

Redemption in Romans

Justified by Faith

Lesson #4 for July 24, 2010

Scriptures: Romans 3:1-4,19-28.

1. In this lesson we come to the basic theme of Romans: justification by faith. The phrase is a figure based on law. The transgressor of the law comes before a judge and is condemned to death for his transgressions. But a substitute appears and takes the transgressor's crimes upon himself, thus clearing the criminal, who—by accepting the substitute—stands before the judge not only cleared of his guilt but regarded as never having committed the crimes for which he was first brought into court. And that's because the substitute—who has a perfect record—offers the pardoned criminal his own perfect law-keeping. Thus, the guilty one stands before the judge as having never transgressed. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, July 17, 2010)
2. This paragraph raises a great number of questions. Does it seem unreal? Can sins actually be transferred or moved around? (Ezekiel 18; 33:12-20) Will heaven be filled with hardened but pardoned criminals for whom a Substitute has been found? Would you want to live as a Christian or a Jew between Stalin and Hitler if they were only pardoned? What would we say about a human judge who did that? Wouldn't the judge go to jail? Are God the Father and the angels deceived by that legal exchange? If by this process sins can be blotted out, what about David's sins? If they were blotted out, why are we still reading about them in the Bible? Or, is God the Father—the Judge—the only one who does not know about them?
3. The word *justified* or *justification* is a Latin term brought into English, but it is a translation from the Greek word *dikaioo* which means to "put right" or "set right." When a tree is petrified—notice the *-fied* at the end of the word—is it just "declared stone," or does it really "become stone"? Is the idea of substitution in the plan of salvation a legal fiction? In criminal law there is no way to substitute anything. No righteous person can die on behalf of a criminal and let the criminal go free. Our law would never permit that. By contrast, in civil law we allow substitution all the time. If you have a motor vehicle accident which is not intentional and yet you damage another person's property, your insurance company can serve as your "substitute" and pay for the damages. But, such a maneuver is never allowed in criminal law. **If we say that this is to be allowed regarding sin, are we actually trivializing sin—suggesting that it is nothing more than a civil offense that we did not intend to do rather than a crime?**
4. Read Romans 3:19,20; Hebrews 10:3,4; Galatians 3:19-24. These verses suggest that the purpose of law is to point out or remind us of sin. Paul points out elsewhere that if we could truly keep the law, we could be saved by doing so. (Romans 2:13; 7:12) So, the problem is not with the law but with our ability to keep it. If we do not know what is wrong, we need law.
5. What was Paul referring to when he talked about Law in these verses? Scholars recognize that to a Pharisee—as Paul was—Law would mean, at a minimum, the five books of Moses, and often, the term was used to describe the entire Old Testament. All the law can do is to point out our sins and hopefully thereby lead us to Christ as the only possible solution.
6. The lesson study guide suggests that justification makes us righteous before God. If that is actually true, why couldn't God just arrange for everyone to be justified just before they die so that everyone could be saved? Would you agree with the following statement (*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 43): "The law of God is perfect, and humans never can reach this standard; but when we accept Christ's righteousness, offered in place of our imperfections, God counts us as righteous"? Are we really changed or not? Does God's declaration change us? When God says something, does that make it so? Or, does He say it because it is so?

7. For many years there has been a huge debate among theologians about the precise role of justification versus sanctification. Evangelical scholars would say that when we are justified, God “counts us as righteous” or even perhaps “declares us righteous” without any change whatsoever in us. They come to this conclusion because they want to make it very clear that none of our works can contribute to our salvation in any way.
8. Read Zechariah 3:1-5. In that judgment scene, it is interesting to notice that the filthy robes that Joshua was wearing had to be removed before new robes could be put on him. What does that imply? Look at these two quotations from Ellen G. White.

What is justification [righteousness] by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 456.

Righteousness [justice] is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account. Christ’s righteousness is accepted in place of man’s failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, **treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son.**—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 367. (Is He righteous? What kind of people will populate heaven?)

In order to correctly compare these two quotations, we need to recognize that *justice* and *righteousness* are translated from the same word in the original Greek manuscripts of the Bible. Notice these words from the lesson study guide for July 19, 2010:

As it operates in the Christian life, faith is much more than intellectual assent; it is more than just an acknowledgment of certain facts about Christ’s life and His death. Instead, true faith in Jesus Christ is accepting Him as Savior, Substitute, Surety, and Lord. It is choosing His way of life. It is trusting Him and seeking by faith to live according to His commandments. [Is that more than justification?]

This statement implies a very large change in a person’s life. Would this then be considered sanctification or justification? Consider the following scenario from the *Adult Teacher’s Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* p. 45:

Here comes the man that you’ve heard about. How can you describe him? Well, he’s something like a combination of the best points of Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Mozart, and Stephen Hawking, only better. He’s on his way to accept multiple Nobel prizes; but instead, he decides to come to your trial. To make a long story short he accepts the penalties that are rightfully yours and gives you the honor that is rightfully his. Where is this in any law book? Suddenly you are on your way to Stockholm [to receive your Nobel prize], and he is on the way to the penitentiary. How does this make you feel?

Is this another part of the legal fiction? Surely we do not believe that Jesus will actually spend the rest of eternity in jail, or dead, or in the fires of hell! Wouldn’t that be the just and right thing for Him to do if He takes our place? But, if God can forgive Him so that He does not, in fact, experience that punishment, why doesn’t God just forgive us to begin with if that is all that is needed? **What is actually accomplished by this substitution?**

9. What happens to our sins when we confess them? If we are justified, do our sins disappear permanently? (Micah 7:19) Read Genesis 3; Psalms 51; Proverbs 28:13; Romans 3:25,26; Hebrews 9:5; Exodus 25:18-21. In these verses we learn that Adam and Eve’s attempts to cover

their sins were futile. The book of Proverbs warns us against trying to conceal our sins. Proverbs indicates that rather, we need to confess and forsake them. Romans and Hebrews suggest that like the ancient Jews at the sanctuary, we need to take our sins to a place called the *hilasterion* or *mercy seat* in the Most Holy Place where they are blotted out and vanish from God's sight. **Do they truly disappear for good? Does God, the omniscient One, forget?**

10. Read Romans 3:24. What is happening in this verse? Are we literally "made righteous"—the original meaning of *justify*? Or are we only "declared righteous" or "considered righteous"? Do we become "acceptable" to God? What would that mean?
11. Justification is presented in Romans as a punctiliar act; that is, it happens at a point in time. One moment the sinner is outside, unrighteous, and unaccepted; the next moment, following justification, the person is inside, righteous, and accepted. (*Adult Sabbath School Teacher's Bible Study Guide* for July 20, 2010.)

Of course, we all recognize that this process is not permanent. Despite the belief of some in a "once saved, always saved" kind of salvation, the truth is that we return to our sins. Then, we must do it all over again.

12. Read Romans 3:25,26. What is a *propitiation*? What is an *expiation*? Does God's wrath need to be appeased? Or removed by some mechanism? (Propitiation? Expiation?) What do these things have to do with the mercy seat, that golden lid on the ark of the covenant in the sanctuary? And what was Paul suggesting when he said that because of the forbearance of God, He passed over the sins previously committed? (NASB) Will God continue to pass over our sins even today? If so, what is the meaning of the next verse indicating that He demonstrates His righteousness at the present time? Is it really possible for God's righteousness to come to us? Is that a legal exchange? An instantaneous change? If God's righteousness is instantly placed to our account, what happens to that righteousness the next time we sin? **"Because of the cross of Calvary, God can declare sinners righteous and still be considered just and fair in the eyes of the universe."** (*Study Guide, op. cit.*, July 21, 2010) Why is that? Does having this justification, this righteousness from God, change our behavior over the next 24 hours? Then, does faith change us? In what ways? Can our neighbors, friends, and colleagues see the change in us?
13. Our Bible study guide (*Ibid.*, p. 49) suggests, faith is "the means to communicate" with God. Further, it says faith is not "something we can arrive at through logic. It exists beyond logic, emotion, and all other human categories, because it is of divine origin." Is there any way to test this?
14. So, if all this is true, do we still need to obey the law? Can we? (Romans 3:28) "To be justified without works means to be justified without there being anything in ourselves to merit justification." (*Study Guide, op. cit.*, July 22) Elsewhere in Paul's writings as well as in statements from Jesus, James and John, (see Matthew 19:17; Romans 2:13; James 2:10,11; Revelation 12:17; 14:12) we are told clearly that God's true people will keep the commandments. How does that relate to justification and salvation? Does our behavior really change or not?
15. *Substitution* is another long Latin term.

A key concept in this lesson is the idea of substitution. Christ's record of perfect obedience to the law substitutes for our record of disobedience, haphazard obedience, or obedience for the wrong motives. Conversely, we may attempt to substitute our inferior righteousness for the righteousness that comes only from God. (*Study Guide, op. cit.*, page 51)
16. Romans 3:25,26 is the only passage in Scripture that specifically talks about why Jesus Christ had to die and the meaning of His death. This is the central point in the plan of salvation! Why would it be necessary through Christ's death for God first to demonstrate that He Himself is righteous before He can "put right" those who trust in Jesus? Has anyone ever questioned God's righteousness or His truthfulness? (See Genesis 3:4) Does the righteousness of God Himself—His

own personal righteousness of character—need to be revealed? Has anyone ever suggested that God is not righteous? Has anyone questioned God’s truthfulness or behavior?

17. In Romans 1:18-32, we learned that the pagan people of Rome were very sinful. Then, in Romans 2, we were surprised to see that **in God’s eyes** the critical, judgmental Jews were even worse! Then, in Romans 3, Paul tried to draw some conclusions. Even if every person who has ever lived is a sinner, that does not make God a sinner! (Romans 3:9,10) God can and does save sinners, and He can do so in such a way as to convince the entire universe (the court in heaven) that it is safe to do so. But first, He must convince all of us that He is right in everything that He has said so far. So, Paul spoke about God, quoting Psalms 51:4:

You must be shown to be right when you speak; you must win your case when you are being tried. (GNB)

18. Paul then showed that the Old Testament agrees that all human beings are sinners. (Romans 3:9-18,23) Having adequately demonstrated that, He turned again to God’s case in Romans 3:25-27 (GNB) and stated:

God offered him, so that by his blood [his sacrificial death] he should become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven through their faith in him. God did this in order to **demonstrate that he is righteous**. In the past he was patient and overlooked people’s sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, in order to **demonstrate his righteousness**. In this way God **shows that he himself is righteous** and that **he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus**.

19. The original questions in the great controversy were about God. Humans had not even been created yet when that controversy started! (Revelation 12:7-12) If God is a liar, (Genesis 3:1-4) then no one is left who can be trusted! But, by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, all of Satan’s accusations have been refuted, and his questions have been completely and adequately answered! The questions were not about us. Everyone knows that we are sinners! It has been fully and adequately shown that God has not lied to us. Everything He said about sin and its consequences is true. It is not God that we need to be afraid of, it is sin! Sin kills sinners; it is not God that kills sinners! Or is God demanding His “pound of flesh”? Learning the truth about God is what “sets us right,” not some legal transaction!

Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, “I have manifested thy name.” “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” **When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men.** (*The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890 [2ST 351:2:0-3:1]; compare *ST*, December 4, 1893; *Manuscript Releases*, vol 18, 359; *RH*, August 14, 1900; *YI*, November 21, 1883.)

20. In this larger-view, great-controversy, trust-healing model, the plan of salvation is first and foremost about God and whether or not He can be trusted. The great controversy is not about us but about God and how He runs His government.

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Last Modified: May 30, 2010

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