

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 4:6-15 - Sermon Notes



Background

Last time we were together, we learned that salvation should never make us proud because we didn't do anything to deserve it. It was given to us as a free gift from God who expects nothing in return for His gift. That's the very definition of "grace." So, if we didn't do anything to deserve it, it was a free gift, and we don't have to give Him anything in return for it, then we can never brag about being saved, can we? But this doesn't mean that we shouldn't do anything to show our gratitude to Him. In fact, our lives should be focused on always doing what we can to show gratitude to Him!

Today, among other things we will learn of God's favoritism toward us. He's not the God who is watching our every move so that He can pounce on us with punishment for every little thing we do wrong. On the contrary, we are highly favored by Him!

Romans 4:6-8

just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account."

"Just as" is translated from a Greek word meaning, "very much as" or "exactly as." In other words, Paul is showing a very strong, direct relationship between the example of Abraham's justification by faith and the things that King David said, as quoted here.

The word translated "blessing" is *makarismos*, which refers to someone who has been declared as fortunate, or happy. A very similar word is used twice more here, where it is translated as "blessed." Paul is using this word to describe someone who "possesses the fullness of God's favor." Another way of saying it is "one of God's favorites." It may seem strange to think of God as having favorites, but in a very real sense that's what David says about those who believe God's good news.

Paul has already shown that Abraham is an example of God's crediting righteousness apart from works of the Law. He now cites another example from the Old Testament. This time it is a quote from David, who obviously understood that God considers a person righteous without the works of the Law. In fact, David declares the person "blessed" to whom God imputes righteousness through faith.

And this favoritism comes, not from works of righteousness, but as a free gift from God. It is not granted to us because we have kept a set of rules or followed all the requirements of the church or even because we have been obedient. God's favoritism comes simply because He has chosen to grant it to those who believe. Again, He doesn't do this because He has to, but because it pleases Him. It makes Him happy!

If you believe that you are a sinner in need of salvation and you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for all of your sins and rose again from the grave, Paul says because of that faith, God has declared you to be as if you had never committed a single sin. You are declared "righteous" and your name is written in the Book of Life. It also means that you will not appear at the Great White Throne Judgment spoken of in [Revelation 20:11-15](#). Instead, you will appear at the Bema Seat Judgment spoken of in [2 Corinthians 5:10](#) where you will receive rewards for those things which you have done for the glory of God.

Remember that Paul is quoting King David here, from [Psalms 32:1](#). David described a condition of blessedness, wherein God demonstrates His favor toward us. This blessedness is the result of God forgiving, or "sending away," our sinful actions, which is also what it says in [Psalms 103:12](#):

[As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.](#)

God actually separates us from our sins (our acts of lawlessness) when they are forgiven. Otherwise, He would not be able to fellowship with us because sin cannot remain in His presence. Therefore, when God forgives our sins, he sends them away (as far from us as the east is from the west!)

This verse also says blessed is the man whose sins are covered over by God. In the previous chapter of Romans we learned that Christ is our mercy seat. The mercy seat was a covering of the Ark of the Covenant on which the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled, covering sins so that God can "pass them by."

Therefore, in this verse David is saying that the person whose acts of lawlessness and sins are sent away and covered over, possesses the fullness of God's favor. And, as we have just learned, this blessedness does not come because we earned it in any way. We are blessed because God has chosen to bless us. One of the beauties of [Romans 4:8](#), "[Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account,](#)" is found in the word "not." This is translated from the two Greek words *ou me*. The word *me* indicates relative negation and the word *ou* indicates absolute negation. In English, a double negative is improper, but in Greek it is a form of emphasis. The expression *ou me* means "absolutely not" or "in no way."

What David is saying is that the person whose sins and acts of lawlessness are forgiven and the person unto whom God will absolutely not credit with sin is a recipient of God's greatest favor. What is just as interesting is what David said at the end of this particular Psalm:

[Many are the sorrows of the wicked, But he who trusts in Yahweh, lovingkindness shall surround him. Be glad in Yahweh and rejoice, you righteous ones; And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart. \(Psalms 32:10-11\)](#)

David tells us to be glad, to rejoice, and to shout for joy because we have not been credited with sin.

What Paul is getting to is this: the person who does not earn (or deserve) salvation but believes God, not only **does not** have sin credited to his or her account but **does** have righteousness credited to his or her

account. Let's see, do I want God to see me as a sinner or as sinless? Hmmm. That's not very hard to decide, is it?

Romans 4: 9-12

Therefore, is this blessing on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "Faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness." How then was it counted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be counted to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

Paul has just quoted from the book of Psalms where David declared the blessedness of the person to whom God will not impute (mark to his account) sin. This blessedness is a characteristic of every person who has saving faith. In Noah's case it was the belief that God was going to bring a flood. In Abraham's case, it was belief that God was going to give him a son in his old age. In our case it is the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and He died on the cross to pay for our sins. In each of these examples, it is faith that is accounted for righteousness in God's record book.

Paul, referring to the blessedness described by David, now asks the (predominantly) Jewish Christians in Rome a pivotal question. Remember, the Jews of the early church still believed that you had to keep the law and be a devout Jew before you could become a Christian. They believed that all Christian males had to be circumcised and keep the Law, even after salvation. There are many churches today that have established laws, ordinances, and rules for their constituents. They teach that obedience to these rules is necessary to be a Christian and to be a member of their church. Paul says, "Not so!"

He asks, "*Does this blessedness (that God will not impute sin) apply to those of the circumcision (keepers of the Law) only? Or, does this blessedness also apply to those who don't keep the Law (or obey the ordinances of the Church) but who simply believe. After all, in Abraham's case it was his faith that was accounted to him as righteousness.*"

He now asks another rhetorical question with a potentially startling answer. "When was the righteousness imputed to Abraham? Was it imputed to him after he was circumcised or was it before he was circumcised?"

Do you see why this is such an important question? If Abraham was declared righteous after he obeyed God by circumcising himself and his household, then it can be argued that he was declared righteous as a result of being obedient, that is, by works of righteousness. But... if Abraham was declared righteous before he was obedient, then his circumcision had nothing to do with his being declared righteous. That's why Paul asks, "Was this crediting of righteousness to Abraham done while he was circumcised or uncircumcised?" Let's look and see. In Genesis fifteen God declared Abraham righteous. He was about 84 years old at the time:

Then he believed in Yahweh; and He counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15: 6)

Then in Genesis 17:24 Abraham was circumcised:

Now Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

The answer is that Abraham was declared righteous about fifteen years before he was circumcised. He was declared righteous as a result of faith, not as a result of obedience! He didn't earn it; it was freely given to him.

Likewise, we are saved by faith and by faith alone. It has nothing to do with any act or deed on our part. We don't have to obey any laws or rules or set of standards to be saved. In fact, we don't do anything ourselves. We simply believe God's promise! That's what Paul meant in **Ephesians 2:8, 9** when he said,

For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works

...

Obedience comes after salvation as a result of our freedom; it is not the cause of our salvation or our freedom!

Why was there such a lengthy period between Abram's being declared righteous and his receiving the sign of circumcision? Perhaps God did this so that there would be no doubt that faith was imputed well before circumcision. Circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign that he had a special covenant relationship with God.

We see that circumcision was given to Abraham as a "seal." It was God's guarantee that He had proclaimed Abraham righteous through faith. That makes Abraham the spiritual father of everyone who believes without being circumcised.

This righteousness, which God declares for a person as a result of faith, comes regardless of whether a person is circumcised or not. Based on Paul's line of reasoning and the carefully laid argument and evidence that he has just placed before the predominantly Jewish Christians in Rome, there is no way they could ever again insist that a person had to become a Jew and be circumcised in order to become a Christian.

One more thing to notice from **Genesis 17:1**: when God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision, he also commanded Abraham to be "perfect" ("blameless" in some translations). The Hebrew word *tamiym* means "to be without blemish" or "to be morally clean." This was not commanded of him until well after he was declared righteous. In other words, Abraham didn't earn his righteousness by being morally pure; it was commanded of him after he was declared righteous. This is another piece of evidence that we don't earn our salvation (righteousness), it is given to us!

It is not obedience to the Law or to any other set of rules that produces righteousness. It is faith that produces righteousness. And the point is that faith came well before obedience and -- as a result of that faith, we all (Jews and Gentiles) can look to Abraham as our spiritual, believing father figure.

Romans 4:13-15

For the promise to Abraham or to his seed that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith has been made empty and the promise has been abolished; for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no trespass.

Paul is covering all the bases, making sure that the Christians in Rome who are predominantly Jewish have no way to twist what he is saying into anything resembling "righteousness through obedience." These verses say something a little bit different from what we found back in verse 10. That verse had to do with righteousness being imputed as a result of faith. These verses are talking about the promises that God made to Abraham. These promises include:

- **Genesis 12:2** – that God would make of Abraham a great nation
- **Genesis 12:3** – that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed
- **Genesis 15:5** – that his descendant would be the Messiah
- **Genesis 17:5** – that he should be the father of many nations

It is probably this last promise to which Paul is specifically referring when he says that “... he would be the heir of the world.”

His point is that this promise was made to Abraham through the righteousness that comes from faith, not from obedience to the Law. In fact, if you read the Old Testament carefully you will discover that the Law of Moses came some 300 years after Abraham died. Therefore, not only was he declared righteous through faith (just as we are declared righteous by faith) but the great promises that were made to Abraham (like the promises that are made to us) were given to him in faith, not obedience. Abraham didn't have to be obedient in order to receive the promises, he simply had to believe.

In a similar manner, the promises made to us concerning our salvation are not dependent on us being obedient before or after we are saved, they are based solely on our “once for all time” saving faith. In other words, there is no sin that we can commit that will prevent God's promises from being fulfilled if we have truly accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior!

These promises are based on faith, not obedience! Hallelujah!

Paul now argues the other side of the fence. Having shown that it is through faith that God reckons righteousness, he now makes a counter statement regarding righteousness through obedience.

He says that if righteousness, being an heir of the world (which was promised to Abraham), is achieved by obedience (obeying the law or any other set of rules), then nothing is accomplished by faith, and God's promise is VOID, it is useless. After all, what value is there in a promised gift to someone if someone else can attain the same thing by working for it?

Do you understand? What value is there in a promise regarding any unearned future gift if that same thing can be earned? Paul says it makes faith “void.” That is, faith would become void of any meaning, hollow, and empty if righteousness can be earned by works. Not only that, but Paul says that the *promise* that God made to Abraham would be “of no effect.” It would become absolutely useless and serve no purpose at all.

What Paul is demonstrating is how righteousness by faith and righteousness by obedience are complete opposites. You can't have both and you can't have a combination of the two, it has to be one or the other. Either a person is made righteous by obedience, or he is made righteous by faith. This is particularly significant when you consider what Paul told us previously:

as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.” (Romans 3:10-12)

Faith is a matter of *believing*, while obedience to the law is a matter of *doing*. Since none of us is righteous based on our doing (works), our only hope for righteousness (and salvation) is through believing (faith). This renders that righteousness very precious because it can't be earned; it can only be given to us:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God;* (Ephesians 2:8)

Let's thank God for this precious righteousness by faith!

Paul now makes one final observation about trying to obtain righteousness by obeying a set of rules or laws. He says that the Law brings about the wrath of God because the Law actually produces transgression (the overstepping of a rule or a law).

Paul even goes on to say that where there is no law there can be no transgressing of the law. Adam and Eve are the perfect example. Before they were told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were free to eat of it, and doing so would not have caused them any negative consequence. But, as soon as God commanded them not to eat of it, not only was it now wrong for them to do so, but it became something that they suddenly wanted to do.

As a result of transgression (violating or overstepping the boundaries of the law) God's wrath is produced because He cannot stand sin. Sin, and therefore anyone possessing sin, cannot remain in God's presence because as a Holy God He must judge sin.

That's what Paul is saying in this verse; that without law there is no transgression and therefore, none of God's wrath. It's actually the Law that produces God's wrath.

But why would God give something to mankind (the Law) that would cause His wrath against mankind? That doesn't seem to make sense, does it? Paul will answer this difficult question later in this letter.

So What?

Deep down inside we all know that we are sinners, and God knows us even better than we know ourselves. But through faith, the blood of Christ covers our sins, and God sees us as righteous and without sin. That's God's grace, that's God's supreme favor, that's blessedness!

Righteousness and moral purity are things that God wants of us. But, as long as we have this sin nature we will never be righteous or morally pure by ourselves. Praise God that He declares us righteous when we believe the good news about Christ's sacrifice for us. And He gets all the glory!

It doesn't matter who your ancestors are, what church you go to, or even if you occasionally break some of the rules. It doesn't matter what color your skin is, whether you are male or female, tattooed or not. It doesn't matter whether your parents are rich or poor and it doesn't matter whether you are European, Asian, African, Caucasian, Baltic, Australian, Indo-European, or Inuit. What matters is that you believe Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for your sins! Period!

Perhaps you are convinced now that you can't earn your salvation by obedience. But do you realize that you can't keep your salvation (receive God's promise to you) by obedience either?

If you believe that Christ's death on the cross paid for your sins, then God has declared you to be righteous; you are saved from your sins. How precious does that salvation feel now?

So, because of this gracious truth, let's commit ourselves to living the remainder of our lives for the sole purpose of glorifying God. It's the least we can do! Don't you agree?

My Christian brother or sister, do you realize just how blessed you are? You and I can have fellowship with our Holy God because He has removed our sins from us and covered them with the blood of Christ. Why not take a few minutes to get on your knees and thank Him for everything He has done for you!

Let's pray.