

Morality or Righteousness

Romans 4

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Part of Paul's Letter to the Romans Chapters 3-5

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Moralism is often mistaken for Christianity, though, in truth, moralism can fit under almost any theological system, for it can be reduced down to being nicer people.

Genuine *Christian* morality is an *outgrowth* of a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, by the power of his Spirit, and this morality *isn't* what saves us.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus

—Romans 3:23-24 (ESV)

The Greek word for justification was used in law courts, as a legal term, as a pronouncement by a judge that a person was declared “just” or right with the legal system, as opposed to being condemned or guilty.

...a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no

one will be justified.

—Galatians 2:16 (ESV)

“Works of the law” is really just another way of saying doing good works and being moralistic, doing them with the hope that that gets us into God’s good graces.

...a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law.

—Galatians 2:16 (NLT)

As Scripture makes clear, our justification is by grace alone, through faith alone.

Justification’s source is *God and His grace*, its basis is *Christ and his cross*, and its means is faith alone, apart from any works anyone does - this is the heart of the Gospel.

Paul’s writing this letter, in part, because so many Jews had missed this point, turning their religion into a moralistic system of laws, and it still happens today within Christianity.

Paul is going to show that the *father* of the Jewish faith, Abraham, was not saved by good works but through his faith.

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

—Romans 4:1-3 (ESV)

And [the LORD GOD] brought {Abram} outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are

able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” And [Abram] believed the LORD, and [the LORD] counted it to him as righteousness.

—Genesis 15:5-6 (ESV)

The word “counted” here has the sense of being graciously awarded as a gift, versus being the reward for some action or good work of Abraham.

Genesis tells us Abraham *believed* God, and based on his faith and belief, God “counted” or pronounced Abraham to be righteous.

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness

—Romans 4:4-5 (ESV)

Paul is contrasting Jewish Christians who *were* circumcised - converts from the Jewish faith - with Gentile Christians, who *weren't* circumcised after converting from pagan religions.

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

—Romans 4:9-12(ESV)

An issue Paul and the early church faced over and over were the attempts by Jews who converted to Christianity who said Gentiles who wanted to convert had to first be circumcised

- to, in effect, do the *work* of being made Jewish first.

Abraham would not be circumcised until Genesis 17:9-27, which was more than ten years later!

God said Abraham was righteous, but were the Jews willing to say he *wasn't* because he hadn't yet been circumcised, or was circumcision, in reality, a sign of the covenant, of the relationship, Abraham had with God, done after the relationship was already in place?

In hope [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

—Romans 4:18-22 (ESV)

Paul says Abraham "grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God," which shows us the importance of the church and regularly attending worship.

But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

—Romans 4:23-25 (ESV)

Just as Jewish and Jewish Christians often tried to make justification and salvation about keeping the law and being circumcised, many in the church today are misled into believing salvation today is about being good and moral.

*We are justified by faith **alone**, saved by grace **alone**,*

*and redeemed from our sin by Christ **alone**. Moralism produces sinners who are (potentially) better behaved. The Gospel of Christ transforms sinners into the adopted sons and daughters of God.*

—Albert Mohler

Next Week: *Romans 5*