

THE GRACE GIFT

God's Provision for Your Salvation



His robes for mine: O wonderful exchange!
Clothed in my sin, Christ suffered 'neath God's rage.
Draped in His righteousness, I'm justified.
In Christ I live, for in my place He died.

Chris Anderson

How should man be just with God? (Job 9:2). How can sinful creatures be regarded and treated as righteous by their holy Creator? Job wrestled with that question in the days of his sufferings. Knowing his own sins, he confessed, *If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me (9:20).* As good a man as Job was, deep within his conscience lived the memory of his sins. Simple honesty enabled him to perceive that any attempt to justify himself would ultimately end in self-condemnation – and worse! For God also *knoweth the secrets of the heart (Ps 44:21); all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do (Heb 4:13).* The ever-present Deity

is aware of our every thought, word and deed, and many a time we have done wrong. We have failed to do what God requires, and foolishly did what He forbids. So how can a person stand in right relations with God? How can we be justified (that is, declared righteous) and thus regarded and treated as such?

NOT BY OUR WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Man can never by his own righteous acts and deeds justify himself before God. The prophet declared, *thy righteousness, and thy works ... shall not profit thee (Isa 57:12)*. Our righteousness comes mixed with sinfulness before all-seeing Holiness; it is as *filthy rags* in His sight (Isa 64:6). We are not holy white but dingy gray at best. Our sin taints all that we think and do. And our efforts to earn God's favor by doing good deeds fall short in the face of God's law that demands perfect obedience. Scripture says, *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them (Gal 3:10)*. *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all (Jam 2:10)*. Under God's holy law, *every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward (Heb 2:2)*. There was no allowance for sin. Ultimately, *every* failure to render obedience required death to satisfy justice. This was the message in the many bloody animal sacrifices offered in the Old Testament under the Law to cover sin, all pointing to the once-for-all human sacrifice on Calvary's cross to *take away our sins (I Jn 3:5)*.

God is holy. He is perfect in all His ways, and requires the same of man created in His image (Mt 5:48; I Pet 1:15-16). To assume that we can be justified by imperfect obedience is a deadly assumption. *The soul that sinneth, it*

shall die (Ezek 18:20). Like Job, we who can neither plead sinlessness nor deny sinfulness would be wise to ponder the question, “How shall man be just with God?”

BY THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF ANOTHER

In the opening three chapters of the New Testament book of Romans, the apostle Paul both argues and proves that we humans *are all under sin ... there is none righteous, no, not one* (3:10). Then, near the end of Romans 3, Paul begins to show that it is only by the merits of another man’s sinless, righteous life that men can be justified (declared righteous) by God. For through faith in this truly righteous man, Jesus Christ, and His atoning sacrifice for our sins, the righteousness of God is credited to the believing one’s account.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, ... Even the righteousness of God *which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, (Rom 3:21-25a).*

Redemption for sinful human beings is available “*in Christ Jesus*” – the sinless Son of God. His bloody death on the cross for our sins propitiated (satisfied) God’s justice against us. Through “*faith in his blood*” we are “*justified freely by his grace.*” The “*righteousness of God*” is “*unto all and upon all them that believe.*” God imputes, or credits, righteousness to the believing one’s account and thereby *counts* him righteous - apart from good works and despite bad, “*ungodly*” character. Paul goes on to say as

much in the next chapter when referencing the lives of Abraham and David.

For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was *counted* unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is *counted* for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God *imputeth* righteousness without works, ... to whom the Lord will not impute sin (Rom 4:3-6,8).

God *promised* aged Abraham a seed: a son, and posterity through whom *the* seed, the promised Messiah-Savior, would come. What was the elderly man's response? **He considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither the deadness of [his wife] Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness (4:19-22).** In order to fulfill His promise to Abraham, God would have to work a miracle. He would have to bring life from the dead! Abraham, being fully persuaded the Creator of life had power over death, relied on God's goodness, and wholeheartedly trusted his Maker to make good on His promise. His strong confidence in God to give him the promised seed – yeah, even a Savior, led to his giving glory to God before his faith became sight. Now - for his faith without wavering, God imputed to Abraham righteousness without works. And having credited righteousness to his account,

God declared the man of faith righteous, and from that day forth regarded and treated him as such.

From the example of Abraham, the father of faith, the apostle Paul goes on to declare that God will impute righteousness unto us also **if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences [sins], and was raised again for our justification (4:23-25)**. God imputed *unto* Jesus our sins, laying them *upon* His Son (II Cor 5:21; Isa 53:6). Having satisfied sin's penalty by His death, God raised Christ from the dead. He now *promises* not to impute sin but righteousness "*unto all and upon all* them that believe." God's Savior died for our sins and arose to justify us. If *we* stagger not at God's miraculous power over death, and rely wholly on *His* goodness and not our own, fully persuaded that He is able to do the good He promised, God will declare *us* righteous. If we have the trusting faith of Abraham, where-by God receives all the glory, we too will be justified by faith.

What follows in Romans 5 is the climax of Paul's teaching on justification by faith. Beginning in verse 12, he shows how that, as all men by birth are "*in Adam*" and thus share in his sin, even so all by faith in God's Son are "*in Christ*" and share in His righteousness.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come (Rom 5:12-14).

Here is the answer to how both sin and death entered the world; i.e., the human race. They entered through *one* man, Adam. God gave Adam a clear command: Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that is in the garden; and God gave Adam a clear warning: If you disobey me, you will die (see Gen 2:17). Adam disobeyed. He deliberately defied God's command. Eve was involved as well, but to Adam was the command given, and as head of the human race Adam was held accountable. Thus, the Bible says that sin entered the world through this one man. And death entered as well. Death is the penal consequence of sin – sin's penalty. As the result of Adam's one sin, Adam now became subject to death. And so did all of humanity, for "death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (12).

While our own sins are sufficient to bring us to death, Paul takes us deeper into the reality surrounding our condemnation in Adam to help us see the reality of our justification in Christ. Follow his argument. Paul writes, "sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses [i.e., from Adam to the giving of the Law], even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (14). Adam *consciously* sinned against a clear command of God, *knowing* death was the penalty for doing so, and he died for it. But, Paul says, death reigned *even* over those who had not sinned in the same way Adam sinned – consciously, knowingly. This group would have of necessity included the mentally impaired and infants who died. But if death is the penalty for sin, how is it that *these* died? They died because of their union with Adam, their head. This is Paul's point, and he brings it up to help us see that, as all who are "*in Adam*" find themselves condemned through *his* sin, even so all

who are “*in Christ*” find themselves justified on account of *His* righteousness.

It is at this point in his exposition that Paul brings Christ into the picture. He refers to Adam as “the figure of him that was to come.” Adam was a type or pattern of the coming one - a reference to the Messiah, the Christ, who is called “the last Adam” (I Cor 15:45). Paul is going to draw a comparison between something Adam did, and the consequences upon the human race that he is the head of, and something Christ did, and the consequences upon this new creation of humanity over which He is Head. (With Adam, it was sin that brought condemnation and death to his children; with Jesus it was obedience unto death that brought justification and life to His).

Paul begins his comparison between the first and last Adam by pointing out some contrasting elements. Notice his use of the words “not as ... so also” and “for if ... much more” in Romans 5:15-17.

But *not as* the offence, *so also* is the free gift. *For if* through the offence of one many be dead, *much more* the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many (15). And *not as* it was by one that sinned, *so is* the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification (16). *For if* by one man's offence death reigned by one; *much more* they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ (17).

“For if through the offence of *one* many be dead.” All humanity being *in* Adam inherited his sin nature; all are born unclean with a natural bent towards sin (Gen 5:3; Job

25:4, 14:4; Ps 51:5, 58:3). All enter life under the curse of sin and death, for *in Adam all die* (I Cor 15:22). We do not die *for* Adam's sin but *because* his sin made ours certain. Now, if that is the case, if we are certain to die *through* the sin of Adam, then, Paul argues, it is much more certain we may live by the righteousness of Christ. "For *if* through the offence of one many be dead, *much more* the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by *one* man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" (15).

What is grace? Grace is the *kindness and love of God our Saviour* that appeared in Jesus Christ, bringing salvation to humankind (cp. Titus 2:11, 3:4). It is by His loving-kindness that God through His Son Jesus grants sinful human beings what is here called "the gift by grace" (15). What is this grace gift? Notice what the text says. First, it is a "*free* gift" (15, 16, 18). Three times in four verses it is referred to as such. If it were not free, it would not be grace. Second, "the free gift is ... *unto* justification" (16, 18). Once received, it results in the recipient being justified (declared righteous). Last, it is the "gift of righteousness" (17). Now, follow closely what is said about this gift. It "is by one man, Jesus Christ" (15). It is "by the righteousness of [this] *one*" (18). Yeah, it is the righteousness of Christ. For (as theologian John Piper discerned), Paul contrasts Adam's *offense* with both the *free gift* (15) and Christ's *obedience* (19), this free gift of righteousness being the righteousness the Son of God won by His obedience. This *free gift* is the gift of *His* righteousness - the righteousness of *God* that is *unto* and *upon* all who believe. It is certain that all men are counted as sinners and die through the deed of the first Adam. It is *much more* certain that God's grace has "abounded unto many," and "they which receive ... the gift of righteousness" are counted as righteous and live on account of the deeds of the last Adam.

Paul continues. “And *not as* it was by one that sinned, so is the gift” (16a). The one that sinned is Adam. The free gift given us through Christ is “not as” that which ‘freely’ came to us through Adam. It differs. In what way? Paul says, “for the judgment was by *one* to condemnation” (16b). The judgment, that is, God’s decision to pronounce the sentence of condemnation and death, was by *one* offense. Adam’s *one* sin brought condemnation and death to the human race. “But,” Paul says, “the free gift is of *many* offences unto justification” (16c). God’s decision to freely credit righteousness to the believing one’s account provides pardon from the guilt of our *many* personal sins, resulting in justification. Truly, Christ saves us from far more evil than Adam sentenced us. For we have received “*abundance* of grace ... where sin abounded, grace did much more *abound*” (17, 21).

Paul carries on. “*For if* by one man’s offence death reigned by one; *much more* they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (17). Throughout this text, both sin and death are depicted as ruling authorities reigning over Adam’s offspring: *death reigned (14)*; *death reigned (17)*; *sin hath reigned (21)*. Here is the impact, the effect, of Adam’s disobedience: sin and death reigned. What is the effect of Christ’s sinless, obedient life: “*much_more* they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.”

John Wesley explains: “As death through the sin of the first Adam reigned even over them who had not sinned after the likeness of Adam’s transgression; so through the righteousness of Christ, even those who have not obeyed, after the likeness of his obedience, shall reign in life. [And] ... as the sin of Adam, without the sins which we afterwards

committed, brought us death; so the righteousness of Christ, without the good works which we afterwards perform, brings us life..." (Think, thief on cross). Yes, the effect of Christ's righteousness shows up in all who are *in* Christ, even as the effect of Adam's disobedience shows in all those *in* Adam. When united with the first Adam, a sinful man, we practiced sin, for we were under sin's reign. Now united with the last Adam, a righteous man, we practice righteousness, for we are under grace and its reigning King. *Now* we can reign in those passions that lead to death (Rom 6:1-8:39; I Jn 5:4-5). *Soon* we shall reign with Christ in life eternal (Rev 3:21, 22:5).

Therefore as by the offence of *one* judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of *one* the free gift [of righteousness] came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (5:18-19).

Here in summary Paul completes his comparison between the first and last Adam. He says, in the same way condemnation came to all who are *in Adam*, justification comes to all who are *in Christ*. Adam chose sin, and being by nature in union with him, we were made sinners and condemned in him. Christ chose righteousness, and being by faith united to Him, we are made righteous and justified in Him. II Corinthians 5:21 adds clarity. *For he [God] hath made him [Christ] to be sin for us ... that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* In the same way Christ was "made sin for us" (our sin was credited to His account), we are "made the righteousness of God *in* him" (His righteousness is credited to our account).

Faith unites us with the righteous One, Jesus Christ. It puts us in Christ, members of His *body* and partakers of His *nature* (Eph 5:30; II Pet 1:4). We are *accepted in the beloved* (Eph 1:6), *complete in him* (Col 2:10), *perfected forever* (Heb 10:14). *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth* (Rom 10:4). The end requirement of the law is perfect righteousness. Christ is that for the believer. He is *THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS* (Jer 23:6); *in the LORD have I righteousness ... in the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified* (Is 45:24-25). Paul longed to be found in him, *not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith* (Phil 3:9). So, abiding in Christ, *we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith* (Gal 5:5); *for, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure* (I Jn 3:2-3).

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (5:20-21)

Why do we need righteousness gifted to us by faith? Because we cannot attain righteousness by following after God's righteous law; the Jews tried that, and failed (Rom 9:30-33). Rather than delivering us from our sinful bent, the commands and prohibitions of the law arouse the sin dwelling in us (see Rom 7). In fact, *the strength of sin is the law* (I Cor 15:56). Paul here says the law "entered" (was given) so sin "might abound" in our lives. By this, God helps poor sinners to better sense their need of Christ

and His “much more” abounding grace. For *the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Gal 3:24)*. God’s law helps us feel the depths of our unrighteousness so we might more deeply feel our need of His righteousness.

Jesus came *to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15)* - to fully perform every part of the righteous law of God as life presented opportunity to do so. This He did, not merely outwardly but inwardly. In trillions of thoughts, with purest of motive, Christ lived as God is: righteous; then died for our sins, arose from the grave, and lives to save. This “righteousness of God” the Jews, being ignorant of, refused to submit to (Rom 10:1-3). They had a saying: ‘The *law* for righteousness!’ Paul says, “Christ is the *end* of the law for righteousness” – to those who believe (Rom 10:4 -10).

Dear friend, God has made provision for your salvation. The righteousness of God is available as a gift through faith in His Son. This is the gospel of God’s grace that we are urged to believe. If you have not yet done so, repent of your sins, including the gravest of all sins, the sin of unbelief. *Believe* in the kindness and love of God. Yeah, *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31)*. Do so with your *heart* – from the core of your being with the whole of your mind, will and emotions. *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom 10:10)*.

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