

Sermon 86: Romans 8:30: Justified by God

OUTLINE

A declaration of righteousness
An imputation of righteousness
A gift of righteousness

INTRODUCTION

Listen to the typical doubt filled thought processes of a young believer. It is typical for a young Christian to pour doubt into their faith like water into a balloon to see if they can find a leak or a weakness. In a flurry of anxiety we attack our own salvation to see if it can stand up to our logical assaults. Here are some of the usual thoughts. 'I can see that God has forgiven all my past sins by Jesus dying in payment on the cross for them, but I still continue to sin, am I not just undoing what God has wrought?' 'I can't be a true Christian because I still sin, I repented of my sins by I have fallen back into some of them how can I be a Christian?' 'I have sinned and rebelled against God's love in Christ, now He must judge me!' 'Romans 8:38 says that fallen angels can't take me out of God's hands, but it doesn't say that I can't take myself out of His hands.' Each of these scenarios, which I am sure we are all familiar with have a single thing in common, they all believe that we can break with our sin God's work of saving us. We feel like the child who has been given a very expensive and precious gift for Christmas, but as soon as we have unwrapped it we have broken it. We feel that we are the Judas in the group, the one who turns God from a Father into a judge.

Paul wants to tell us different in Romans 8:30. Paul is arguing that God saves us from beginning to end. He outlines the five unbreakable links in the chain of redemption. We have seen God freely fore-love us with a never dying love; we have seen that God's predetermined plan can never be changed or fail because God never has to resort to plan B; we have seen how God ensures that all those who He has foreloved, He will also ensure their salvation by drawing them, calling them to saving faith in Christ. However, this is the point at which we can break the chain that we can undo what God is doing that we are stronger than Him, and that where grace abounds sins abounds all the more. It is the next link in the chain which is vital to understand in order to see that our ongoing sins as Christians cannot undo God's salvation. The next link in the chain that we need to understand is 'justified.' Paul is telling us that this word describes what God does to ensure that you and I, as sinful as we still feel ourselves to be have had our sins sufficiently dealt with that the story will still end with our certain glorification. All your fears, all your doubts, they are all accounted for in this one word 'justified.' Let us remember that we are describing God's saving action. God can do nothing imperfectly, God perfectly fore-loved, God perfectly predestines; God effectually calls; God perfectly justifies, and perfectly glorifies. God has sufficiently provided for our salvation that we cannot break it, that His will cannot be frustrated by our ongoing weakness, that no devil can overcome Him. Let's investigate some aspects of justification.

A declaration of righteousness

This is not the first time that we have encountered this pregnant word in Romans, let us cast our minds back to Romans 5:1-11. Having given us the teaching that God justifies the believer through the gift of an alien imputed righteousness through faith in chapters 1-4, Paul outlines the benefits of all of those who are now justified. He begins, 'Therefore, since we have been justified by faith....' The word 'justified' is a legal word; that means it comes from the law courts. It is the opposite of the word 'condemned.' Here Paul puts it in the past tense indicating that justification is not an ongoing process like sanctification, but a once off past event in the life of the believer. Putting all of this together it means that our judgement day verdict has been brought forward and already proclaimed irreversibly by God concerning us. That decision which many of us live in fear of, that time when we have to face God on judgement day; here Paul is telling us that God's decision of our legal standing before Him is already decided and past. On judgement day there will be no surprise verdict God will merely repeat the verdict that we are 'justified.' All those who are not believers will be the opposite, 'condemned.' God only needs to speak once as a judge, there is no court of appeals against this verdict by God because He has made no mistakes in giving this verdict. There will be no double jeopardy against our sins, for Christ has suffered the wrath of God against them and has sufficiently paid all of our sin debt by being the propitiation for our sins. All the anger of God, as much as sin deserves, He poured out on His own Son, our substitute. Jesus drank all the wrath of God for our sins so that God could, without violating His own justice, fully and freely forgive all of our sins and openly declare us as justified. Jesus took our judgement day on the cross. Your judgement has been paid in full, it would be unjust for God to pour out His damning wrath on your sins again.

Now it needs to be stressed that this is a legal declaration that declares us as holy, but it does not constitute us as holy. Justification is not to be confused with the new birth which is a distinct work of the Spirit, where justification is a legal declaration by the Father concerning a new status. Justification should not be confused with sanctification for this declaration pronounces us holy because Christ's righteousness is seen as ours not because we are actually as holy as Christ. It is a description of Christ's righteousness which is credited to us not a description of our own righteousness.

Paul tells us in Romans 5:1-11 that because we are now justified, now that our judgement day verdict is already determined and we have a new legal status as friend and not enemy there are now certain benefits that are ours. Firstly, we have peace with God. Jesus took all our punishment so that we will no longer be punished. The war that used to exist between a holy God and I, as a sinner, is ended by sin being paid for in full by my substitute. Secondly, I have obtained access by faith. Adam and Eve were chased from God's presence under threat of death if they ever tried to come into God's presence as sinners. This has all changed, Christ the Second Adam has succeeded where the First Adam failed and has fixed the problem of our guilt so that we can now enter into God's holy presence and not be killed. Thirdly, we stand in grace. Think of it this way, we have been adopted into a family, God is now our Father and no longer our judge. And even though we will still sin, we will not be unadopted and kicked out of the family, we will never see the

judges frown and judgement but only a Father's frown and discipline. We are under grace not law. Law would condemn me to hell, but grace has paid what the law requires for all my sins and now I stand in grace, under grace, drowning in God's abundance not His wrath. Because of our new relationship with God we will now go to heaven and not hell and so, fourthly, we can now rejoice in the certainty of hope. For all those whom God justifies He will also glorify. All those whom He calls to faith in His Son He will also raise up on the last day. And now because we are His children and He is for us and not against us He is working all things together for our good and, fifthly, we can even rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering in God's hands produces endurance, endurance produces character and character further beefs up our hope. Sixthly, we can know that our hope is not in vain, that we do not have an empty promise from God because we have the Spirit dwelling within us testifying with our spirits that we are children of God, and we have the objective proof of God's love in the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins. And if God has done the hardest part of giving heaven's best for earth's worst. If God has given the Son in whom He is well pleased to save His enemies, if God has done the big thing in sending Jesus to die to pay for our sins, then the hardest part is done and the easy part of glorifying us will follow, Rom. 5:9-10, 'Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.' The seventh benefit mentioned is that we rejoice in the God we used to hate and find Him to be our greatest treasure.

The point you need to see is this, justification secures you these things. All the wrath of God that you think your ongoing sin incurs is in fact satisfied. Jesus has died to pay for the guilt of all your sins, past, present and future. God's judgement day verdict has been given and it is irreversible.

The imputation of righteousness

How? You are probably asking yourself. Paul gives us further light on the mechanics of justification in, 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.' Here he is telling us about God crediting or imputing our guilt to Christ's account, and Christ's righteousness being imputed to our account. We have used several pictures to portray this. We have spoken about two bank accounts yours and a millionaire's. You have incurred millions in debt and the millionaire and that amount and much more in his account. Paul is indicating to us that when we are justified God swaps accounts, all of our debt is put into Christ's account and seen as His, and all His surplus is seen as ours. He suffers the legal penalties associated with our debt namely God's wrath and death, and we receive the rewards of His riches. We have also used the picture of two exams Christ's and ours, we fail and He gets full marks and He gives us His pass and He takes our fail. Or we have used the idea of two criminal records, ours and Christ's. We have tallied up many crimes but Christ has obeyed every law of God. There is a swap of criminal records and we are now seen as if Christ's life of obedience is ours and our life of crime is His.

This 'trade' has two aspects to it. We not only have the guilt of our sins removed, seeing traffic going away from us, the guilt of our sins being put on Christ's account. We also see Christ's righteousness being seen as ours. We see that Christ's death pays our sin debt, but that is not all, we are not merely seen as guiltless in Christ we are seen to be as righteous as He is, the righteousness of God in Christ. God requires that we be holy as He is holy and He then also provides the holiness that we cannot provide for ourselves in Christ.

In other words we receive a gift of righteousness, a gift of alien righteousness. We receive a righteousness that does not come from ourselves, from our own obedience or any work we can do, but a righteousness wrought by another given to us freely as a gift. This gift of righteousness Paul sees as one of the most precious things that he could ever possess, Phil. 3:8-9, 'Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.'

Martin Luther said that for all those who receive this gift of righteousness they are now two apparently opposing truths. *Simil Iustus et Pecattor*. We are simultaneously sinful and righteous at the same time. Although we continue to have the sinfulness of our fallen nature, and we still continue to sin at times, though our hearts are now given to God, we are at the same time as holy as God through Christ. The common picture used to explain this is the tapestry. We are on the underside of the tapestry all our sin. We are a bundle of unattractive unfinished loose ends. However, on top of the tapestry we are perfect, we are the righteousness of God in Christ. When God justifies someone, when He gives His judgement day verdict concerning us He does not judge the underside of our sin, but the top side of Christ's righteousness. The word of not guilty and righteous that God speaks over His Son, that word spoken at His resurrection because death had no right to keep a perfect man in death, that word is the word that is spoken over you and I. We are in Christ and His righteousness is our righteousness, this is what Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 1:30-31, 'And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Jeremiah prophesied of this amazing work of grace where God Himself would enable us to be as holy as He is in Jeremiah 23:5-6, "'Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' By virtue of our being united to Christ, He is the one who now mediates for us before the Father and our lives are now hidden in Christ in God. The devil can no more raise an accusation against you than he could against God Himself. This is not because you are holy in and of yourself, no even the most diligent Christian is in process, they are only being progressively sanctified. No, we are declared righteous not because God judges our personal righteousness but because God judges the righteousness of our covenant head Jesus Christ, and He is 100% perfect and sinless. And you are the righteousness of God in Christ.

Jesus also speaks of this double reality concerning the believer that we are simultaneously sinful and righteous, justified though still being sanctified. John 13:9-11, '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." Look at verse 10 Jesus says that the believing disciples, are both all clean and needing their feet cleaned. So which is it, are we completely clean or do we need our feet cleaned? And the answer is, yes! We are both! When we believe upon Christ for righteousness we are justified, that is God declares our judgement day verdict over us and declares us to be as perfect as the Son who He resurrected from the dead. This is a declarative act that gives me a new legal status but does not make me immediately perfect, I still have to wait for glorification for that. And so I am still imperfect and still need to confess my sins. However, I am now a child of God, completely clean and when I sin I am not made an enemy again but need only to restorer the fellowship that sin has disrupted with my Father. Heb. 10:14 captures this double reality this way, 'For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.' Can we be perfect and in process at the same time? Yes we can. How? By us being declared righteous as a new legal state; but only being made more and more like Christ in actuality over a life time and the process not being perfected until we are glorified.

A gift of righteousness

We have said that justification is a declaration by God not us, it is a legal declaration, our judgement day verdict brought forward. We see that it is the imputation of an alien righteousness not a righteousness of our own. It is the righteousness of Christ Himself so that we become in Him the righteousness of God in Christ. This causes a dual reality for every believer whereby we are both sinful and righteous at the same time, perfect in legal status but in process in sanctification at the same time. This is the provision of God for the Christian this is the reason why we cannot break the unbreakable chain of redemption because God has provided in Christ payment for our sins past, present and future. He has brought us into a position where we are His children and sin will not and cannot unadopt us. We can still displease God but now only as Father and not as judge, and although He will still act against our sins if we do not repent of them it will be in discipline not in wrath.

This is an unimaginable gift the question is, how do I receive it? How do I get to the place where I am seen in Christ and not in myself, that I am judged for Christ's righteousness not my own? Here is where the good news continues to be good. We receive this free gift of righteousness by faith, Romans 3:21-23, 'But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it--- 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' Faith is the empty hands that we hold up to God in helplessness asking Him to give us Christ's righteousness to justify us. Faith is not an offering that we earn God's forgiveness with. Faith is not a lessor work because God has relaxed His standards of righteousness that He rewards. Faith is the instrument that we use to receive this gift from God not give a gift to God.

We are not justified by repentance because repentance is the letting go of sin, but this does not declare us righteous, we need to have something given to us to declare us righteous. We are justified by receiving and trusting in the gift of Christ's righteousness to make us holy in the eyes of a holy God. We are not justified by baptism for baptism is a symbol of our having been washed by Christ's work not an actual bath in itself. We are not justified by the law for we break more laws than we keep, and any laws we keep we do as sinners therefore imperfectly and can only add sin to our record not remove it. Faith receives the gift that God offers. This gift is a gift which means it does not have to be earned and is offered freely to all. It is grace on God's part that we receive this profound gift not by earning it but by humbling ourselves independence upon what God provides in Christ. Martin Boos, a Roman Catholic priest had this lesson taught to him by a women on her death bed, he writes, 'In 1788 or 1789 I visited a sick person, who was respected for her deep humility and exemplary piety. I said to her, 'You will die very peacefully and happily'. 'Why so?' she asked. 'Because you have led,' I replied, 'such a pious and holy life'. The good woman smiled at my words and said, 'If I leave the world relying on my own piety, I am sure I shall be lost. But relying on Jesus my Saviour, I can die in comfort! How could I stand before the divine tribunal, where everyone must give an account even of her idle words? Which of our actions and virtues would not be wanting if laid in the divine balances? No, if Christ had not died for me, if he had not made satisfaction for me, I should have been lost forever, notwithstanding all my good works and pious conduct. He is my hope, my salvation, and my eternal happiness.' (Murray, Old Evangelicalism, p99). That is what it means to have faith in Jesus Christ. Martin Boos himself practiced asceticism and penance for sin after the Roman Catholic fashion and, like Martin Luther, found no peace. He later came to believe in Justification by faith and was persecuted by the RCC for believing and preaching it, and he preached it to great effect.

Let us conclude. God saves us, He does this by providing a sufficient justification that brings us into a new legal relation to Him. He speaks His judgement day verdict over us and it can never be reversed. Where sin has abounded grace has abounded all the more. We are declared righteous by the imputation of an alien righteousness, whereby although still sinful we are the holiness of God in Christ, and we receive this gift by faith. God overwhelmingly saves us in this wonderful manner that we might not doubt His ability to save.