

Salvation by Faith Alone: The Book of Romans

Justified by Faith

Lesson #4 for October 28, 2017

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

1. In this lesson we come to the basic theme of Romans: justification by faith—the great truth that, more than any other truth, brought about the Protestant Reformation. And, despite all the claims to the contrary, Rome has no more changed regarding this belief now than it did in 1520, when Pope Leo issued a papal bull condemning Luther and his teachings. Luther burned a copy of the bull because if there were one teaching that could never be compromised, justification by faith was and is it.

The phrase itself 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. By accepting the substitute, the criminal now stands before the judge, not only cleared of his guilt but also 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.

In the plan of salvation, each of us is the criminal. The Substitute, Jesus, has a perfect record, and He stands in the court in our stead—His righteousness accepted in place of our unrighteousness. Hence, we are justified before God, not because of our works but because of Jesus, whose righteousness becomes ours when we accept it “by faith.” Talk about good news! In fact, the news can't get any better than that.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, October 21, 2017.

2. These paragraphs raise 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 in heaven as a Christian or a Jew between a Stalin and a 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, (Micah 7:19) what about David's sins? Or, Abraham's? Or, Solomon's? 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. What is faith? Based on all of Scripture, a biblical definition of *faith* stated so well so many times by one of God's best modern friends, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell, is as follows:

Faith is [just] a word we use to denote a relationship with God as with a Person well known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be.

Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deep admiration. It means having enough confidence in Him, based on the more than adequate evidence revealed, to be willing to believe whatever He says [as soon as we are sure He is the One saying it], to accept whatever He offers [as soon as we are sure He is the One offering it], and to do whatever He wishes [as soon as we are sure He is the One wishing it]—without reservation—for the rest of eternity.

Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven.

[Faith also means that, like Abraham, Job, and Moses, God's friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, "Why?"]—A. Graham Maxwell, *You Can Trust the Bible* 81. [Bold type is added; content in brackets is added based on Dr. Maxwell's lectures.]

4. 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, has 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 frequently. 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, aren't 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?**
5. Read Romans 3:19-20; Hebrews 10:3-4; and Galatians 3:19-24. These verses suggest that the purpose of law and the sacrifices was to remind us of sin. Paul pointed 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.
6. What was Paul referring to when he talked about Law in these verses? Scholars recognize that to a Pharisee—as Paul was or had been—Law would mean, at a minimum, the five books of Moses, and often, the term was used to describe the entire Scripture at that time—what we know as the Old Testament. (John 10:34; Psalm 82:6) All the law can do is to point out our sins and hopefully, thereby, lead us to Christ as the only possible solution.
7. 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 s/he dies so that everyone could be saved? Why didn't God change Satan when he first started to rebel? Would you agree with the following statement from the *Bible Study Guide* as above?

The Substitute, Jesus, has a perfect record, and He stands in the court in our stead—His righteousness accepted in place of our unrighteousness. Hence, we are justified before God, not because of our works but because of Jesus, whose righteousness becomes ours when we accept it "by faith."

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?**

8. 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 in any way to our salvation.
9. Read Zechariah 3:1-5. In that judgment scene, it is interesting to notice that the filthy robes—representing his sins—that Joshua was wearing had to be removed before new robes could be put on him. What does that imply? Look at these words from Ellen G. White.

None but God can subdue the pride of man's heart. We cannot save

ourselves. We cannot regenerate ourselves. In the heavenly courts there will be no song sung, "To me that loved myself, and washed myself, redeemed myself, unto me be glory and honor, blessing and praise." But this is the keynote of the song that is sung by many here in this world. They do not know what it means to be meek and lowly in heart, and they do not mean to know this if they can avoid it. **The whole gospel is comprised in learning of Christ His meekness and lowliness.**

What is justification 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. When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. When they begin to praise and exalt God all the day long, then by beholding they are becoming changed into the same image. What is regeneration? It is revealing to man what is his own real nature, that in himself he is worthless. These lessons you have never learned. Oh, that you could realize the value of the human soul.—Ellen G. White, Letter to "Dear Brother and Sister Maxson," October 12, 1896, from Adelaide, South Australia, [20MR* 117.2-3]; *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers** - (Series A, No. 9, 1897) 62.1-2; TM* 456.3; FLB* 111.2.

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, *Review and Herald*,* November 4, 1890, par. 7; 6SDABC* 1073.8; *Selected Messages*,* book 1, 367.1; FW* 101.1; AG* 265.3. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

Is He righteous? What kind of people will populate heaven?

10. 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 *Bible Study Guide* for October 23, 2017:

The faith of Jesus Christ is here, doubtless, faith *in* Jesus Christ. 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?

11. This statement implies a very large change in a person's life. Would this then be considered sanctification? Or, justification?

The true heart of the discovery of both the apostle Paul and Martin Luther was genuine clarity on how the demands of God's justice could be satisfied without doing away with His law. Key for them was the fact that Christ met the demands of divine justice [Is God the one who is demanding it?] for us in His life of active, perfect obedience to the law and in His passive, substitutionary death for sinners. Thus, as the Sin Bearer, Christ satisfied the just demands

of God's law, which demands eternal "death" (*Rom. 6:23*) as payment for the wages of sin. And through Christ's payment of the debt and His holy life, God has made full provision for the forgiveness of human sin.—*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 53. [Content in brackets is added.]

12. Is this legal fiction? Surely we do not believe that Jesus would 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?**
13. What happens to our sins when we confess them? If we are justified, do our sins disappear permanently? (*Isaiah 44:22; Micah 7:19; Acts 3:19*) Read *Genesis 3; Psalms 51; Proverbs 28:13; Romans 3:25-26; Hebrews 9:5; and 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?** (*Ecclesiastes 12:14; Revelation 20:12-13*)
14. 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?

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, accepted, and righteous.—*ibid.* for Tuesday, October 24, 2017.

Isn't that a real change?

15. So, why can't God just do that for everyone? 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. What happens if we have sinned and die before we are justified?
16. There is a very serious flaw in this whole approach to salvation. People are encouraged to focus on their past sins in order to have them forgiven. Focusing on sin is the last thing that we should be doing.

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell.—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy** 555.1.

What happens to us if we are always focusing on our past sins in order to make sure they get forgiven? The only safe thing for us to focus on is Jesus, His life, and His death, and constantly consider the implications of that most important event in history.

17. Read *Romans 3:25-26*.

Romans 3:25-26: God offered him, so that by his blood 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.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News*

*Translation** (2nd ed., Romans 3:25-26). New York: American Bible Society.

3:25-26: ²⁵Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, **to declare his righteousness** for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; ²⁶ **To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness:** that **he might be just**, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.—*The Holy Bible: King James Version.** (2009). (1900 Authorized Version., Romans 3:25-26). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. [Bold type is added.]

18. What is a *propitiation*? *Expiation* is a term used similarly. What is an *expiation*? Does God's wrath need to be appeased? Or, removed by some mechanism? (By 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."** (*Bible Study Guide*, October 25, 2017. [Bold type is added.]) 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? (Matthew 5:16)
19. So, if all this is true, do we still need to obey the law? Can we? (Romans 3:28) 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?
20. *Substitution* is another long Latin term.

Key for them [Paul and Martin Luther] was the fact that Christ met the demands of divine justice for us in His life of active, perfect obedience to the law and in His passive, substitutionary death for sinners. Thus, as the Sin Bearer, Christ satisfied the just demands of God's law, which demands eternal "death" (*Rom. 6:23*) as payment for the wages of sin. And through Christ's payment of the debt and His holy life, God has made full provision for the forgiveness of human sin.—*Teacher's Bible Study Guide* 53. [Content in brackets is added.]

21. If the consequences of sin are "eternal death" and if Jesus Christ is our Substitute, doesn't that mean that He should be eternally dead? If being dead for three days or less pays the debt for all sinners, couldn't sinners each be allowed to die for three days or less to pay their own debt so that Jesus would not have had to do so? That would be a kind of purgatory!
22. 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 2:17 and 3:1-4.) Does the righteousness of God Himself—His own personal righteousness of character and even the way He runs His government—need to be revealed? Has anyone questioned God's behavior? Or, how He runs His government?

23. 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, quoting Psalms 51:4, Paul spoke about God:

Romans 3:4 (*GNB**): "You must be shown to be right when you speak;
you must win your case when you are being tried."

24. 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 all of 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!

The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes. That men might have salvation he came directly to man, and became a partaker of his nature.

...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." [John 17:6,4] **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.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,* January 20, 1890, par. 6,9. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]**

25. 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; instead, it is about God and how He runs His government.

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