

Romans 4:1-12
“Worth before Works”

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I. Intro

The final 11 verses of chapter 3 must have blown the minds of the readers of Paul’s letter; “*Self-worth, value, apart from doing or keeping anything?*” Such teaching goes against all of human nature, against all religions and philosophies. *What will happen to society if we tell folks that they aren’t of value because they are trying to be good, they are of value solely on the basis of their relationship to God who is good?* Won’t society plummet into chaos, anarchy, and lawlessness where people will have nothing to restrain them? To prove his point Paul calls to the witness stand two revered ancestors Abraham and David. The history of the Jewish people didn’t begin with Moses it began with Abraham and their kingdom began with David. Paul uses Abraham as an example of being declared of worth by faith apart from works and he will address three important questions about Abraham:

- 1. How was Abraham made righteous?*
- 2. When was Abraham made righteous?*
- 3. Why was Abraham made righteous?*

II. Vs. 1-3 Grace before good works

Vs. 1-3 Paul answers the first question in these three verses by saying that Abraham was a “*good man*”, you will see that as you read about him in Genesis. He trusted God to lead him out of a country to one that God would show him. Over and over again we see that Abraham was a man

of “good works” and Paul doesn’t dispute that. Instead, **Paul says that those “good works” were not what caused God to declare him of value.** Most folks learn early on like Abraham that a way of gaining a sense of significance and self-worth is “**performance**”. If you perform at your word or above expectations, you will be highly regarded by our peers. And clearly Abraham could boast about his good works before his fellow man. But it doesn’t work that way with God, He is never impressed by our outward performance because **He isn’t limited by what we humans see as He looks beyond the action to the heart.** He sees the selfishness and self-centeredness behind our actions. He sees all the maneuvering and manipulation in what we do to get what we want. That’s why Paul says that Abraham could brag to some of us but not before God! **When did Abraham realize that his self-worth wasn’t based upon his good works?** In Gen. 15:5 God show Abraham the stars in the sky and said, “*Even if you could count all those stars, you still wouldn’t be able to count how many descendants you will have.*” God spoke to this man who didn’t have any children, he and his wife Sarah were well past the age of being able to produce children. And Abraham simply believed God and it was accounted to him as “*self-worth*”. Just by believing God’s blessing he had self-worth, he hadn’t done anything to have God say that; there was no condition made upon that statement by God, and it was his by faith. Based upon Paul’s words to the Galatians, God had made it clear to Abraham that He was talking to him about His Son Jesus and that through Him not only would Abraham have earthly descendants he would have spiritual ones as well. That is what Jesus told the religious leaders in John 8:39, 56 who claimed that a heritage to Abraham when He said, “*Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing My day and he saw it and was glad.*” **James also uses this section in Genesis and adds that he was called God’s friend not because of the way he behaved but because of the way he believed!**

- *God didn't declare Abraham of value or worth when he left Ur of the Chaldees*
- *Neither was it when he offered his only son Isaac on Mount Moriah*
- *God declared him of value and worth in Gen. 15:16 when he simply trusted God at His word.*
- *Even more amazing is that even though Abraham trusted God to keep his word he soon doubted and took matters in his own hands and tried to produce a child of faith through his wife's hand maiden Hagar.*

Yet even this didn't dislodge God's declaration of being of value and worth. *Abraham was not declared righteous when he followed God obediently or when he offered himself sacrificially, he was declared right when he trusted God supremely!* The one and only thing that man can do is trust God to do what He said He was going to do!

III. Vs. 4-5 Having begun in the Spirit

Vs. 4-5 If God had declared Abraham of value and worth because of his obedience or sacrifice then his value would have been based upon works and effort and he would simply have received what his effort had earned him. God would have only paid Abraham what He owed Him. That's Paul's point here Abraham did or didn't do anything that merited God's blessings. He uses an illustration that we have within our IRS regulations which states that if money under a certain amount is given you as a gift then it is not taxable. But if you are being compensated for the work you are doing then it is taxable. If you work then it isn't a gift it is wages for your labor and there is an obligation to pay you.

It's amazing how many Christians fall into this wrongful thinking. *Though they realize that they trusted in Jesus for their eternal destiny they spend the rest of their lives trying to earn God's approval and self-worth.* Apparently the Galatians struggled with this as Paul wrote

them in his letter to them in 3:3 “*Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*” If we are doing things to ensure God’s favor, thinking that in so doing God “**Owes You!!!**” We can’t do anything to secure God’s favor, we already have it the moment we trusted in Jesus. **Our doing things now is because we have God’s blessings and favor not to get them.** It isn’t our “*great faith*” “*prevailing prayer*”, “*dedicated devotion*” or “*tireless work*” that has been the secret behind the innumerable blessings lavished upon our lives. **“It’s unmerited, undeserved and unearned favor”** and all that I can do in light of this is worship Him! Oh saints, far too much of our “*bible reading, prayer and service*” is to earn a reward from God instead of as Paul wrote in Ephes. 1:3 that “*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”*. “*Are you saying not to read my Bible pray and serve?*” No, I’m saying that all the above things are **not to fulfill an obligation or to earn a reward they are because you love Him and want to spend time with Him.** God isn’t impressed with your effort He is blessed when you want to be near Him. **Our being declared of value is not God making us perfectly right but counting us as perfectly right.** After God counts us as right, then He begins making us truly right, which will culminate in our resurrection when we see Him face to face. **Jesus’ work on the cross is so great that He does not just declare of value the “godly” He declares of worth the “ungodly”.**

The Greek word **grace** “*Signified spontaneous generosity of the heart without any expectation or return.*” The other day I cut my finger and Hannah was following me around and I asked if she would like to help Grandpa and she said, “*Yeh, sure yeh!*” So, I got a Band-Aid, and she pulled the backing off as I wrapped it around my finger then unsolicited she said, “*Gama, Hani kiss and make better!*” I hadn’t told her if she did that then I give her something she did all on her own! It is not the penitent man, or the praying man that God has declared of worth it is the ungodly man!

IV. Vs. 6-8 Man after God's heart?

Vs. 6-8 Paul uses another person as an example and he too is a giant among them, David. Paul says that David spoke of the blessedness of a man to whom God credits His self-worth apart from works with regards to failure. **The quote here is Psalm 32 where he writes about how he found this gift of self-worth when he was suffering from a guilty conscience as he had committed adultery and murder.** David knew what it was like to be a guilty sinner; he knew the seriousness of sin and how good it is to be truly forgiven. If David was judged on works alone, then God must condemn him. **"No sinner can carry their own sins and come back cleansed of guilt. No amount of money, no science, nor any other earthly power can carry away from the sinner one little sin and its guilt. Once committed, every sin and its guilt cling to the sinner as close as does his own shadow, to all eternity unless God carries them away."**

You talk about a guy not earning self-worth, what could David ever DO to regain self-worth after sinning like this? In 1 Samuel 13:14 we are told that *"The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart"*. God being all knowing knew that David was going to blow it; so, what is it that made him a man after His heart? **I believe that it is the fact that he would simply receive his self-worth from God and not attempt to earn it. The believer is not merely a pardoned criminal, but one who has been placed in a right relationship with the One he offended.** The state of being right before God covers past present and future! God no longer sees us as sinners, screw-ups, He sees us as His children. **Two men, one called "a friend of God" the other "a man after God's heart" and they both have in common receiving their self-worth by trusting God not by performance.**

V. Vs. 9-12 More of God less of me

Vs. 9-11a Paul now moves to the 2nd question *"When Abraham was made righteous?"* God chose the symbol of circumcision to describe the cutting away of the flesh. Paul's point here is that

Abraham received the symbol 14 years after he was pronounced as being righteous by faith and a friend of God. So clearly not even this symbol of cutting away the flesh caused God to gift Abraham self-worth. It wasn't circumcision that caused God to say, "*Ok, now you can be my friend!*" The same could be said today of church affiliation, baptism, or any other thing.

Vs. 11b-12 Finally Paul explains "*Why Abraham was made righteous?*" It was to make the father of all who believe! Circumcision stands for the "*Gift of self-worth from God*" and was given Abraham as an outward sign and a reminder for everyone that we can only receive self-worth we can never earn it. What a change this makes in our motivation if we know that we do not have to earn God's love, His favor, His forgiveness it's already ours in Christ. We no longer need to seek to get our self-worth from others; we don't have to show folks our value and significance by our works. You are set free from that tread mill. Instead, you are free from performance-based self-worth and now free to simply love God and people because of His love for you. Faith always involves a twofold process:

1. **Renunciation of self:** Faith implies the cessation from self-reliance and dependence.
2. **Reliance on God:** Faith also implies the commencement of total dependence upon God. Our trust responds to His truth, our faith to His faithfulness.

The basic thought of Christianity is that all man can do is take God at His word and stake everything on the faith that His promises are true!