**A COMMENTARY ON ROMANS 4:4-8**

*“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin’”* (Rm.4:4-8).

This passage is often abused by those who teach “salvation by faith only, before and without any acts of obedience.” Indeed, a casual and careless reading of the text might even seem to support this false notion. Therefore, is would be time well-spent to consider these verses in context, that we might better understand Paul’s teaching here. Space is limited, so let’s get down to business…

**“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt” (Rm.4:4).** In this context, we must be very careful how we define the word, “works.” Paul is saying that the man who “works” has “wages” that are OWED to him as a “debt.” This means he has EARNED his wages (in this context, the “wages” is salvation). Now think! The only way to EARN salvation is if your works are perfect, i.e. if you have never sinned. Paul has already indicated that this way is closed to us, for we are ALL sinners (Rm.3:23).

**“But to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness” (Rm.4:5).** Again, we must be very careful how we define the word “work” in this context. When Paul spoke of “him who does not work,” he does NOT mean “him who does absolutely nothing!” How do I know this? Because the man “who does not work” is ALSO the man who “believes” ***– and believing is something “I” must “do.”*** Not only is believing something I must do, but if I believe (or trust) in someone, I will do as they say (cf. Jm.2:20-24). Notice also that I must be one who “believes on him who ***justifies***the ungodly.”This is a critical point! I am believing or trusting in someone to “justify” me, i.e. to declare me righteous by acquittal (or forgiveness). I was “ungodly,” but now I am “justified” (or forgiven).

**“Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin’” (Rm.4:6-8).** Here, Paul gives Scriptural support to what he has said. David long ago said that man is justified, or counted as righteous, by the act of forgiveness (see Ps.32:1-2). Notice “the man whose lawless deeds are forgiven,” is the man “whose sins are covered,” and “the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.” Simply put, sin is not imputed to a forgiven man; it is as if he had never sinned! And a man is forgiven on the basis of His faith (v.5). But remember, the kind of faith that saves is an obedient faith (Jm.2:14-26).

Now, let’s plug this information into some relevant passages of Scripture. “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. ***He who believes and is baptized will be saved;*** but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk.16:15-16). ***“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”*** (Ga.3:26-27). “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, ***by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God,*** who raised Him from the dead” (Col.2:11-12). Notice that, in each case, faith plus obedience (or faithfulness) renders one “saved” (Mk.16), makes them “sons of God” (Ga.3), and results in “putting off the body of the sins of the flesh” (Col.2). One would need “professional help” to misunderstand such clear passages of Scripture, especially as they harmonize very well with what Paul said in Romans 4:4-8.

The only question which remains is: Do you have enough “faith” to be saved? Are you willing to be “baptized into Christ Jesus,” and then to “walk in newness of life” (Rm.6:1-4)? If so, let us help you obey the Lord!

--Lanny Smith