the ticket, that ticket itself is not what purchased your deliverance. But the conductor deems the

ticket (token) to be proof that the purchase price of deliverance had been paid. It is an *evidence* of a completed transaction of value, a satisfied requirement.

- B. A parable: A certain great man was willing to purchase the release of some men hopelessly locked in debtor's prison so they could come live with him. The cost was extremely high so the great man's son agreed to forego his own inheritance to cover the cost. The transaction was completed and the men were released along with a "debt satisfied" document. The wiser of the men took notice of, and hung on to the document to show it to anyone who asked about their release. They made the best of their liberty and flourished. Others of them did not take such notice of the document, some let it corrupt, and a few even lost it; none of them flourished. All the men eventually were called to the great man's estate. Those who had treasured their release and their document gladly presented it as evidence that they should live with the great man. The others shamefacedly quivered before the great man. But the great man and his son remembered them as having been purchased and legally released: their lack of the token document did not cancel the transaction. These also were allowed to live with the great man, though their entrance to his estate was not nearly as abundant as the others. Note **2PE 1:5-11**.
- C. So also is a sinner's faith. It is *evidence* and *witness* that a person HAS BEEN purchased, legally released and made righteous. **HEB 11:1, 4**.
 - 1. The sinner's faith provides evidence to men that a sinner has indeed been set free from the guilt, penalty and mastery of sin. Like the "debt satisfied" document, it can be pulled out whenever one's liberty is called into question or when trial, temptation or even failure come along in life. It ever is a comforting assurance of a better inheritance in the world to come.
 - 2. The sinner's faith, though, like the "debt satisfied" document, is not what procures the better inheritance. It is a token of a completed transaction that did cause the release and reward of inheritance.
- D. A sinner's faith is not what *causes* his eternal salvation any more than the *token* rainbow is what *causes* mankind to be saved from another global flood. **GEN 9:12-13**.
- E. When Abraham believed God, he manifested that God had made him righteous and given him eternal life and a new inward nature capable of true belief. c/w **JOH 5:24**.

VI. **ROM 4:4-5** is actually teaching the opposite of what many people assume about it.

- A. If a sinner believes that his faith (something he does) OBTAINS his righteousness and eternal life, that is a reward reckoned BY DEBT, not grace!
 - 1. Such a faith is NOT counted for righteousness since it is affirming a reward which is based upon debt incurred by one's work, contrary to **v. 4**.
 - 2. That kind of "faith" is a "do and live" acquisition of righteousness, which cannot acquire righteousness. **GAL 3:10-12**.
 - 3. That kind of "faith" presupposes that belief of the gospel is an indispensable requirement for the expunging of sins, thus condemning all who never heard the gospel and denying the plain facts of texts such as **ROM 11:27-29**.
 - 4. Sinners do not obtain the righteousness of Christ through their faith. They obtain their faith through the righteousness of Christ. **2PE 1:1**.
- B. If a person believes that Christ ALONE in faithful obedience (**ROM 5:19; HEB 1:3**) justified him by His substitutionary death and resurrection and that his (the sinner's) faith is the *proof*, not the *cause* of eternal salvation, THAT kind of faith is counted for righteousness.
- C. Faith is God's "PAID" stamp on the debt of sin.