

**Intro:** Have you ever heard of "The Legend of Divina Pastora"? I hadn't until I received a letter this summer from a missionary who is serving in the Philippines (Craig Johnson). He wrote, "In 1595 Spanish Augustinian priests carved out a settlement in the thick forests of central Luzon and erected a small chapel and convent. This community, which came to be called Gapan, served as a strategic base of operations for launching further Augustinian missionary efforts to the north.

"In 1700 a priest brought a statue of the virgin Mary to Gapan from Spain. Calling the image 'Birhen Divina Pastora' (the Virgin--Divine Shepherd) to associate the statue with Gapan's abundant grazing land and animals, the priest's goal was to establish a group devoted to the veneration of the statue. He was hugely successful: Filipinos from throughout the area and in neighboring towns began to pray to the Divina Pastora to intercede for them in their needs.

"In 1800, however, the statue was reportedly lost and wasn't seen again for fifty years when some farmers discovered it lying under a tree in a rice field. The image was immediately enthroned in the Catholic church, and it is said that a miraculous spring appeared behind the altar which provided healing for people for more than fifty years.

"Today, the statue of Divina Pastora stands in a prominent place in the Catholic church, and Filipinos continue to travel from throughout the region to entreat the image for help. For many, Birhen Divina Pastora is the vital link between earth and heaven, between man and God himself." (The Johnson Journal, July/August, 1994)

Those words jump off the page, "For many Birhen Divina Pastora is the vital link between earth and heaven, between man and God himself." In stark contrast, consider the words of the Bible, "Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Rom 3:28)."

The world is full of people who are seeking to find a relationship with God based on their own efforts. Is it possible? In our study of Romans, we have learned it is not. In fact, to sum up what we have seen thus far, Romans 1-3 teaches us three basic truths:

1. Mankind needs God's righteousness (1:18; 3:10).
2. God's righteousness is available through the gospel of Christ (1:16-17).
3. God declares sinners righteous by faith, not works (3:28).

We are not right with God on our own. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Why is that? "There is none righteous, no not one." "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation...for in it is the righteousness of God revealed." We are saved "sola fide," by faith in Christ alone.

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\*\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

Perhaps you're wondering, "Well, how can we know for sure? How can we know that somebody won't slip into heaven some other way? How can we know that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way?" The stakes for those questions is high, for the issue is eternity.

**Proposition: In Romans 4:1-8, we find two case studies in faith. These case studies reveal for us that undeniable truth that we are justified by faith, not merit.**

Review: To sum up Romans 1-3...

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I. Case Study #1: Abraham (1-5)

Two lessons we can learn from him...

- A. Our works may impress men, but not God (2).
- B. We are justified by imputation, not perspiration (3-5).
  1. It is the activity of God (3).
  2. It is the result of grace (4).
  3. It is realized by faith (5).

II. Case Study #2: David (6-8)

Two lessons we can learn from him...

- A. God's favor must be received, not earned (6).
- B. God's forgiveness must be received, not earned (7-8).
  1. His righteousness is imputed to us.
  2. Our sins are imputed to Him.

**I. Case Study #1: Abraham (1-5)**

Paul frequently introduced a new section in his letter by asking this question (six times, in fact), "What shall we say then?" Paul had in mind his Jewish readers. He could read their minds, "Wait a minute, Paul. This doctrine of justification by faith, how does it jive with the Old Testament? Are you saying God saves people differently than He used to? Are you teaching us something new?" To which Paul answered, "Not at all. What I am teaching is as old as Abraham himself."

Who was Abraham? Abraham lived 2,000 B.C. To the Jew, he was the greatest of the patriarchs. There was no character held in higher regard in Jewish circles than Abraham. So Paul says, "Ok, take Abraham. He is our forefather. What did he discover?" He discovered two important lessons in his life. In fact, there are two lessons we can learn from him.

A. Our works may impress men, but not God (2).

V 2 "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath something of which to glory, but not before God." Many Jewish rabbis taught that Abraham earned a right standing with God by his good works. In fact, they taught that Abraham had a surplus of merit from his works that was available to his descendants.

According to the "Book of Jubilees" (a Jewish document written in the 2nd century BC), "Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in

righteousness all the days of his life (from Cranfield, 83-4)." The rabbis believed that Abraham was the only righteous person in his day, and that's the reason God chose Him to be the ancestor of His chosen people. Was that true?

Look again at v 2. "For if Abraham were justified by works (implication--"and he was NOT"), he has something to glory (he has something to brag about)." So would everybody else. If salvation was something we earned, there would be cliques in the church. There would be boasting. There would be pride.

No doubt Abraham was a great man. He was an impressive forefather. But his works didn't impress God.

Never forget this. Right standing with God is not based on performance. It's based on grace. We may impress people with our works, but not God. Why not? Any "work" that we do is marred by sin, and will pale in comparison with His perfection!

A child draws a picture and says, "Isn't this good?" You nod, pat the child on the head, and say, "Yes, it's great!" But if an objective third party came along and took your child's picture, and put it next to the work of a professional artist, what would he say? "This artwork is full of flaws."

The first lesson we can learn from Abraham is this. Our works may impress men, but not God. Here's a second lesson.

#### B. We are justified by imputation, not perspiration (3-5).

V 3 "For what saith the scripture?" Stop there for a moment. Right there is our authority no matter what the issue--What do the Scriptures say? Opinions will fly, but what does the Bible say? Men will spout off their views, but what has God said? In this case, what does the Bible say about Abraham? How was he saved?

Paul quotes from Gen 15:6, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." How was Abraham saved? How was he justified? By perspiration, by his own effort and merit, by his performance? No. By imputation.

Imputation is a tremendous word. It's a doctrinal word. What is it? We can make three observations about the doctrine of imputation from vv 3-5.

##### *1. It is the activity of God (3).*

V 3 says, "It was counted unto him." The verb is passive. If you look at Gen 15:6, you will read, "And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness." The verb in Genesis is not passive, but active (in fact, Paul is quoting from the LXX, where the passive is used). Who is the subject of this activity? God is. God counted it to Abraham for righteousness.

What does that mean? The Greek word translated "counted" is the word "logizomai." Paul uses it eleven times in this chapter. It's translated by three different English words: "count" (3), "reckon" (4), and "impute" (6). It's an accounting or banking term which means, "to put to one's account."

If I went to your bank with \$10,000, and told the teller, "This is for (your name). Put this money in his account." The money would be yours. It would be credited to your account.

Imputation is the activity of God. God imputes righteousness to our account. He declares us to be right with Him. On what basis?

## *2. It is the result of grace (4).*

V 4 "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." Notice the contrast between grace and obligation. God's righteousness is a gift. It can't be earned. It's the result of grace.

We know the difference between grace and obligation. If your boss said, "You put in your 40 hours this week. Here's a gift for you. It's your salary check." You'd say, "This is no gift. I earned it!" But suppose you were disabled, and couldn't work. One day the mail came, and there was an anonymous letter with a \$500 bill. That's grace. You didn't earn it. It was a gift.

We're pretty clear on the difference between grace and works when it comes to paychecks. But lots of people confuse the two when it comes to righteousness. They think righteousness is something they must earn. It is not. It is the result of grace.

I don't believe with all of his theology, but William Barclay made an observation that would settle matters for a lot of counseling patients. He wrote (64), "It is the supreme discovery of the Christian life that we do not need to torture ourselves with a losing battle to earn God's love but rather need to accept in perfect trust the love which God offers to us."

Perhaps growing up you had a parent you wanted desperately to please, but could not. Love was based on performance. If you performed, you felt acceptance. So you performed. But it was never enough. Then you became a Christian. That was great, but you transferred the baggage of your view of your parent to your view of God. You thought God's love was based on your performance. But is it?

God's love is not something we must earn. Our standing with God is based on grace. That truth alone could liberate many of us, if we would get a handle on it.

Perhaps you're wondering, "On what basis does God impute righteousness to our account?" V 3 says, "Abraham BELIEVED God, and it was counted to him." V 5 says, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." There's the key word--faith.

## *3. It is realized by faith (5).*

The Hebrew word translated "believed" means "to say amen" (Wiersbe, 524). That's what Abraham did. In Genesis 15, God made Abraham a promise. He told Abraham, a man of old age, he was going to have a son. He told Abraham to look up at the night sky, and said this, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be (Gen 15:5)." Do you know what Abraham did. He said, "Amen!" The text says he "believed in the LORD." And his faith was counted for righteousness (6). When was Abraham saved? When he believed God.

I want you to ponder something. What do the following people all have in common? Matthew, a former, cheating IRS man; Saul of Tarsus, a one time Christian-killer; the Samaritan woman at the well, a lady who had been married and divorced 5 times, and then lived with a man; Nicodemus, a self-righteous, religious leader; the demon-possessed wildman from Gerasa who lived in a mosoleum; former homosexuals

who were members of the church in Corinth. What do these people have in common? They were all declared righteous. How? By trusting in Christ.

Does God justify only "nice" people, only the "good" guys? No. The text says, "God justifies the ungodly (the wicked, NIV)." How amazing!

Martin Lloyd-Jones makes an important observation about v 5. "'God justifies the ungodly'. He does not first make us godly and then justify us. What Paul says is that He justifies the ungodly, not the ungodly made godly, not the unrighteous made righteous or become righteous. They are justified as they are, without works and while still ungodly (172-3)."

All because of imputation. Imputation is the activity of God. It is the result of grace. It is realized by faith. Case study #1 reveals that we are justified by faith, not by merit. Two lessons are clear: Our works may impress men, but not God. We are justified by imputation, not perspiration.

## **II. Case Study #2: David (6-8)**

David lived about 1,000 B.C. If Abraham was the Jews' greatest patriarch, David was their greatest king. Abraham was justified by faith. So was David. In the second case study, Paul shares the lesson David learned, the key to "blessedness."

V 6 "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness." Who is the blessed person? Who is the happy person in life? The man who has grasped two lessons David understood.

### A. God's favor must be received, not earned (6).

V 6 says, "The man unto whom God imputeth righteousness apart from works." David lived during the time of the Mosaic Law. But David didn't merit God's favor. He received it. So must we. Louisa Stead captured this truth when she wrote, "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him at His word, just to rest upon His promise, just to know, 'Thus saith the Lord.'"

### B. God's forgiveness must be received, not earned (7-8).

The blessed person is the forgiven person. In vv 7-8, Paul quotes Psalm 32, a psalm David wrote, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven..." By the way, David wrote these words after his blatant sin with Bathsheba. What did David learn about God's forgiveness? It must be received, not earned. How? Two steps...

#### *1. His righteousness is imputed to us.*

V 6 says, "God imputes righteousness." II Cor 5:21 tells us how, "God made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." When, by faith, we receive Jesus Christ, God puts the righteousness of Christ to our account. Something else happens.

#### *2. Our sins are imputed to Him.*

Vv 7-8 "Saying, Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven..." David had broken God's Law, deliberately and blatantly. But God forgave Him. God did not impute His sins against him. It was as though he had never sinned!

When God justifies us in Christ, He imputes Christ's righteousness to us, and He imputes our sins to Christ. Can you sing these words? "My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul."

There are some tremendous, practical benefits of the doctrine of imputation. Allow me to merely list a few, and invite you to ponder them further.

- a. Security: What God imputes, I cannot negate.
- b. Stability: I need not wonder about my standing with God. I can have assurance.
- c. Strength for living: If I know God has accepted me in Christ, it matters not what others think of me. You say, "But you don't know what I've done." I may not, but you know what David did. He committed adultery. He murdered. He played coverup for a year. Yet he experienced forgiveness. How? God did not impute his sin against him.
- d. Satisfaction: I am "blessed" (6). I can't add to what God has done!
- e. Significance: I need not search for it. I have it in Christ.

Objection: "If you believe in justification by faith, and not works, there's no incentive for right living, is there? It'll end up being a crutch for wild living, won't it?" Not at all, in fact, just the opposite.

Why? If God has been so kind to declare me righteous, I will want to live a righteous life. I will want to please Him. For example, if I am traveling alone, and I stop at a gas station, I have a great reason to resist the temptation to linger at the pornography rack. What is it? It's not merely the fear of "getting caught." My motivation for holy living is my right standing with God. After all He did to declare me righteous, after all my Savior did to take my sins and give me His righteousness, how could I sin against Him?

Do you want to enjoy the favor and forgiveness of God? They must be received, for they cannot be earned. Just ask David.

### **Conclusion:**

Years ago, I helped a farmer bale hay. On that hot day, the first thing we did was straighten up the haymow. Upon moving one bale, a large raccoon ran out. It was a mother, and we had uncovered her nest. The farmer didn't want the coons in his barn, so he gave them to me. I took them home, and tried to raise them. They were fierce. Someone told me if I kept handling them, they'd settle down and trust me. They never did. One time one climbed up in a rafter to get away from me, slipped and fell head-first on the concrete, and died. Eventually, we just let the other go. They refused to trust me, and let me take care of them.

A lot of people treat God the same way those coons treated me. They won't trust Him. They won't accept His care. They resist Him, and want to go their own way.

Friend, God loves you. He offers you what you cannot attain on your own. The question then is this. Have you trusted in the One God provided for your righteousness? Have you believed in Jesus Christ?