

How Anyone can Obtain Righteousness

Romans 4:9-12

When it comes to the matter of salvation and getting right with God, many people are confused.

Today, there are groups that say baptism is a requirement for salvation. Some claim that people must belong to their denomination or group if they hope to be saved. Others claim that certain sacraments or holy ordinances need to be kept in order to get to Heaven. No wonder so many people are confused and are uncertain where they stand with God.

Really it is no different than in Jesus' day.

In **John 3:3** Jesus told Nicodemus, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Later in **John 6:65** He told His disciples, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." Many of His followers didn't understand and walked away from Him. They were confused and felt that no matter what they did, it wouldn't be enough.

Paul is writing to help these Roman Jews understand that getting right with God is simply a matter of faith.

Martin Luther came to understand and accepted that salvation has nothing to do with one's obedience to the Law, nor does it rely on anyone's good works. Blessings like justification, righteousness, salvation, forgiveness, are all given to us free and clear, when we trust Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. There are so many people in our world wondering how anyone could possibly obtain *Righteousness*. Let's take a closer look at how God makes this possible.

THIS IS GOD'S PLAN FOR RECEIVING RIGHTEOUSNESS (9)

⁹ Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.

Paul begins by addressing the issue of circumcision.

He anticipated the objections and confusion of his Jewish audience because he knew they devoted far more significance to circumcision than God intended. For them, circumcision had become God's mark of salvation in a man's life! However, some Jews, went so far as to teach that even if a man committed idolatry, God would have to supernaturally remove his circumcision in order for that man to go to Hell. So, Paul tells them that Abraham was saved by faith alone, it was not the Law or the rite and ritual of circumcision. He reminded them that Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. But don't judge the Jews too harshly for becoming so devoted to circumcision. When God called Abraham, He chose his descendants to be His people. Then He used circumcision as a permanent sign for the Jewish men to be reminded that they belonged to God. Once it was done, it could not be undone!

Today, circumcision is a medical procedure to be performed a few days after a male child is born.

This is more for hygiene purposes than anything else. But this doesn't change the fact that salvation still comes through Jesus Christ, and each person must trust Him by faith and faith alone! Even though people still attach spiritual significance to rituals like baptism, communion, and good works, as markers that show they belong to God.

HOW AND WHEN IS RIGHTEOUSNESS ACCOUNTED? (10)

¹⁰ How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.

Paul's previous remarks brought up another point of Confusion

The Jews wanted to know just when righteousness was applied to Abraham, did it come before or after he was circumcised? It must have been hard for them to accept after all; their hopes of heaven were on a ritual of the flesh and now they were being told that many of them were going to die and go to Hell.

Things haven't changed today; people are still looking at everything under the sun for salvation! They are so confused about this and the only thing that will really help is to hear the truth from redeemed people. They need to see God's truth lived out in the world by those who claim to know Jesus. Paul had an answer for his generation, do we have that same answer for our generation?

Paul uses the book of Genesis to answer their question.

Righteousness was accounted to Abraham when he was 85. **Genesis 15:6** says, "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness". However, even though the Jews believed that circumcision was required for salvation, Abraham wasn't circumcised until he was 99 (**Genesis 17:1-14**). The man they revered was saved long before he was circumcised.

The point being that salvation never has been about what we do.

It has always been about whether we belong to Jesus. If we do, we are saved, forgiven, adopted into the family of God and declared righteous. If not, we are lost, no matter what we do! Salvation will only be found only in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only door to salvation! In **John 14:6** - Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me". Although Abraham was long before Jesus, he was faithful to God. The gospel of John tells us that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (**John 1:1**). Therefore, you could say that Abraham knew Jesus and was faithful to Him.

NOW PAUL ADDRESSES THE PROOF OF RECEIVING RIGHTEOUSNESS (11-12)

¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, ¹² and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised.

Paul tells the Jews how they can demonstrate that they are a possessor of righteousness.

He points out that circumcision was a sign in the flesh that was to serve as a reminder to them that they were in a vital relationship with God and they were to demonstrate the truth of that relationship, by walking with Him in faith each day. Then as a seal, circumcision was meant to serve as a reminder that they were supposed to walk in humble submission with the Lord. The true value of their circumcision was in their heart as they surrendered in obedience to the Lord!

Today, baptism is similar in that it is a reminder that we are to humbly walk in willful obedience to all that Jesus has commanded.

Our confession of Jesus as Lord says that we believe and have faith in God, then as we walk in that faith, it proves our confession is true. That is James' point in **James 2:18** - But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. We prove that we are saved, not by what we say, but by what we do.

Now, if the uncircumcised Gentiles had the same kind of faith that Abraham had, they also had the right to call Abraham "father." It all comes down to what you are trusting in for your salvation! The same is true for the Jews, if they can demonstrate the same kind of faith that Abraham lived by every day. **Romans 2:28-29** - ²⁸ For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.

Conclusion

When I think of things like this, I am thankful for that July day in 1978, when a pastor came to our house and explained what it took to receive God's salvation through Jesus Christ.

Yet I am more thankful for that December night in 1985 when I truly understood and God told me from that time on my name was written in Heaven. Then my confession and prayers may have paved the way, but now it's my actions that prove to God, my confession was true. Oh, I know that there are still times my actions don't match what I say, but I can go to Jesus in repentance and ask for forgiveness and get back on track with the things He has for me to do.

What about you?

What marks you as belonging to God? Are you living for Jesus, or trusting in some other religious means to save you? Remember it's all about faith! If anyone is going to get into Heaven, it will come through the same message the Jews heard. No one can earn their way to Heaven, but they can believe their way there!

Those of us who are sure need to be willing and ready to talk to those who are not.

Those who are not sure don't wait for someone to come to you, start asking God for help. Keep in mind that it is not always easy for believers to recognize when someone needs help. In fact, we all need to pray, and God will hear our prayers!