

It is **so** hard... It is so, **very** hard... to get people of the world to understand, what the Christian faith, is all about.

*A year (or so) ago, I went to a funeral in another church here in town, and the message the minister gave, was just a plain, simple, good, Gospel message, and afterwards, I overheard a couple of blokes talking to each other, and one said to the other, "I think he accused us of being sinners..." and he said this, as if this was something new... and the minister must be mistaken... And how **dare** he suggest such a thing.*

And yet, I know, that time and time again, at funerals, and just about everywhere else, the true gospel **has** been preached in this town – over and over again... And yet people still don't get it. Even some people who regularly attend a church – still don't get it.

If we were to take a survey of ordinary old Jo-Blo down the street, and if we were to ask them, what someone has to do, to ensure that they're right with God, I reckon generally, we'd get one of two different answers.

Some will say, "You have to live a good life, and do the right thing."

- As long as you don't hurt anyone; and
- You don't make a habit out of kicking the cat; or
- Beatin' your wife; and
- Watch your tongue around little old ladies

And if you always try to do the best you can:

- You help other people out if you're able
- You give \$5 to the Salvos when they knock at the door
- You try to teach your kids some good values; and

- You leave the world a little bit better than how you found it

Then that's what'll get you right with God... I reckon that's what most people would say.

Probably the 2nd most common answer, would be “If you want to get right with God, then you have to be a bit religious”:

- You have to go to church; and
- Get christened; and
- Do confirmation classes; and
- Take communion;

To get right with God, you have to do all this religious stuff.

And then of course, we'll get those who 'hedge their bets' and go with both answers:

To get right with God, you have to be religious (go to church and stuff); **and** live a good life – always try to do the right thing...

Do you agree with me? Is that how you reckon most people might answer (if we were to ask them that question)? To get right with God, you live a good life; you do the right thing; or you get a bit religious...

But that is just so, so far, from the truth of the matter... It's not the Gospel... The **only** basis, for getting right with God, is this thing called “**faith**”. And that's what this morning's reading has been all about – **faith**.

Over the last month-and-a-bit, as we've studied the previous couple of chapters of Romans, Paul has drilled it into us, that we are **incapable**, of being good enough, to get right with God. No matter **how** many good things we do, or how many religious ceremonies or activities we participate in,,,,, the tiniest, miniscule, little sin, ,, , disqualifies us...

And the **worst** sin of all, is to decide, that I don't **need** God, or "I really don't want to have anything much to do with Him. And if He doesn't let me into heaven, well it's His loss, because I've been such a good bloke, or such a 'nice lady'"...

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That's the terrible truth of the matter – **No one** is righteous – **not one**... And even if I only sinned once a day, well so far, in my nearly 47 years, I've committed 17 104 sins – but let me tell ya – one-a-day doesn't come close...

- but who's counting? ... Who's counting??? God is.

He knows my righteous deeds. He knows my evil deeds. He has them all written down in His book.

And Joe Blo we surveyed down the street, might say – "Well you'd better do some more **good** things, to get some more entries on the positive side of the ledger..." Or "You'd better get religious, and get some more points that way"....

But the trouble is, we're not saved by doing good things, and we're not saved by getting religious... We're saved by faith... And that's something that the world cannot comprehend, because the world tends to equate "faith" with doing good deeds, or it equates "faith" with getting religious".

And most people would **much** prefer, to have a little check-list of righteous deeds they have to do, or a list of carnal sins they must avoid; And a list of religious duties they must perform... That's human nature. Well, it might be human nature, but it's not reality, because that's **not** the gospel...

There **is** no "list" that gets us right with God.

Whenever I preach on a particular passage, one of the first places I begin to study, is to look for key words in that passage. And in today's reading, there's a few words that keep coming up:

- Law
- Works
- Faith
- Justified
- Righteousness

And we've been encountering some of those words a fair bit in Romans already, haven't we?

Well, let me give you one that we haven't encountered yet – and it's a very important word, which helps us to understand, what Paul is teaching us today: It's an accounting term – "count" (or counted), or "reckoned"...

And so, imagine we have a ledger, with our sin on one side, and our righteousness on the other, and down the bottom you've got the totals...

And what Paul is telling us, is our faith (faith in Jesus), is reckoned, or counted, as righteousness – and not just a single

entry – it totally scrubs out the entire negative side of our ledger, and it totally fills up the good side of our ledger. It's the only positive worth counting... Faith. And if someone has no faith in Jesus, then their ledger's pretty scary. It reveals, that they're spiritually bankrupt.

Our Faith, is counted as “righteousness”... At the end of the day, when the ledger is all added up, the **only** thing worth counting, is faith, because faith, is what makes us right with God.

And some people will tell you, “well that's the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament”... Not so...

Even in the Old Testament, Judaism – the Jewish faith – began as a way of faith... But it didn't take long, for men to muck it up, and turn it into a religion of a list of do's and don'ts. And Paul gives us two examples of how (even in the Old Testament) righteousness came by faith.

It all began with Abraham. Abraham was considered as the father of the Jews... And Paul explains that Abraham wasn't saved by being circumcised, **or** by keeping the 10 commandments, **or** by always doing the right thing (because he certainly didn't). Abraham:

- Well, at times, was a coward;
- he was a bit deceptive;
- Twice, Abraham told people that his wife was his sister, and so another man took her as his wife;
- he sometimes argued with God...

Abraham had plenty of sin on the bad side of **his** ledger...

What then, did he have going **for** him? ... Faith.

Abraham had faith, and it was **counted to him**, as “righteousness”.

And so Abraham, became the father of **all** who believe – of all who have faith, whether they’re circumcised or uncircumcised – alright – whether they’re a Jew, or a Gentile (a non-Jew). Abraham, is considered as the Father of Faith.

The second Old Testament example of being saved by faith, was David. David is held in such high regard in the Bible, and yet, when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, he broke 5 of the 10 commandments in one hit.

1. When he saw Bathsheba, he coveted his neighbour’s wife.
2. And then he committed adultery with her.
3. And in doing so, he stole Uriah’s wife from him.
4. And then, when he realised she was pregnant, he tried to cover it up, and he lied – he bore false witness..
5. And then finally, when Uriah was so honourable, that it prevented David from covering it all up, he had Uriah murdered.

That was David – one of the heroes of the Old Testament.

What could David ever do, to make up for that???? And you might be listening to this today, wondering to yourself, “What could **I** ever do, to make up for what **I’ve** done?” ... Well, I don’t think you’re worse than David, are you??? And even if you were, it wouldn’t matter.

David repented, and pleaded for mercy from God. And his faith, was counted as “righteousness”. And David wrote a song, to praise Godⁱ:

⁷ *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,*

and whose sins are covered;

⁸ *blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”*

Did God count David and Abraham as righteous because they were such good blokes? No. Did He count them as righteous because they kept a big heap of religious ceremonies and what-not? No. They were counted as righteous, because of their faith.

And I’m here today to tell you, that nothing has changed. There’s plenty of people out in the world, who do plenty of good stuff, but they have no faith. And likewise, there’s plenty of pews being sat on today, by people who are full of religion, and empty of faith....

But righteousness before God, is a product of only one thing: faith.

Well, that makes faith pretty important, doesn’t it? What is this faith???

Well, faith means “to believe”. But, let’s dig into that for a bit... *I can believe that a motor vehicle can get me from point “A” to point “B”, but unless I get **into** that motor vehicle, it hasn’t done me any good.*

Faith, is not just believing **about** God – it's not just believing **about** salvation either... – the Devil knows all that stuff, but **he's** not right with God. Faith, is believing in, and trusting in God, with your whole life

In the late 1800's, Charles Blondin put on a show, walking a tight-rope across the Niagara Falls. He walked over and back. And everybody was amazed. And then he said to the crowd, "Do you believe I can cross over again, carrying somebody on my back?" And the crowd said "Yes! Yes! We believe it". And so he pointed to one of the enthusiastic audience, and said "Right'o, you'll do, hop on." ... And he said "No way..."

And so he asked another person. And another. And another. ... What would you say? And all these people, who enthusiastically believed that he could do it, wouldn't let him carry them across... Until finally, one young man climbed onto his back, and held on, while Blondin carried him across the Niagara falls.

That's the difference between "belief" and "faith" ... The whole crowd believed Blondin could do it, but only one man had faith in Blondin...ⁱⁱ

What does it mean to have faith in God?

- Well, it's much more than just believing that He exists
- It goes well beyond knowing, that Jesus is raised from the dead.
- And it's certainly a very different thing to having a check-list of "do's" and "don'ts"

You see, having faith in God, means giving control over to Him.

Paul said that righteousness ^{24....} will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,

There is an enormous difference between believing “**about**” and believing “**in**”. To believe “**in**” God, means to have **faith** in Him. And if Jesus is Lord, this is about giving control, over to the One in whom we have faith...

You see, while **we** try to be in control of our little check-lists of “do’s” and “don’ts”, **we’re** in control... **We** decide what’s right and wrong. **We** decide the standards of morality. And **we** maintain complete control – trusting in nobody but ourselves... But faith, is trusting in God, instead of ourselves. Faith, is giving over the controls of your life, to Jesus Christ, our saviour. And trusting in Him, to be made right with God.

Good works are important. Paul does **not** mean that we shouldn’t be doing good deeds. But even if we do good works, and do them well, on their own, they will not justify us *in God’s sight*. *He is cutting the ground from under the feet of those who say, ‘I always do the best I can ... I try to live a decent life ... what more can God expect of me?’ⁱⁱⁱ*

Let’s finish up, and let’s make it personal:

Christianity, is not something you have to be ‘born to’. It’s not just for those who were brought up by “religious” parents.

It's not just for the "good" people... The Christian faith, is for anyone, who is wise enough, to know they need to get right with God.

It's for those who realise they're **not** good enough (and can never be good enough), and religion is **not** enough, and who realise, they desperately need a saviour.

And if that's you, I urge you today – don't put it off – I urge you today, to repent of trying to justify yourself. Repent of sin, and to start following Jesus as your Lord and saviour, knowing that by faith in Him, it is counted to you as righteousness; It is a gift of grace; Not something you've earned; but a gift of love, from God, to you.

And then, live by faith. You've handed the reigns of your life over to Jesus Christ. So now, live for **Him**.

And if you're at that point, where you realise:

- That you've been going about it all the wrong way round
- You've thought you could be right with God, by doing the right thing, and being a good person
- Or you've been trying to get right with God by being religious

But now you know that's not enough, I think it's time to talk to God about that – don't you?

I'm going to lead us in a prayer, and you can make this prayer, your prayer. You can say these words quietly under your breath (or you can shout it from the hill tops), and The Lord will hear (if you mean it in your heart).

Heavenly Father,
For so long, and in so many ways,
I've tried to get myself right with you
But now I know I can't.

God, forgive me of my sins.
Forgive me of trying to cut you out,
And trying to make it without you.

Lord, my faith is weak.
But I do have faith.

I thank you that Jesus died on the cross, to pay the penalty of
all my sin.

I praise you that He is raised from the dead and that He lives
again.

I commit my live to You, as my Lord, and my Saviour

And I thank you so much, that even though I don't deserve it,
You count me as righteous,
Not through what I've done,
But through faith.

Amen.

Now, V20 says:

²⁰ No unbelief made [Abraham] waver concerning the
promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he
gave glory to God

And that's how we can grow strong in faith – We grow strong in faith as we give glory to God. Let's do that now.

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ⁱ Quoted from Psalm 32

ⁱⁱ Adapted from Green, Michael. 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching. Baker Books: Grand Rapids. 1989 No.462

ⁱⁱⁱ Bruce, F.F., 1985. *Romans: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

^{iv} *Justification by faith is nothing more than what the Old Testament teaches*

Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

^v *All ground of boasting in one's personal righteousness is removed, not by the works prescribed by the law but by the principle of faith. Where Jew and Gentile alike are justified by God's grace, through no merit of their own, none can say, 'I achieved this by my own effort.' The conclusion of Paul's argument is that human beings are set right in God's sight by faith, quite apart from the law's requirements. If acceptance by God could be attained only by keeping the Jewish law, then God would be in a special sense the God of the Jews. But he is as much the Gentiles' God as the God of the Jews, for in the gospel one and the same way of righteousness is opened up for both. He will accept Jews by virtue of their faith, and he will accept Gentiles on exactly the same basis*

Bruce, F.F., 1985. *Romans: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

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28. *Apart from works of law.* Paul does not mean that such works need not be performed, but that, even when they are performed tolerably well, one is not thereby justified in God's sight. He is cutting the ground from under the feet of those who say, 'I always do the best I can ... I try to live a decent life ... I pay my lawful dues, and what more can God expect of me?'

Luther (like Origen and others before him) emphasizes 'apart from works of law' by adding 'alone' to *justified by faith*: 'man becomes righteous without works of the law, through faith alone.' He pours scorn on the criticisms which he incurred for this 'addition' to the Word of God. In fact, he expressed Paul's meaning accurately: it is by faith alone, and not by legal works, or by any other fancied means of justification, that men and women receive the righteous status which God by his grace bestows. When this is grasped, it can be seen that they have no ground for self-congratulation as they contemplate the way of salvation: it is *sola gratia, sola fide, soli Deo gloria* ('by grace alone, through faith alone; to God alone be the glory').

Yet, while justification in this sense is received by faith alone, 'the faith which justifies is not alone'; it is, as Paul says in Galatians 5:6, 'faith working through love'—and just how it so works is set out in practical detail in Romans 12:1–15:13. But this belongs to a later stage of the argument; what is important at this stage is to insist that it is by faith, not by what they *do*, that human beings receive the justifying grace of God.

Bruce, F.F., 1985. *Romans: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Circumcision was supposed to be the outwards sign of the faith that was within – the faith that they walked by – the faith that they lived by...

But instead, circumcision (for them) had become an outwards sign, of their national pride – of God's stamp on them (this is my people)... but they weren't. we can see this with the discussion that Jesus had with them: John 8:48–59 (ESV)

Before Abraham Was, I Am

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" ⁴⁹ Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honour my Father, and you dishonour me. ⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." ⁵² The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.' ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?"

⁵⁴ Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.