

Romans: The Good News of God

David's Testimony

Romans 4:6-8

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Scripture

In our series in Paul's letter to the Romans we are learning about the good news of God. The apostle Paul is teaching us how unrighteous sinners come into a right relationship with a holy God.

We are sinners by nature. We are rebels against God. We want to rule our own lives, and we have no interest in submitting to our Creator.

God is therefore understandably angry with us. Even though he created us for fellowship with him, we have broken fellowship with God because of our sin. God cannot look on wrong (Habakkuk 1:13b), and he must condemn us to hell for all eternity.

Thankfully, God has made provision for us to enter into a relationship with him. He has done so by providing his own righteousness. He credits us with the righteousness of Jesus and transfers our sin to Jesus. God then justifies us and we receive his verdict of "Not Guilty!" by faith. We call this "justification by faith."

The apostle Paul in Romans 4 uses the patriarch Abraham as an Old Testament example of justification by faith. Paul teaches that Abraham was saved, not by his own good works, but rather through faith in the righteousness that God provided. Abraham believed God that he would provide Abraham with his divine and perfect righteousness, and because of his faith in God's work Abraham was justified.

Paul knew that the Jews would require more than one witness to establish a legal matter (Deuteronomy 19:15, 17:6-7, Numbers 35:30). So he added the testimony of King David to that of the patriarch Abraham to support his illustration of justification by faith. He did so by citing the first two verses of Psalm 32.

Let's read Romans 4:1-8, bearing in mind that Romans 4:6-8 is our text for today:

¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶ **just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:**

⁷ **"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;**

⁸ **blessed is the man against whom the Lord will
not count his sin."** (Romans 4:6-8)

Introduction

When I talk to people about heaven and salvation I often ask the first Evangelism Explosion question, "Do you know for sure that if you were to die today that you will go to heaven?"

The answers I receive are, "Yes," "Maybe," "I hope so," and "No."

Then I follow up with the second Evangelism Explosion question, "Suppose you were to die today and you were to stand before God, and he were to say to, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' what would you say?"

The answers I get to that question are very revealing. How would you answer that question?

The answers I receive to this second question are, "God will let me into his heaven because. . . I try to obey the Ten Commandments. . . I try to be a good Christian. . . I'm a basically good person. . . I go to church. . . I am a member of a church. . . I believe in Jesus AND go to church . . . and so on."

The problem with each answer is that the person is trusting in his own work to get him into heaven. Theologians sometimes call this "works-righteousness," meaning that we are presenting our

own works to God to satisfy his requirements for perfect righteousness.

Other people do not think of themselves as being in a wrong relationship with God. They assume that all is well between themselves and God. So they do not feel a need for justification.

This is illustrated by what theologian R. C. Sproul speaks of as “justification by death.” Years ago Sproul asked his young son, R. C., Jr. the second EE question, “Suppose you were to die today and you were to stand before God, and he were to say to, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’ what would you say?”

R. C., Jr. replied, “I’d say, ‘Well, I’m dead, aren’t I?’”

Young R. C., Jr. thought that all he needed to do to get into God’s heaven was to die. The righteousness of Christ received by faith did not seem to enter his son’s thinking in the slightest.

Because so many people think or respond in these ways today, it is necessary to teach the doctrine of justification at length, as I have been trying to do in my exposition of Romans.

God knows that “all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isaiah 64:6). He knows that “none is righteous, no not one . . . no one does good, not even one” (Romans 3:10-12).

And so God has provided us with his own righteousness in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus’ works are perfect and they alone are accepted by the Father. And so the correct answer to the second EE question is, “God will let me into his heaven because I trust in Jesus Christ alone for the gift of eternal life.” In other words, when I get to heaven I will present Jesus’ works to God to satisfy his requirements for perfect righteousness.

Lesson

Now, the apostle Paul has been arguing in the first three chapters of his letter to the Romans that this is how we come into a right relationship with God. Romans 4 is an illustration of the principle of justification by faith. Paul used Abraham as an illustration in verses 1-5 and 9-25. Romans 4:6-8, however, tell us about

David's testimony. And so, today, let us listen to David's testimony about how God justifies and blesses sinners.

I. God Justifies Sinners (4:6)

First, God justifies sinners.

Paul says in Romans 4:6, **“just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.”**

Of all the kings of Israel, David was the greatest. He embodied the nation's hopes and aspirations. The Jews to whom Paul was writing would have had the highest possible regard for David. He was as revered as the patriarch Abraham. Author James Hastings wrote of David in *The Greater Men and Women of the Bible*:

The David of Israel is not simply the greatest of her kings; he is the man great in everything. He monopolizes all her institutions. He is her shepherd boy—the representative of her toiling classes. He is her musician—the successor of Jubal and Miriam and Deborah. He is her soldier—the conqueror of the Goliaths that would steal her peace. He is her king—numbering her armies and regulating her polity. He is her priest—substituting a broken and a contrite spirit for the blood of bulls and rams. He is her prophet—presaging with his last breath the everlastingness of his kingdom. He is her poet—most of her psalms are called by his name.¹

As James Montgomery Boice says, “It is hard for us to appreciate the Jews' special regard for King David unless we think of a person in whom the best qualities and achievements of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln are combined. And perhaps even that would not quite reach David's stature.”²

But though King David was a great man he was also a great

¹ James Hastings, *The Greater Men and Women of the Bible*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 113.

² James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, Vol. 1: Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 446.

sinner. He committed adultery with Bathsheba. He tried to cover up his adultery but was unsuccessful. He then had her husband killed when he would not fall for David's deception. So, David was an adulterer, deceiver, and murderer (cf. 2 Samuel 11:1-27).

Months later God confronted David through the prophet Nathan. His adultery, deception, and murder were exposed. Although David had tried to cover up his sin, he was unsuccessful. He knew the terrible burden of sin as a result of his transgression.

It was only when he repented of his sin and trusted in the perfect righteousness of Jesus that he was set free from guilt. He could then rightly speak **“of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works”** (4:6).

And though David is the great poet of Scripture, I am sure that he would join Horatio Bonar, who accurately captures how God justifies sinners in his hymn titled, “Not What My Hands Have Done”:

Not what my hands have done,
Can save my guilty soul;
Not what my toiling flesh has borne,
Can make my spirit whole.

*Chorus: Thy work alone, my Savior,
Can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,
Can give me peace within.*

Not what I feel or do,
Can give me peace with God;
Not all my pray'rs, nor sigh, nor tears,
Can ease my awful load.

It will be helpful for us to keep in mind the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* definition of justification, which is: “Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the right-

eousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.³

So, God justifies sinners.

II. God Blesses Sinners (4:7-8)

And second, God blesses sinners. That is, God blesses those who have been justified by faith.

God justified David. God pardoned David. God forgave David. God accepted David as righteous in his sight, not because of anything that David had done, but only because of the righteousness of Christ. God imputed, or credited, or reckoned Christ's righteousness to David's account. And God did this because David believed God.

And so David wrote a marvelous Psalm, which we know as Psalm 32, which is an expression of his repentance and God's blessing. The apostle Paul quotes Psalm 32:1-2, which tells us how God blesses sinners.

Paul cites David to establish that the greatest king of Israel understood and taught that justification is by faith alone. The blessing David is speaking about is salvation, God's supreme blessing offered to fallen mankind. The only ones who can receive it are those to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

The apostle Paul quotes King David, who declared in Psalm 32:1-2: **“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”**

David clearly understood God's grace. In another great penitential psalm written after Nathan confronted him with his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, David cast himself entirely on God's grace.

He pleaded with God in Psalm 51, which was written at the same time as Psalm 32, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my

³ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*, 3rd edition. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1996), Question 33.

transgressions” (51:1).

He confessed, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment” (51:4).

David knew that only God purifies and washes away sins and blots out transgressions. Only God creates clean hearts and renews a right spirit within.

The person of genuine faith is **blessed**, David proclaims, because by God’s gracious provision his **lawless deeds are forgiven**, because his many particular **sins are covered**, and because the basic **sin** and depravity of his fallen nature **the Lord will not count** against him.

In the 14th century, Robert the Bruce of Scotland was leading his men in a battle to gain independence from England. Near the end of the conflict, the English wanted to capture Bruce to keep him from getting the Scottish crown. So they put his own bloodhounds on his trail. When the bloodhounds got close, Robert could hear their baying.

His attendant said, “We are done for. They are on your trail, and they will reveal your hiding place.”

Robert replied, “It’s all right.”

Then he headed for a stream that flowed through the forest. He plunged in and waded upstream a short distance. When he came out on the other bank, he was in the depths of the forest. Within minutes, the hounds, tracing their master’s steps, came to the bank. They stopped there. The English soldiers urged them on, but the trail was broken. The stream had carried the scent away.

A short time later, the crown of Scotland rested on the head of Robert the Bruce, and he became Robert I, the King of Scotland.

Our sins, prodded on by Satan, can be like those baying dogs—but a stream flows, red with the blood of God’s own Son. By grace through faith we are safe. No sin-hound can touch us. The trail of sin is broken by the precious blood of Christ.⁴

⁴ Erwin Lutzer, *Putting Your Past behind You* (San Bernardino, CA: Here’s Life Publishers, 1990), 42.

Abraham was justified only by faith. David was justified only by faith. And every believer before and after them has been justified only by faith. A sinner's faith is graciously accepted by God and counted for him as righteousness for Christ's sake.

The story is told of a poor farmer who had saved his money for years in order to buy an ox to pull his plow. When he thought he had enough saved, he traveled a great distance to the nearest town to shop for an ox. He soon discovered, however, that the paper money he had been saving had been replaced by a new currency and that the date for exchange from the old to the new had long since passed. Because he was illiterate, the man asked a neighbor school boy to write a letter to the president of their country, explaining his dire situation and asking for an exemption.

The president was touched by the letter and wrote back to the farmer: "The law must be followed, because the deadline for exchanging bills has already passed. The government can no longer change your bills for the new ones. Even the president is not exempt from this rule."

"However," the president continued, "because I believe that you really worked hard to save this money, I am changing your money for new money from my own personal funds so that you will be able to buy your ox."

Before God, every person's good works are as worthless as that farmer's outdated money. But God himself, in the Person of his Son, has paid the debt. And when a confessed sinner casts himself on God's mercy and accepts by faith the Lord's atoning work in his behalf, he can stand forgiven and righteous before him.

Someone once wrote the following lines:

If our greatest need had been information,
God would have sent us an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology,
God would have sent us a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money,
God would have sent us an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure,

God would have sent us an entertainer.
But our greatest need is forgiveness,
so God sent us a Savior.⁵

God blesses sinners by forgiving us our sin through the Savior he has sent.

Conclusion

But how does one obtain forgiveness of sin?

A Sunday school teacher once asked her class of nine-year-olds, “Can anyone tell me what you must do before you can obtain forgiveness of sin?”

There was a short pause and then, from the back of the room, a small boy spoke up.

“Sin,” he said.⁶

Well, that is where forgiveness begins as far as we are concerned. We must recognize that we are sinners and that we have sinned against a holy God.

Then we must ask God to pardon us. God will not automatically pardon you. You must want to be pardoned.

In 1830 George Wilson was convicted of robbing the United States Mail and was sentenced to be hanged.

Apparently, President Andrew Jackson issued a pardon for Wilson, but he refused to accept it.

The matter then went to Chief Justice John Marshall, who concluded that Wilson would have to be executed.

“A pardon is a slip of paper,” wrote Marshall, “the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged.”⁷

God offers pardon to sinners. If it is refused, there is no par-

⁵ Charles Sell, *Unfinished Business* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1989), 121-122.

⁶ *Bits and Pieces*, May, 1991.

⁷ *Prokope*, Vol. 11, #5.

don.

Many people yearn for pardon and forgiveness. About fifteen years ago there was a story of a father and son in Spain who had become estranged. The son ran away, and the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in Madrid newspaper.

The ad read: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father."

On Saturday 800 Pacos showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.⁸

God does not place an ad in any newspaper. Instead, he has placed a notice in the Scriptures which, in effect, says, "Dear sinner, meet me at the cross of Christ today. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father."

But, as I said, God's pardon is not automatic. You must receive it. You must believe that Jesus paid the penalty for your sin. And you must believe that his righteousness will be credited to your account.

And when you do that, God will justify you by faith in his Son. And God will bless you, and you will be pardoned and forgiven. Amen.

⁸ *Bits & Pieces*, October 15, 1992, 13.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

Our Father in heaven, your Word teaches us of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

Your Word says, “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

O Lord, justify and bless each one who looks to Jesus by faith? Justify and bless each one who does not trust in his own works but trusts only the righteousness of Jesus for the gift of eternal life.

And all of this I ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.