

I. The Difference Between Works and Faith

A. Romans 9:30-33 . . . What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; [31] but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. [32] Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, [33] just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."

B. Prayer

II. Faith in Jesus is essential to justification

A. As a reminder, Romans 9-11 is a section of Romans where Paul is dealing with the fact that the Jews, in spite of their birth and religious heritage, are not automatically justified. In fact, contrary to Jewish beliefs at the time Paul wrote Romans, only a few were justified while the majority were outside the secure circle of God's love.

1. We have worked our way through Romans 9:6-29, and the main point of those verses is that God independently and sovereignly chooses who he justifies and to whom He gives eternal life. The reason this truth is so important is because many Jews in Paul's day, just like many who consider themselves born-again Christians in our day, believe they have a standing with God that guarantees them justification and eternal life. And according to their beliefs, this guarantee is immutable, that is, it is not subject to change in any way, regardless of what we do or do not do once we believe we claim to have trusted in Christ as our only hope of eternal salvation.
2. Now it might seem that in Romans 9:30, Paul is setting down the sovereign election of God and picking up the requirement of faith in us as the new basis for justification and eternal salvation. However, Paul is not changing directions, but rather he is continuing to explain why the Jews are not automatically justified, while Gentiles, who are not God's chosen people, are being justified.
 - a. And so after making it clear that it is God, not us, who decides who God justifies, Paul continues on by making it clear that we must come to God in faith and live a life of faithful obedience to be justified and given the gift of eternal life.

- b. In other words, though God independently and sovereignly chooses or elects, He has placed on us the responsibility to come in faith, to trust in Christ as our only means of redemption and eternal salvation, and to live a life of faithful obedience from that time forward. And this responsibility God places on us can either be rejected or accepted.
 - c. Now in showing that justification is a combination of God's sovereign choosing and our faith unto faithfully obedient living, Paul contrasts faith and works.

- B. Romans 9:30 . . . What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith;
 - 1. When Paul says the Gentiles did not pursue righteousness, he means they were content in their ignorance. In other words, they were not seeking to know God or submit to God. And they knew nothing about the salvation that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 2. However, when they heard the gospel message, some of them believed and responded accordingly.
 - 3. In affirming their response of faith, Paul says they attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith. Now Paul's use of the word attained should gain our attention – even though we should be careful not to exaggerate Paul's use of this word.
 - a. The word attain (*Gk – lay hold of, seize*) is a verb that always implies an effort toward an object. The object here is righteousness, and the specific righteousness is the righteousness which is by faith.
 - b. Therefore, the Gentiles attained the righteousness that makes them acceptable to God as a result of putting forth the effort God requires of us for attaining such righteousness.
 - 4. Now I want to be clear here: our efforts, even though they are according to God's requirements, do not change God's grace or God's sovereign choosing over who He justifies. However, what our efforts do is verify that we are taking seriously our faith in God and His requirements of us in relation to justification and eternal life.
 - a. Now you may be wondering what the efforts are that I am speaking of. For starters, it takes effort to respond honestly and properly to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and the drawing work of God toward salvation. For example, we must repent of our rebellion – which means turning our backs on the cultural

and religious norms, the family and friends, and the pride, position, power, and wealth that have held us captive to sin. Then we must embrace God and His truth, and earnestly pursue living according to His will.

- b. And consider the effort required to remain vigilant against the wiles and flaming arrows of the devil, along with the constant pull of the world to return to old sinful ways.
 5. The point here is simply this, where Paul was only presenting God's independent and sovereign right to choose who He justifies in Romans 9:6-29, he is now adding to that unchangeable truth the fact that we must respond to God in faith and live according to that faith in order to be justified and receive eternal life.
- C. Romans 9:31-32a . . . but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness (*the law of God that when obeyed results in righteousness, acceptance with God, and justification by God*), did not arrive at that law (*that is, they did not arrive at the intended outcome of the law*). [32] Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.
1. As we know, the Jews had the Mosaic Law, and the law was intended to bring them to the kind of righteousness God required for acceptance, justification, and the gift of eternal life.
 - a. Now I understand that in our day, any mention of the word "law keeping" in relation to justification and eternal life is condemned as works-based salvation by almost everyone in the Protestant wing of the church.
 - b. However, listen to what God said to Israel way back in Leviticus 18:4-5 . . . "You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God. [5] So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD."
 - c. So how do we put this in perspective? First, the current low view of the Law as a path to justification is not without merit, for to gain acceptance with God by means of keeping the Law, you have to keep the whole Law, as stated by Paul in Galatians 5:3 . . . And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.
 - d. Of course, keeping the whole law is a difficult, if not impossible challenge. James makes this clear in James 2:10 . . . For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

2. So what is my point? There is a righteousness that justifies in keeping the law. However, from the OT and the larger context of Romans, we see that the Jews not only faced the daunting challenge of keeping the whole law, they made their failures worse by being deliberately hypocritical in keeping the law.
 - a. In other words, they pretended to be single-minded about keeping the law when in fact they were double-minded – double-minded in that they kept the law in some ways and in some areas of life, while knowingly and intentionally practicing sin in other areas of life (Note: Romans 2:17-29).
 - b. I spoke of this last Sunday when I gave you a more definitive description of the Jew's hypocrisy in Paul's day by using Jesus' own words in describing them (Note: Matthew.23).
3. Again, drawing from all of Romans, we know that Paul has already attacked the Jew's rejection of faith and foolish use of works in their pursuit of gaining justification and eternal life. For example,
 - a. Paul says in Romans 3:20 . . . "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in God's sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" – not justification.
 - b. In Romans 7:14-25, Paul shows that those who are trusting in the Law to justify them are trapped in an unwinnable struggle between their good intentions and the power of sin and their sinful passion to lead them astray. Paul's point is that the Law, which is holy and righteous and good and given to us by God, cannot save us from the power and practice of sin. So who or what can save us? Only God, through Jesus Christ our Lord and by means of the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit and save us.
 - c. Paul says in Romans 8:3-4 . . . For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, [4] so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh (*and that includes works*) but according to the Spirit.
 - d. Simply stated, we need Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit to live according to God's laws, standards, and expectations.
4. Therefore, the point Paul is making is that the Jews were following a path of works to justification and eternal life, but that path does not lead there. The only path to justification and eternal life is the path of faith. And the entire Jewish population can not claim ignorance about this because there is both a remnant of Jews who

know this and there are those Gentiles who took the path of faith when they heard the gospel of salvation.

D. Romans 9:32b-33 . . . They (*the unbelieving Jews*) stumbled over the stumbling stone, [33] just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."

1. The quote, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed" comes from two different chapters of Isaiah. The first part comes from Isaiah 8:14-15, and the second part comes from Isaiah 28:16. To give us a fuller picture of the point Paul is making, we will look at both parts of the quote.
2. In Isaiah 8:1-16, Isaiah is prophesying about the Assyrian invasion that will come upon Israel and Judah like the rushing waters of a great flood. But contrary to what the Jews believed at that time, there would be only one place of refuge from those rushing waters, and that one place of refuge was God, who would be to them a rock, or a safe place for all who trust in Him.
 - a. However, according to Isaiah, those who will not trust in God for their security, but instead trust in other people and things, will be swept away by the flood waters. And in being swept away, the rushing waters will crush them up against the rock of refuge, that is, up against God, who at that point will not be a source of refuge for them, but rather a source of destruction.
 - b. Therefore, Isaiah 8:14-15 tells us that this refuge will become a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Many, Isaiah says, will stumble over this rock, and they will fall and be broken.
 - c. In talking to the unbelieving Jews of His day, Jesus said a similar thing in Matthew 21:42-44 . . . "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? (*Psalms 118:22-23*) [43] Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. [44] And he who falls on this stone (*Jesus*) will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."
3. The second half of the Romans quote comes from the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 28:16: "Therefore, thus says the Lord: 'Behold,

I lay for the foundations of Zion a costly stone, a chosen and precious cornerstone for its foundations, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.”

- a. In other words, those who trust in God and His Son Jesus Christ, need never fear that their trust will turn out to be wasted, so that they than feel ashamed for being so foolish as to trust in God to protect them, and save them.
 - b. God is our rock, our fortress, our stronghold; He is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and those who trust in Him will receive the full benefits of their faith. But if we do not live by faith, God will be to us a rock of destruction.
4. And this brings us to a discussion of faith and works.

III. Contrasting faith and works.

- A. In the NT, much is made of the contrast between faith and works, and Paul speaks to this issue more than a few times here in Romans. So what is the difference between faith and works.
- B. First and foremost, the difference between faith and works is an attitude that produces behavior in keeping with that attitude. For example:
 1. The dominant attitude of faith is humility, while the dominant attitude of works is pride.
 2. The prevailing attitude of faith is indebtedness to God. The prevailing attitude of works is entitlement from God.
 3. Of vital importance to works is knowing the law, while doing the law is what is vitally important to faith.
 4. The longing of faith is to be holy in all its behavior just as God is holy. The longing of works is to be as holy as it has to be to get from God what it wants to get, while being as sinful as it desires to be without losing out on what it wants from God.
- C. With these four realities in mind, consider the following specific examples of the contrast between faith and works.
 1. Faith trusts in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ for salvation from sin and eternal life. Works trusts in some specified level or amount of religious practices and personal good deeds for redemption, justification, and eternal life.
 2. Faith believes that God is the supreme being and that God rewards those who diligently seek Him. Therefore faith comes to God in humility, recognizing it is indebted to God for all the good it has, is receiving, and will have for eternity. Works believes God exists and that God has to reward those who do enough good deeds. Therefore,

works comes to God with a sense of pride over the good character qualities and good behavior it has attained in this life, and believes its accomplishments entitle it to special treatment from God, including justification and eternal life.

3. Faith depends on God as its primary source of security so that it does not feel the need to step outside the boundaries of godliness to make itself feel safe. Works trusts God for some things and trusts itself where it does not deem God trustworthy, which results in various forms of ungodly self-protection wherever it distrusts God.
4. Faith learns to be content with God, with what God is doing, and with what God is allowing, regardless of the circumstances. Works is content as long as God is acting according to its wishes and sense of need, while being discontent – both inwardly and outwardly – when God isn't living up to its expectations.
5. Faith loves its enemies, and that includes its friends and family when they are acting like its enemies. Works loves those who love it in return. Works loves as long as love is not too demanding. And works justifies not loving those who are mistreating it.
6. Faith seeks God's kingdom first, gives bountifully out of what it has, looks after the weakest and most helpless, and sacrifices when necessary to seek the good of others – confident that God will provide all it needs. Works determines how far it will go in seeking God's kingdom, giving what God requires, helping the weak and needy, and sacrificing for the good based on what it deems necessary to ensure its own happiness and well-being.

IV. Conclusion

- A. As I have already said, the foundational difference between faith and works is an attitude – an attitude marked by humility or pride, indebtedness or entitlement, doing what is right or merely knowing what is right, being holy in every area of life or being holy enough to get what it wants.
- B. To be a true descendant of Abraham, or a true child of God, we must come to God in faith and go forward in living a godly life by faith.