

## Romans

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Romans 4:1-8



Vss. 1-3

- Since the beginning of the letter to the Roman church Paul has been engaging in a debate with an imaginary Jewish Christian opponent. For many years at this point Paul has been engaging the Jews in these debates, so he no longer needed an actual person, like a chess master he could play both sides at once.
- Throughout Chapter 3 Paul had been making the case that we are saved by God’s grace, not by our works, not by attempting to keep the Jewish Law. Now here in Chapter 4 he brings the argument home. In any debate or teaching where the Jews are concerned there are at least three trump cards: Abraham, Moses, and David. In the verses Paul drops two.
- In verse 1 what Paul is asking is, “What is it that makes our father Abraham special?”. Here Paul is anticipating an objection: “Yes Paul, we hear what you are saying, but what you are proposing, that we are saved by Grace and not by works/keeping the Law, is an entirely new concept and honestly contradicts everything we’ve been taught to believe”. So Paul pulls Abraham out of the deck. Paul has been talking about abstract ideas like Faith and Grace, so to clarify and to build a position that cannot be breached, Paul says, “Do you think it was Abraham’s works that justified him in the eyes of God? If that were so he surely could claim to be spiritually superior to us all! But that’s not what the Scripture says. Genesis 15:6 says that, ‘Abraham **believed** God and it was credited to him as righteousness!’”.
- William Barclay puts it this way: “God had come to Abraham and bidden him leave home and friends and kindred and livelihood, and had said to him, ‘If you make this great venture of faith, you will become the father of a great nation.’ Thereupon Abraham had taken God at his word. He had not argued; he had not hesitated; he went out not knowing where he was to go...It was not the fact that Abraham had meticulously performed the demands of the law that put him into his special relationship with God, it was his complete trust in God and his complete willingness to abandon his life to Him. That for Paul was faith, and it was Abraham's faith which made God regard him as a good man.

- Hebrews 11:8 “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out, not knowing where he was going.”

#### Vss. 4-5

- Paul is not saying that keeping the law, doing the works of righteousness, are unimportant and have no value. Instead, he is saying that like a laborer who does a job and is paid, the works of righteousness are what we do as a matter of course. These are things that God’s people simply do. We love as Jesus loves, give as Jesus gives. Living this way doesn’t earn us special favor with God any more than simply doing a scripted fitness routine wins an athlete any special praise from a coach. It’s what we’re **supposed** to do, what we’re **expected** to do. The Law is the base line, the starting point, not that which exceptional. For instance, we make a lot of fuss about tithing. The Law says that a tithe is 10% of our gross earnings and people quietly complain about having to give the church so much and many don’t. Among all the denominations, Southern Baptists give better than anyone, but the average Southern Baptist hasn’t given better than 3% in over 40 years. But what Paul is saying is that the Law, in this case the 10% tithe, is where we start! It’s not the goal, the finish line, it’s the **starting line**! So the disciple is to start at 10% in his giving and work up from there. Not to gain favor with God, but he is only doing what a disciple is **supposed** to do.

#### Vss. 6-8

- Paul now drops a second trump card, quoting David from Psalms 32:1-2. Again, the quote here will not line up word for word with your Bible because not only is Paul quoting from memory, but he is quoting out of the Greek translation of the original Hebrew. So word for word there are some subtle differences, but the meaning is not altered.
- I again like Barclay’s summation: “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. True, after that, any man of honor is under the life-long obligation to show himself worthy of that love. But he is no longer a criminal seeking to obey an impossible law; he is a lover offering his all to One who loved him when he did not deserve it”.