

Expansion of the Rom 4:2-5 Context: Rom 3:21-4:1; Justification by Faith; the difference between Human Good & Divine Good

34. The question begins with the pronoun **τίς, τίς** translated “what,” plus the conjunction **οὐν, ουν** translated “then” and the future active indicative of the verb:
- εἶπω, eirō** - “to say, speak, or tell.”
- future: Deliberative: Questions of uncertainty are occasionally expressed by the future indicative. Such questions may be real questions asking for information, or rhetorical questions taking the place of an assertion.¹
- In this context it forms a rhetorical question that is used by Paul seven times in Romans: 3:5; **4:1**; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14; and 9:30.
- active: Paul produces the action through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to force a conclusion.
- indicative: Sets up the rhetorical question.
35. This construction forms an idiom that is translated as an interrogative: “Therefore, to what conclusion are we forced?” Or, “What are we to conclude?”
36. Paul then follows with a statement regarding Abraham, “... that Abraham our forefather has obtained?” The verb “obtained” is the perfect active infinitive of **εὕρισκω, huriskō**:
- perfect: Intensive: places emphasis on the existing results. When special attention is directed to the results of the action, stress upon the existing fact is intensified. It is a strong way of saying that a thing *is*.
- active: Abraham produces the action of discovering something.
- infinitive: Resultant: there are three points of view from which result may be expressed by the infinitive. It may represent *actual result*; it may represent *conceived* result, that follows the nature of the case, or is assumed as a consequence; or it may represent *intended* result, when the result is indicated as fulfilling a deliberate aim. Here Paul indicates that what Abraham discovered was an actual result.
37. This rhetorical question looks like this in corrected translation:
- Romans 4:1** - What then are we to conclude that Abraham our forefather has actually discovered?
38. Paul has just concluded an argument in chapter 3 that presented justification by faith rather than by works:

¹ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillan Co., 1955), 193.

Romans 3:21 - Now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been disclosed—

v. 22 - namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,

v. 23 - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

v. 24 - But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

v. 25 - God publicly displayed Him at His death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because God in His forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed.

Romans 3:26 - This was also to demonstrate His righteousness in the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

v. 27 - Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded! By what principle? Of works? No, but by the principle of faith!

v. 28 - For we consider that a person is declared righteous by faith apart from the works of the law.

v. 29 - Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles, too? Yes, of the Gentiles, too!

v. 30 - Since God is one, He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

v. 31 - Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not! Instead we uphold the law.

Romans 4:1 - What then are we to conclude that Abraham our forefather has actually discovered?

v. 2 - For assuming that Abraham has been justified by means of works, then he has a basis for boasting, but not before God.

Romans 4:3 - For what does the Scripture say? [**Genesis 15:6**] "Abraham had believed [πιστεύω, *pisteuō*: **faith alone in Christ alone**] God, and it [**salvation**] was credited to his account [λογίζομαι, *logizomai*] for righteousness [δικαιосύνη, *dikaïosunē*: **justification and vindication**].

39. Since this is true, Paul proposes that this same test be put to Abraham in order to determine whether this principle of justification by faith can be applied to him.
40. To do this, in Romans 4:2 Paul, for the sake of argument, makes the assumption that Abraham was justified by works but if this is so Abraham would not have a basis for boasting. Why? Because in Romans 3:26 Paul observes that because of the work of Christ on the cross God is said to be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."
41. With this fact established, Paul then hits the Judaizers with a series of rhetorical questions in:

Romans 3:27 - Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded! By what principle? Of works? No, but by the principle of faith!

v. 28 - For we consider that a person is declared righteous by faith apart from the works of the law.

42. So then in Romans 4:2, Paul applies this principle to the assumption that Abraham was justified by works, "For assuming that Abraham has been justified by means of works, then he has a basis for boasting, but not before God."

43. Then to drive home his point Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 in:

Romans 4:3 - For what does the Scripture say? [**Genesis 15:6**] "Abraham had believed [πιστεύω, *pisteuō*: faith alone in Christ alone] in God, and it [salvation] was credited to his account [λογίζομαι, *logizomai*] for righteousness [δικαιοσύνη, *dikaïosunē*: justification and vindication].

44. Principles:

- 1) God is not impressed with human good, works motivated by a desire to appropriate salvation, a winning personality, or a commitment "do better."
- 2) The only thing that impresses God is His righteousness. When that righteousness is found in a human being it is the result of a divine imputation at salvation that justifies that person before the Supreme Court of Heaven leaving him vindicated.
- 3) When this is true then any thought, decision, or action that is motivated by the Word of God and empowered by the filling of the Holy Spirit, contributes to that believer's justification by works. This is called divine good and is classified as service to God.
- 4) However, an unbeliever – one who has not believed in Christ and as a result has not received the imputation of divine righteousness – is categorically unqualified to perform such works.
- 5) Justification by works is exclusively found in the domain of the believer who not only has imputed righteousness but also has learned enough doctrine to know what God desires of him and then complies under the power of the Holy Spirit.
- 6) Know this: Even the works of a believer are classified as "dead works" if that person (1) does not do so from clear biblical guidance and (2) is not motivated and empowered to perform them by means of the filling of the Holy Spirit.
- 7) The idea of salvation by means of works puts man in competition with the work of Christ on the cross. A spiritually dead person is at enmity with God and under condemnation. Because of this it is impossible for him to have a relationship with God, there is nothing that he could possibly do to receive salvation.

- 8) Look at it this way. A man is found guilty of first-degree murder and the judge sentences him to life in prison. The convict decides that if he works hard while there the judge will change his mind and set him free. So the man starts a campaign to become the best convict in the prison; he is kind to others, visits the ill in sick bay, and even plants flowers in the exercise yard. He is convinced once the judge learns about all his good deeds that he will be allowed to leave. After determining he has become "good enough" he writes a letter to the judge telling him about all his good works and how he is certain they qualify him to be released from prison. The judge writes back, "Are you kidding me?"
- 9) As silly as this sounds, it is not as ridiculous as the unbeliever who thinks his works qualify him to be saved. The Judge condemned him at birth and the only possible way he can be vindicated is through faith alone in Christ alone.
- 10) When an unbeliever assumes he can be saved by his works he unknowingly considers his self-righteous acts to be equal to the righteousness of God. Therefore, the very idea of trying to achieve salvation by works is blasphemous.
- 11) The person who hopes to acquire eternal life by works is actually insulting the integrity of God. God is absolute righteousness while man, even when on his best behavior, is declared by Scripture to be unrighteous.
- 12) Isaiah, who was not one to mince words, provides a graphic illustration of the divine view of human good:

Isaiah 64:6a - We are all like one who is unclean, all our so-called righteous acts are like a menstrual rag in Your sight.