

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

Redemption in Romans **Lesson 4: “Justified by Faith”**

From the opening lines of his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul was laying down the principle distinctions between supposed justification by “works of the law” (legalism), and a true righteousness by faith response to everything that God has already done for the human family in Christ Jesus. From his premise Paul then draws the conclusion “that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28).

Over the centuries two main arguments have arisen from this simple statement of Paul’s. First is the idea that the Law of God (specifically the Ten Commandments) can be thrown out completely because we don’t need it for our justification, or for anything else. The claim under this view is that “since the cross” we’re living by “grace” and don’t need the Law, which is labeled as being part of the “old covenant” that was “nailed to the cross.” The second idea is that somehow faith justifies us; that “works of righteousness” have merit. The former notion is antinomianism; the latter is legalism. Both are ditches running along side the highway of truth.

Righteousness by faith, or justification by faith, must first and foremost have an object toward which the faith is directed. There must be a reason for the faith. Why do we believe? In *what* do we have faith? Faith is not a mental assent to a list of facts or data. Faith is not an emotion, even though we often define it as a “heart-felt appreciation.” Faith is a living dynamic operative in the life of the believer that impels a continuous creative change in the one who believes. Paul describes it in Galatians 5:6 as “faith which works by love.” Or, faith that is motivated by that heart appreciation.

Which immediately raises another question: “heart appreciation of what”? Has God done anything for which we should be grateful? Yes, we all have memorized John 3:16, but how often do we read verse 17? “God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the WORLD through Him might be saved.” First Timothy 1:15 says, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” How many in the world are sinners? “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Then for whom did Christ die?—the whole world of lost sinners.

In the section of Romans we’re focused on this week Paul doesn’t leave his readers in despair after telling us we have all come short of the righteousness we need. Immediately he says, but the good news is that God has already freely (liberally, without measure or restraint) justified us by the grace that is in Christ Jesus (vs. 24). What God liberally bestowed upon the sinful world is an “abundance of grace and of the gift of [Christ’s] righteousness” (Rom. 5:17).

Getting ahead of ourselves just a bit, we read “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (Rom. 5:18). Christ, as the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8), reversed the condemnation that fell upon the human race when Adam sinned in the Garden, thus placing the entire human race (in Adam) on a second probation. “As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary” (*Review and Herald*, March 12, 1901). This reversal of condemnation is often referred to as “forensic” or legal justification because it has to do with the Law which all (except Christ) who have been born into the world have transgressed.

Here in chapter 3 we read that God “set forth [Christ] to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the redemption of sins that are past” (vs. 25). While in the death of Christ God demonstrated His righteous judgment against sin, so in His resurrection we find proof of the acquitting righteousness of God that reveals mankind as having been declared justified (Rom. 4:25). “Propitiation” is translated from the Greek word that literally means “mercy seat” referring to the ark of the covenant whereon the Shekinah glory of God resided in the wilderness tabernacle. It is the place of atonement between sinful man and the righteous holy God. Christ is that place of atonement.

Now, with this knowledge we return to our question: “heart appreciation of what?”—the gift of grace and life. Except for Christ we would all be dead from the “foundation of the world” had Christ not immediately stepped between our father Adam and the sentence of eternal death, taking the penalty upon Himself (Gen. 2:17; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15). The gift of legal justification implores the sinner to repent and believe God’s everlasting covenant promise to save from sin. When a person hears the good news that God already loves him so much that He willingly gave up His own life to redeem us from sin, the natural response is profound wonder. “What is man, that Thou shouldest magnify him? and that Thou shouldest set Thine heart upon him?” (Job 7:17).

The “righteousness of God which is by the faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference” is the gift from God to the entire world. God gives to every human on earth a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3; Eph. 2:8), and not just any ordinary faith, but the faith of Jesus Christ. “He imparts to us His own faithfulness. This He does by giving us Himself. So that we do not have to get righteousness which we ourselves manufacture; but to make the matter doubly sure, the Lord Himself imparts to us in Himself the faith by which we appropriate His righteousness” (*Waggoner on Romans*, p. 69).

Christ took upon His sinless nature mankind’s sinful nature, and at the cross crucified that nature. Just as all humanity were in Adam when he fell, just so all humanity were in Christ when He died the equivalent of the second death on the cross of Calvary. Therefore, without performing any legal trickery God is able legally to declare the sinner

righteous. “Christ is set forth to declare God’s righteousness for the remission of sins, in order that He might be just and at the same time the justifier of him who believes in Jesus. God justifies sinners, for they are the only ones who need justification. The justice of declaring a sinner to be righteous lies in the fact that he is actually made righteous. Whatever God declares to be so, is so.” (ibid., p. 73; see also *Christ and His Righteousness*, pp. 72 and 74).

Such a magnanimous gift must kindle a heart-felt appreciation in the repentant sinner. The result of that appreciation is a transformed life which reflects the character of Christ to the fallen world.

—Ann Walper