

“Stop Negotiating” // Romans 4:1–5 // Phantom Faith #1

Alright, by show of hands... **how many of you are into Zombie** shows? It's ok; I **won't judge** you. Your neighbor might, but I won't.

It seems like zombies are the **horror genre of choice** these days.

Here's your proof: More than twice as many people watched the opening season of *The Walking Dead* as watched the final season of *Mad Men* (which kind of felt like a ~~Zombie show in its own right~~).

I read a great article in the NYT by one of my favorite social commentators, Chuck Klosterman, who suggested that the reason **Zombie** shows appeal to so many of us is because they **correlate with how we feel** in our day-to-day lives: a seemingly endless onslaught by mindless emails and advertisements and pop-up ads and tweets and voicemails that we have to **eliminate** one by one or else be consumed by them. (You **open up your email** on Monday morning and there are 68 emails droning toward you and you start shooting each of them with the delete button.)

The good news, Klosterman says, is that by now we're all pretty prepared for a **zombie apocalypse**: *“If you awake from a coma, and you don't immediately see a member of the hospital staff, just assume a zombie takeover has transpired during your incapacitation. Don't travel at night and keep your drapes closed. Don't let zombies spit on you. If you knock one down, make sure to pump a second bullet into its brain stem.”*¹

And, btw, if you've never seen the *Walking Dead*... here's the basic plot of each episode... *“There's something we really need and we've got to go get it... over there, where the zombies are.”*

Zombies are basically moving bodies without souls... They mimic the actions of being alive, but they are not.

I want to **use that image to explain a concept** called *Phantom Faith*.

Having phantom faith means you go through the motions of Christianity, but without the soul.

- I don't mean you're an **out and out hypocrite**; just that there are some core things about the Christian faith that you don't get yet, and so you **mimic the motions** of Christianity... but there is **something missing** in your relationship with God (and maybe you know that).

So in this series I **want to identify 3 concepts** that a lot of sincere people miss.

- And I **don't must mean newbies** to Christianity. Sometimes people have **been in church for years** and they still have never quite grasped these things.
- Or sometimes it is **people trying to get back into church**—we have a lot of people here who have kids and decide it's time to make God a part of their lives... These are the concepts they stumble over.
- In fact, **this message series came as a result** of me have a bunch of conversations with people like that, and thinking, “You know, I just need to do a series on these.”)

((And let me go ahead and tell you... For the 1st 3 weeks of October, we're going to do **baptisms every weekend** here at the church. Here's why: **Baptism is supposed to be** the first thing you do after becoming a new believer... It's the 'going public' phase of your faith.

- And we've had a lot of people **make a truly informed, first time** decision to become a follower of Jesus in the last few weeks.
- And others of you have had a relationship with Jesus for a while, but you've still never taken that step... give you a chance to do that.))

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/05/arts/television/05zombies.html?pagewanted=all>

Our first concept is from...

Romans 4:1–5 / BIBLES

...It concerns **how you know for sure** you belong to God, or why you think you're going to heaven.

If you died today, and God said, "Why should I let you in, what would you say?" I know – if you grew up in the South or in church – it's a cliché question... Billy Graham made it famous, "If you died tonight..." always die at night... but it's a good one.

You say, "J.D. I'm not even sure there is a heaven." Suppose there is one... what's the criteria for *who gets in and who doesn't*? **And do you think you'll go?**

- I've talked with you before about **my own struggle** with this question...
- Guinness Book... That's what you did. "Accepting Christ..." Asking Jesus into your heart. Every time I did it, I'd ask questions: Did it **do it right**? Was I **sorry enough** for my sin? Did my **life change** enough?

Most people feel like it has **something to do with their behavior**—If you are **good enough**; if you **believe enough**; go to **church enough**; **give enough**.

- (People from other religions use the **same criteria**, they just switch some of the specifics; instead of going to church you go to mosque, or synagogue or temple; instead of mission trips you go on pilgrimages.)

It's like we're always trying to make a deal with God. "*God, if I do this, I expect you to...*"

We do that a lot, don't we? Make deals with God?

- You're out really late and you say, "*Lord, if you'll let my parents be asleep before I get home, I'll go to church. I promise. For a month. I'll even go to Sunday School. Shoot, I'll **lead** Sunday School, if you get me out of this one.*"
- Ever done something like that? **Get me this job** and I'll be generous. Let **her go out with me** and I'll start reading my Bible.
- **Raise your hand** if you've ever made a deal with God. Me: In high school... like I was doing God a favor. "Oh, you won't cuss? I want in on that action. How can I refuse?"

So **we think of going to heaven like a deal we make with God**. *We give God obedience; God rewards us with heaven. But here's what Paul says:*

****3** What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness..." (Gen 15:6)—Context⁵ To the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

- (One of my **professors in seminary** said he thought Romans 4:5 was the most important verse in the whole Bible. I am tempted to agree with him.)
- **This word credited** is a *key word in the verse*. It's a very important Greek word, "**logizomai**." It's an accounting term. We translate it "credited" or "counted."
 - It means that **God counts something as being** there, even though it isn't.
- It might be EASIER to explain it to you if I first tell you **what it doesn't** mean:
- **It doesn't mean that Abraham's faith actually made him righteous** from that point onward.
 - **Abraham's life** from this point on would still be plagued with all kinds of inconsistency and compromise.
 - In the **very next chapter Abraham doubts God** will keep his word to give him a son through Sarah and so he takes matters into his own hands and sleeps with his house-servant, Hagar, to try and produce a son through her.

- Then there is what I refer to as **the sister incident**... TELL STORY. **Multiple things** wrong with that.
 - This **George Costanza** level. Seinfeld fans? He pushes kids and old ladies out of the way to save yourself in case of fire... dirtbag maneuver
- All these things occur after the declaration of Genesis 15:6. So **Abraham's faith doesn't make him act** righteously all the time.
- **Nor does the phrase mean that faith is actually righteousness in itself,** as if faith were the supreme of all virtues, the main one that matters to God... and, as long as you have it, nothing else really matters.
 - **1 Cor 13, Paul said** that the chief of all the virtues was love. "If I had faith to move mountains, and had not love, It'd be worthless."
 - **Jesus said** you could summarize the whole law by saying, "Love the Lord your God..."
 - **So it doesn't mean that faith is so awesome to God that having it makes you righteous.**
- **What "faith credited as righteousness" means is that God counts our faith in Christ as righteousness, even though it is not.**
 - Righteousness is a gift that God gives to us that we do not possess in ourselves on the basis of something else.
 - **Best analogy: Wild card**... Jokers wild. Counts as if it were something else.
 - I'm not saying faith in Christ is arbitrary; simply that faith is not a **really a virtue per se; it is a declaration that we have no virtue**, and that if we are going to be saved, it is going to be because of God's grace, not our worthiness.
 - Faith is us saying, "God, I have to trust you because I don't have anything else to offer."

According to Romans 4:5, the one who is declared righteous, and goes to heaven, has 3 primary characteristics:

¹⁵ However, to the one who *does not work* but *trusts God* who justifies the *ungodly*, their faith is credited as righteousness.)

- Characteristic 1: You know you are "**ungodly.**" There is an inherent admission in what Paul says here. You know you need to be justified.
- Characteristic 2: "**Does not work**": This means you do not think you can do anything to change your status. You don't think you can earn righteousness; there is no deal you can cut with God.
- Characteristic 3: You "**trusts God,**" who promised to justify the ungodly himself.

Abraham is the example Paul uses. Go to 4:18: God declared that Abraham is going to be a father of a whole nation of people. But Abraham was 90 with no kids. **18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed** (When you're 90 and you haven't had kids, you give up for obvious reasons. **Blue pill or no pill**, it ain't happening.) **19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead.** (He knew he wasn't fertile; he understood how things work) **20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,** (He declared things that were not as if they were because God had said they would be) **21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."**

23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, **24** but also for us, to whom God will *credit* (*logizomai*) righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. **25** He (you see) was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

When God raised Jesus from the dead, he was declaring that he accepted Jesus' sacrifice as the payment for our sins. When **we trust that as our salvation, he counts that as righteousness.**

- He literally gives us Christ's righteousness. We don't just get forgiveness of sins; we get Christ's perfect record.
- Jesus is not only a dying Savior; he was a doing Savior. Before he died the death we were condemned to die, he lived the life we were supposed to live. In him, God looks at us not only as if we had never sinned, but as if we had actually lived the life of Jesus himself.
- When God looks at J.D. Greear, he sees not how many times I've prayed, how sincere I was in my faith, how pure I was... but he sees Jesus' record.

This is called **"Gift righteousness"**, and it is what separates Christianity... God's righteousness given to us as a gift...

- Not because our faith deserves it; not because our faith equals it, but because God has declared that faith in his promise is the instrument—**the wild card**—through which he will credit righteousness to our account.

There is no deal, you see, that we can make with God. Here's WHY:

1. **Like Abraham, we are "dead" in our ability to please God (4:18–21)**

- The **illustration with Abraham** is important: Abraham and Sarah were unable to have kids even in their youth (they were infertile); **add to that the fact** that they're both now about 100. They are **doubly unable** to have kids. Doubly dead.
- In the same way, we are **utterly unable** to be righteous.
- We **tend to think of ourselves** as generally good people, and if we just try a little harder we can probably get a passing grade on the final.
 - **God's measure of goodness is the 10 Commandments.**
 - Recently, I was reading Martin Luther and he said one of the things you should do stimulate your quiet time is go over the 10 Commandments from time to time. It will **really help you deepen** the value you place on the gospel. I've been doing it... overwhelming..

- **No other gods:** Do I love and cherish God more than anything else in my life? Is he the most valuable to me?
- **Make no graven images.** Am I satisfied with God the way he is, or am I constantly wishing I could make him into something else? Or saying, "God, why do you do it this way? If you are really good, why don't you do this or give me that?"
- **Honor your parents:** Am I always submissive to the authorities God has put in my life? Parents? Police? Teachers? Boss.
- **Thou shalt not steal**—How many times do I try to appropriate things that don't really belong to me? Of course you have cutting corners in business or on your taxes... but how often do I take credit that is not mine or listen to illegally downloaded music or fail to give credit for ideas that I borrow because I want to look smart?
- **Thou shalt not lie**—How often do I exaggerate to make myself look better; bend the truth to avoid difficult situations?
- **Thou shalt not commit adultery:** Feeling good until Jesus says...
- **Thou shalt not murder...** I say, "Ah, ok. Finally one can put in the 'W' column." But then Jesus says in Matthew that if you have ever desired to see someone else harmed, and I think about **how many times I have rejoiced when someone I don't like**, or who has made me mad, suffers; or **how many times I've relished** the thought of being able to cal down a meteor on someone I am angry with.
- **Thou shalt not covet...** That means I am always fully satisfied with the situation God has me in, and never crave someone else's income, privileges, talents, or family situation...

- **And when I get through the list, I realize that I'm 0 for 10.** When you're 0 for 10 on the final exam, you are not going to pass the class!
 - You say, "I'm **pretty good, except for being, instinctively, a lying, hateful, pilfering, rebellious adulterating blasphemer.**"
- **You really think you are a good person?** Jesus said **unless we were righteous like our Father** in heaven is righteous, we cannot enter heaven.²
- Of course, **some of you don't trouble yourself** with the 10 commandments... You have **your own standard** for what constitutes a good person. "Be good and fair in business. Be kind." Or, "Be nice; recycle; only drink fair trade coffee and argue for justice for everyone, then God is happy with me."
- Two problems with this:
 - **First, you totally made that standard up.** Come on, really? Where else does that work?
 - Imagine showing up as a freshman at Duke... you sit down in class. Teacher says, "I don't see your name in the registry." You say, "I didn't apply." They say, "Well, we have standards to get into this school... You have to get a minimum of this amount on the SAT; GPA has to be..." "Yeah, I didn't do any of that well, but I am wicked good at ballet and so I just thought I belonged at Duke."
 - Why think you can do that in heaven? Make up a standard and God say, 'OH, ok, you are sincere...'? Be serious.
 - **Problem #2** is that you're not even consistent with your own list. You would have to give yourself an F from time to time if you were honest.
 - **Illus. "Ought."**

2ND REASON CAN'T MAKE A DEAL WITH GOD...

² Matthew 5:20, 48.

2. **We don't have anything to offer to God (4:4)**

- ⁴ Now to the one who works, wages are not *credited as a gift but as an obligation*. You do something for somebody and they pay.
- We think of getting to heaven like that... **2 problems with that. First, we don't have anything God needs.**
 - Think about how foolish our negotiation sounds... "God, how about some obedience? How about some church?" *Like God is rubbing his hands in heaven saying, "Wait, really? Church? Now **that's** an offer I can't refuse! How lucky am I!"*
 - We **don't have anything** by which to put God in our debt.
- Second, being good in one area doesn't erase the fact that we broke God's laws in another.
 - Imagine if you were on trial for **breaking & entering and assault & battery** and during the trial you say, "Yeah, but Judge, I always use paper, not plastic, because it is better for the environment, and I drive a Prius and have my own compost pile. And I **haven't gotten** a traffic ticket in 5 years!" *Great, but irrelevant.*
- Supposed goodness in one area doesn't make up for breaking God's laws in another...

3. **God alone will get the glory (4:2)**

- ^{***2} If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had **something to boast about—but not before God.** (If Abraham had done it, he'd boast, "I did this when I was 90!" ... "but not before God" means, "*God will not let that be.*")
- **God does not want us strutting around in heaven! If we earn heaven based** on what we do, then we'll spend our time in heaven talking about what we did to get ourselves there.
 - We'll walk up to each other in heaven and says, "**Why are you here?** Oh, you were faithful to your wife for how long? You gave how much? You prayed how often? You're amazing, and I'm lucky to know you."

- THE BOOK OF Revelation says every person in heaven wears A NAMETAG. Did you know that? It's actually **on our** forehead, but it's not our name, about how awesome we are, but his name, on how gracious he is.
- **It's not the reputation or record associated** with our name that gets us there, but the righteousness gifted to us in his name that gets us there.
- **Why are you here?** I point to my head. *I walked on water! I resisted Satan to his face! Forgave my captors!*
- In **the NAME series**, we saw that God is **merciful and gracious...** (Mercy: God not giving what we do deserve; Grace: God giving us what we don't deserve).
- **That's the name** we wear in heaven. *That's* what gets celebrated! **We get the grace; God gets the glory.**

The only kind of people who go to heaven are those who know **they don't belong** there; know there is **nothing they can do** to fix that, but trust God who said he was so gracious he'd do it for us.

You can't earn heaven. You can't make a deal with God.

What this passage tells us is that righteousness—full acceptance with God—is a gift that God gives us while we are still sinful. It is possible to acknowledge that you are more guilty and worthy of condemnation than people could ever imagine; and yet you are more sure that you are loved and accepted by God than you ever dared hope... because that status has been given to you on the basis of Christ, not you.

- **Martin Luther called this the most important and probably most misunderstood** doctrine in the Bible... the doctrine on which the church, he says, **rises and falls**; the doctrine which separates Christianity in its essence from every other religion...
 - Every other religion in the world is spelled D-O. It's what you do that determines whether God accepts you.
 - Christianity is the only one spelled D-O-N-E.

A. Stop negotiating

- Old hymn: (goofy tune) "Lay your deadly doing down... "
- Every religion in the world tells you, "You are broken; now you have to fix yourself."
- The gospel is that you and I messed it up, but God fixed it. We can only receive it as a gift and then give him the glory.
 - **Story of girl breaking all the dishes...**
 - Most religions teach that's what God did.
 - But the gospel says, "You can't save yourself; and what you destroyed was priceless; and God loves you..." so he saved you.
 - **Stop negotiating.**
 - God does not want something from you—you don't have anything anyway to give him—he has something for you.

Let me give you the sign that you've gotten this: you feel sure of your salvation. The **sign that you are still negotiating is you are unsure:** "*I hope I'll get in.*"

But when Jesus has become my salvation, then I am as sure of heaven as he is. I don't hope I'm good enough for God to let me in; I know Jesus was good enough and I'm getting in under his name.

If God asks me, "Why should I let you in?" I won't even stop (no disrespect to God, of course...) I'll just say, "Because I believe you did what you'd said you'd do!"

Which leads to...

B. Cease boasting

- **Christians who understand the gospel** are the least self-righteous people you'll ever meet.
- And I know you have met a lot of **ridiculously self-righteous Christians...** which just shows that they don't really understand the gospel. They may think they do...

- **Imagine if you had met Abraham** after he had his son, and you were like, “Abraham, you did it, old man! I didn’t think you had it in you.” He’d say, “I didn’t.” God did it.
- **Really understanding the gospel changes us from proud people to humble ones.** And that one thing **does more to change us** than anything else. Gratefulness replaces a sense of entitlement. Gratefulness leads to gracefulness.
 - That’s the **SOUL** of Christianity
- **You know what Christian generosity is?**
 - Someone saying **that they will begin to be to others** what Jesus has been to them. Not so he’ll accept them, but because he has!
- **Do you know what a Christian marriage is?**
 - It is when two Christians who understand this concept decide to treat each other like God has treated them... and **then that’s what they start arguing about.** Who can out-surrender and out-serve the other one. And those arguments are awesome.
- You see, **when Paul says in vs. 5** that a Christian declared righteous does not work, he doesn’t mean that Christians don’t **do good works...**
 - He means that **the reason we do** good works has changed. We don’t work **in order to be saved**, but because we have been saved.
 - **Paul said in 1 Cor 15**, “I worked harder than anyone I knew, but it was a response to the grace of God in me.”³

C. Trust him

Let’s go back to 4:5 once more: *****⁵To the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.**

- Some translations say, “believe in.” But that doesn’t quite capture the idea... it’s not believing in, like you believe that God exists or

that Jesus raised from the dead as a historical fact... demons believe like that.

- Other translations say, “believe on.” And that’s better. Personally I like “trusts” because it means your belief has become personal, and you are acting on it.
 - Lean your whole weight on: **Chair.** The moment of transfer is the moment of faith. **Same with gospel**
 - Like the scene in **Return of the Jedi**
 - Like Abraham... who trusted God **when God said “Leave your father’s country** and go to a land far away, the location of which I won’t tell you about yet.” And who trusted God **when God said, “Have a child with Sarah even though** you are both wrinkled up like prunes;”
 - Against hope he believed in hope and became the father of many nations.

23 The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, **24** but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. **25** He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

- Romans 10:9... *If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (THAT HE IS WHO HE SAYS HE IS), and believe in your heart (THAT HE DID WHAT HE SAID HE’D DO!)... you will be saved.* Not might be, or it will increase you chances, but WILL BE saved.
- **Best verse: 10:13**, “For whosoever will just call on the name of the Lord.” Used to confuse me: Ask him what? You’re missing the point. You don’t ask him anything; **just call his name!** Calling him by the right name.
 - **I know a guy who says that salvation is found** through simply calling Jesus by the right name.
 - **I can tell a lot about your relationship with me by what you call me.** Gree-ar/Mr. Greear/Dr. Greear/James/J.D./J. Dizzle/There are 4 that call me “Daddy.” 1 calls me “Megaman.”

³ 1 Cor 15:10

- You are saved by calling Jesus, my Lord (you are who you say you are... not just Lord but *my Lord*.) And my Savior.” Has it become personal to you? Have you trusted him as *your* Savior? Not just *the* Savior, but *yours*?

Prayer

Card