

Sermon 61: Romans 8:4: Why God saved us

OUTLINE

To fulfil the requirements of the law

To walk in the Spirit

INTRODUCTION

Why has God saved you? For what purpose did He save you? A common answer to that question would be, 'so that I can go to heaven.' This is not the main reason why God saved you. In the first instance our ultimate goal is not heaven but the new heavens and the new earth. To die and go to heaven as a disembodied spirit is not the final goal. To be resurrected in a glorified body and live forever with God in the new heavens and earth is a more complete answer. The answer to this question can come from different perspectives. We could look at it from the point of view of missions and see that God does not merely want to save us, but He wants to save His church and we are saved and put into His employ as workers in His vineyard. Paul answers this question of why God sent His Son in the flesh to condemn sin in the flesh through His death on the cross from the perspective of righteousness. God created human beings in His image. This is the greatest thing that any created thing can be, we get to reflect a glory greater than our own, abilities that are copies of His, beauty that takes its pattern from Him. We who are a bucket of dust and a few litres of water have been graced to be God's image bearers. We were created to reflect the various aspects of God's being. In particular we were made to be holy as He is holy, holiness is not only necessary so that we are fit to be in God's presence, but we are also to be clothed in the beauty of His holiness to display and magnify His holiness. When our first parents fell into sin and plunged the human race into sin this image of God in humanity was marred. One of the reasons Christ came to live as a human being acquiring a perfect human righteousness by His life; and offered a perfect human life in payment for sin was so that we could be restored to this original purpose of bearing God's holy image. Later on in this chapter Paul tells us that we were purposed to be conformed to the perfect human being Christ Jesus, 'For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.' (Rom. 8:29). God did not save you simply so that you would not go to hell. He is restoring you to that original purpose for man in Christ. He is making holy people out of us. Holy not only in standing but in practice.

So as we come to our next verse, Paul tells us why God saved us in Christ, 'in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.' In order that is language which informs us of God's purpose. We see that God saved us in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled by us. The law which God gave to His people as an outline of His holy will, that law which we see summarized later in Romans as loving God and neighbour, this is the law that God seeks to see us fulfil. Today we will be looking at how God enables us to fulfil the law in justification and sanctification.

To fulfil the requirements of the law

As we begin our analysis of v4 I want to direct your attention to the word 'righteous' describing the law. Paul has been defending the law as good in the last chapter and he continues to speak well of the law here describing it as the 'righteous requirements of the law.' Why such a description? Have you ever thought these thoughts or heard something like them? 'God is unjust for expecting perfection of humans who cannot perform it, it is cruel for God to give a law that cannot be fulfilled.' I can imagine many people thinking this. In fact the Philosopher Immanuel Kant insisted that God would never require of us what we cannot perform. He denied our sinfulness on this basis. It was this very thought that laid the foundation for Charles Finney to deny that we need the Holy Spirit to convert us because we can cause ourselves to be born again for God would not command anything we could not perform. So how is it that the law's requirements are righteous and God is not being cruel?

In the beginning God made man with all the ability necessary to keep God's law in the Garden. They were fully equipped and able to love God and their neighbours. The call to be perfect as He was perfect was possible for Adam and Eve. However, Adam and Eve fell and as a result of their sin they became polluted with a sinful nature, a judgement wrought on our natures due to sin. Now we are unable to keep God's law, but He has not changed. The requirements of the law are righteous for it is right that we obey God's every command, that we fulfil our created purpose in displaying His perfection, that we keep every law as good and right. However, we have changed and the law can now only expose us for what we are. We must resist the temptation that the world is indulging whereby we change the standards of God's law to conform to what we can render. This is what has happened in the case of abortion, gay marriage, euthanasia, man's desires and abilities and the difficulties of our fallen world have become the basis for what we deem to be righteous law and not God's character. God does not change and neither will His law, it will always be the same and the basis upon which we are finally judged. This is why we thank God who has done for us what we could not do for ourselves, who in sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh has condemned sin in the flesh that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us.

Now there are two aspects that we need to appreciate about how God fulfils the law for us. It is a failure to grasp both these aspects that has led to error. The two dimensions of the law being fulfilled are justification and sanctification. If we read v4 so that it only means that we gain a new legal standing of righteousness but that God does not save us to produce a life of love that conforms to the law then we are doing exactly what the Roman Catholic Church accused Martin Luther of doing (which he wasn't) when he taught that we are justified by faith alone. They feared that the teaching of justification by faith alone would cause a life of sin to result. Paul is telling us here that God seeks not only to gain us a legal standing of righteous but also seeks by the Holy Spirit to cause a life that fulfils that law as well; a life of progressive holiness into the law keeping image of Christ; a life that is marked by love to God and neighbour. The other error we want to avoid is to say that this verse is only teaching sanctification. That this is verse is implying that Jesus died so that we

would be good people, only. This would deny the very reason for Jesus dying so that our law debt could be paid, and would demean the cross to nothing more than clearing past debts and being a good example, and a way of getting us the Spirit so that we could save ourselves. This is the error of Roman Catholicism, they believe that we add to our justification by Spirit wrought works. If you over emphasize one side or the other you will have a problem. So let's examine how God fulfils the righteous requirements of the law in our case, both in justification and sanctification.

Lets quickly review justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ. We stand before God as condemned criminals, we have no way of firstly, paying for all our sins, and secondly, being righteous. We need a perfect death to pay our sin debt and a perfect human life of human obedience to declare us righteous. Praise God for Jesus Christ who dies a perfect human death and lived a perfect human life who offers me His life and death to be made righteous in God's eyes. When we look away from ourselves to Christ as our sufficient saviour who alone by His life and death can make us righteous in God's eyes. God gives the righteousness of Christ to us as a gift, crediting it to us and our guilt is exchanged for His righteousness. As Paul puts it is 2 Cor. 5:21, 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' The law demanded death, the law demanded perfection, we have both credited to us as a gift through faith in Christ. So technically we are not saved by faith but through faith. Faith is the way we receive the gift of righteousness not an earning work. Through the imputed righteousness of Christ the law is fulfilled so that we have a perfect legal standing before God.

This however is not the end of it, God does not stop His work of holiness in your life. There is nothing that can be added to your legal righteousness that justifies you in God's sight, however you are still a work in progress. We have all seen carpets or tapestries where the side that is presented to the viewer is a wonderful colourful picture. However, the underside is full of loose ends, and is not as presentable as the other side. This is much like our justification. God has clothed us in the righteousness of Christ, we are legally declared righteous, in terms of being righteous in order to get into heaven we are dressed in Jesus righteousness and very presentable, holy in God's eyes. However, although we are sufficiently righteous for justification, this is not all the truth about us we are also that underside of the tapestry that is full of loose ends and God is in the business of not only gaining us a legal righteousness, but He is also seeking to conform us in this life into Christ's image. Justification is putting the righteousness of Christ on our account making our topside presentable in God's eyes. However, we are also being sanctified and this is God making us holy by the work of the Spirit of Christ, bringing us into conformity to the image of Christ not merely in our legal standing but in our characters as well. One day when Jesus comes again and our bodies are resurrected, that will be the final part of us being fully conformed to Christ where we will not only have the righteousness of Christ imputed to our account, nor will we only have Christ's character as ours, but we will receive bodies just like His that can never die again, and so we will finally be fully conformed to Christ's perfect humanity.

All three parts, justification, sanctification and glorification have to be with being conformed to Christ, let's take a closer look now at sanctification. Now I want to give you a clear distinction that will be the best way for you to remember the difference between justification and sanctification. If justification is the imputing of Christ's righteousness, then sanctification is the imparting of Christ's righteousness. Here are some more differences: Justification is righteousness that is not ours imputed as ours, sanctification is righteousness that is not ours imparted to us. Justification is an action that makes you instantly perfectly righteous in God's eyes, sanctification is the process of being conformed over our lifetimes into Christ's image never fully being completed until death where our spirits will be made perfect, and then in the resurrection where our bodies will finally be perfected as well. Justification is God saving us from the condemnation of sin, sanctification is God saving us from the corruption of sin.

How then, through sanctification, will God fulfil the righteous requirements of the law? Paul is going to tell us much about the Spirit's work for holiness in the next section, but let me try and give us a quick summary. The Holy Spirit is often called the Spirit of Christ, why? It is not only because the Spirit has been sent from Christ, and to glorify Christ. The Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ because He is presently taking dead sinners and uniting to Christ, He is applying Christ's death and resurrection life to them to break the power of sin in their lives and to transform our characters into the likeness of Christ's. The Holy Spirit lives in us to make us more like Jesus, not only in the resurrection but now. We experience resurrection power to transform us into Christ's image not only in the resurrection but in the renovation of our characters. The evidence of this is the fruit of the Spirit, those character traits of Christ's perfection presently flowering in the barren place of this body of sin. It is an intrusion of the power of the age to come making itself felt even now, a taste of the new creation that we already are, but not yet completed. Christ's perfect law keeping life, a life that consists in loving God and our neighbour, this is the life that we are being transformed into, from one degree of glory into another.

God does not stop working on us as soon as we are justified, the work has only just begun. Your condemnation has been removed, the guilt for your sins has been dealt with, but God does not only want to deal with the guilt of sin through His Son, by the power of His Son's Spirit living in you He wants to triumph over the power of sin and begin transforming us even now. God saved us so that our lives would be holy. Let me prove this with one more argument as we examine Ephesians 2:1-10.

The wonderful thing about this passage is that it gives us a chronology of God's work in saving us. It begins with us dead in our sins and it ends not with our justification, but with God saving us to do good works. Let's read it together.

It starts off with a description of what we were in sin, dead, 'And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of

the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.' We were sinful, could not do otherwise and were under condemnation.

Then God comes to save us, v4 describes His motivations, 'But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us.' It was not our goodness but His that moved Him to save.

V5-7 tells us that it all began with God uniting us to His Son so that we partook of His resurrection, and were made alive, born again. 'even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ---by grace you have been saved--- 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.'

Our response to God uniting us to His Son by His Spirit is a corresponding uniting of ourselves by faith to Christ, and this ability to have faith is a gift, v8-9, 'For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.'

V10 then tells us what God intends now that we have been saved by grace through faith, 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.' Here is what Paul has been talking about in Romans 8:4. We are saved not by good works but to good works. Those who claim that they are saved but are not producing these good works, this proves that they have never been born again of the Spirit. You cannot be united to the vine who is Christ and not produce fruit. The potency of His life being made to dwell within us by the Spirit will inevitably bear fruit.

Let me ask you then, is this how you view the Christian life? That you have been saved not to do your own thing, but that you have bought with the precious blood of Christ, you are no longer your own, and you are to now walk in the good works God has prepared for you. Scan your life, if you are a Christian is this truth dictating the decisions that you make on a daily basis, affecting the big choices like who you marry, where you live, as well as the little ones, what you do with your spare time and how you spend your money? Paul tells us in Romans 13:10 that love is the fulfilling of the law, let me ask you, is love the word that you would use to describe your life? Do you love God, your neighbour, your family, your work colleagues, your church, the nations, and your enemies? Or do you just love yourself?

To walk in the Spirit

How do we know whether we are those who have been justified and are presently being sanctified? I do still sometimes love myself more than God and put my will before His will. I read Romans 7:14-25 and I feel that I am the man who is constantly scuttling his own holiness. We come now to the second part of the verse where Paul offers a description of those who are justified and are being sanctified, those for whom there is no longer

condemnation and who are still a work in progress with regards to sanctification. 'who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.' The distinction between flesh and Spirit in this verse is not a distinction between bad Christians and good Christians, but the saved and the unsaved. Flesh stands for those who are still in Adam and not in Christ, and all those in Christ are in the Spirit.

The key word is the word 'walk'. This is a word that describes the general tenor of one's life, it is not a summary based on isolated incidences of sinning or being good, but the general direction and character of one's life. A Christian is not someone who is perfect but one whose life is directed towards God and away from sin, it is characterised by denying the flesh and obeying the Spirit, by cultivating holiness and not sinfulness. An unbeliever's life on the other hand is the opposite, they live for themselves. Their lives can have many different forms, sometimes they are very religious like Paul before his conversion, or very immoral, but they live for self not God. They do their will, their desires, they indulge the desires of their hearts and mind and not God's. Their lives are characterised by a love for self not God. John puts it even more drastically in 1 John 3:4-10, 'Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.' The older KJV said, 'he who sins is of the devil,' but the ESV has captured the sense in adding 'makes a practice.' You see if you are a Christian you can no longer happily live in sin, you are spoilt for sin. You will still sin but the overall tenor of your life will be one of living for God and seeking to emulate Christ's holiness. John did not say that Christians are those who do religious things like going to church, but rather who produce the fruit of the Spirit like love. Does this describe you? Are you walking in the light as He is in the light on the highway of holiness? You might say, but I still sin! So do I, but I don't lie in my sin I pick myself up out of the mire and get back on the road of holiness asking that God would cleanse me and restore me. This life of holiness is one of the proofs that you are his and have the Spirit, the absence of this walk and fruit should cause you to question whether you are truly a Christian. And even if you fall, you are no longer under condemnation. Let me end by looking at the scene of Jesus washing His disciple's feet.

John 13:1-10, 'Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5

Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

If you have put your trust in Christ, you have been cleaned, there is no more condemnation for you, your guilt has been washed away. However, as you walk the road of holiness you will still fall and get your feet dirty. You can come to God knowing that you don't have to bath from head to toe again, get justified again, you only need to heal the relationship with your Father. So then, reminding ourselves that this section is primarily about assurance know that when you fall you only need to get your feet washed. But let us also see the intent for which the Lord saved us, to be holy, to fulfil the law in our lives by conforming our characters to Christ. Are you simply resting in your justification and not striving in your sanctification, we must pursue holiness for this is what God has saved us to, not by.