

God's Intended Product of the Gospel

Any Christian that is uncertain about the ultimate purpose for God in sending His Son to die as a substitute sacrifice for sins will be greatly handicapped in his ability to know and appreciate truth. As a result, he will be greatly hindered in living the type of life Jesus wants him to live. Based upon my observations, many if not most Christians living in the twenty-first century have a myopic view of salvation that hinders zeal and creates a lethargic spiritual life. I write this hoping to help such Christians gain a larger, richer understanding of the gospel and the salvation that Jesus died to make possible. To do so, I will focus on Paul's teaching on this subject as provided in his letter to the Romans. I will focus primarily on one particular verse, Romans 8:4.

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ **in order that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.***

What did Paul mean by the phrase, *that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us*? I suspect that many Christians have not given this much thought. Have you? Hopefully, you should agree that to benefit from the words Paul wrote in this chapter, you first must understand what he meant by the words he chose to use.

When faced with the task of understanding such passages, many Christians tend to put down their Bible and open a commentary to see what their favorite theologian thinks. But trying to gain insight through this means might prove challenging because there are two different schools of thought concerning this verse.

A few commentators suggest that Paul is talking about the righteousness that is imputed to the Christian when he first believes the gospel. Other commentators suggest that Paul is talking about practical or actual righteousness in the form of righteous attitudes and actions. The interpretation of Romans 8:4 greatly impacts how a person understands the rest of the eighth chapter of Romans.

In this verse, I am fully convinced that Paul is talking about practical or actual righteousness in the form of righteous attitudes and thoughts, not imputed righteousness. I believe that all who think he is talking about imputed righteousness here will be greatly hindered in their understanding of not only this verse, but the surrounding verses and even the entire book of Romans. It is a pivotal verse. If a person believes Paul is talking about imputed righteousness in Romans 8:4, he will benefit less from the surrounding section of scripture. His understanding will likely hinder his ability to enjoy abundant life.

Before I explain why I hold my view, let me first say some things about the opposing view and those who hold to it. First and foremost, I hold dear the teaching about the imputed righteousness made possible through the sacrificial death of Jesus to all who believe. This is a doctrine that is foundational to the gospel. Without imputed righteousness made possible through the sacrificial death of Jesus, nobody could ever be saved! Because this truth is so important, I fully understand why some might interpret Romans 8:4 through that prism. But I emphatically say that such a view fails to recognize the thrust of this section of the book. In other words, to conclude that Paul is talking about imputed righteousness in Romans 8:4, one must close his eyes to the immediate and wider context in which we find it. In addition, it assumes conclusions about the opposing view that the syntax of this verse does not demand.

The context clearly indicates that Romans 8:4 is talking about actual, lived righteousness.

Following is a brief summary of Paul's letter to the Romans leading up to chapter 8. In addition to the context of the letter itself, it is important to also consider the context into which it was received. In those days, those who identified themselves as followers of Jesus often suffered persecution in varying degrees. If today's reader fails to keep this in mind, he will have difficulty getting the full impact of what Paul had to say.

Introduction (Romans 1:16-17):

The letter is Paul's explanation of the gospel. In this introductory statement, he says that the gospel is God's power or means necessary to bring about the ultimate salvation (from God's wrath at the coming judgment) of all those who believe it. (See verse 16.) Then, Paul indicates that the revealing of God's righteousness is the effectual element of the gospel in the saving of souls. But the information contained in the gospel, though glorious, was not the ultimate means to reveal God's righteousness. Rather, the revelation of God's righteousness would be insured by the actions and attitudes of believers as they live moment to moment by faith. As this occurs, it will produce faith in others who observe believers living righteously. (See verse 17.¹)

The preparation God made to make His ultimate desired effects (Chapter 1-5)

In the opening chapters, Paul explains that God's desire for actual righteousness in people could not be fulfilled unless several things happened first. For example, in their natural state, no human is inclined whatsoever to live righteous lives of obedience because sin has utterly corrupted them. Their tendency is to go from bad to worse and not vice versa. Though God has been restraining evil and even providing revelation concerning His desires, people don't care. So, they seek their own pleasures without regard to what God wants for them, even though He created them and owns them.

In addition to their corruption, God Himself is not at liberty to excuse a single sin, let alone the multitudes of sins each person commits. So, even if there was a person who attempted to live a righteous life in sincere devotion to God², he could never make himself acceptable to God because God's absolute righteousness prohibits Him from excusing even a single sin. God cannot have a single sin come to Him and all humans have been stained with sin.

¹ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith" (Romans 1:7).

It is true that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel message itself. The fact that God gave His Son to die as a sacrifice for sins demonstrates His absolute righteousness. He could not excuse even a single sin. The punishment had to be poured out. So, Paul could have merely said "In it (the gospel), the righteousness of God is revealed." This would be easy for us to understand. But he did not stop his thought with that simple statement. He said, "In it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." Then Paul quoted from Habakkuk 2:4, "as it is written, 'the righteous shall live by faith'" to support his statement. Clearly Paul saw a connection between the information contained in the gospel and the life of those who actually believe it. In his mind, the information itself would not insure that the righteousness of God would be revealed sufficiently.

God knew that the believing of it would radically impact the life of the one believing it. Those who believe it fear God and love Him more than life itself. They are enthralled with the wonderful grace of Jesus and seek to please Him for the rest of their lives even if it means that they must endure great suffering as they show their allegiance to Him. Obviously, they tell their loved ones, friends and others about the gospel since their entire life is utterly wrapped up in it.

If the gospel did not impact people like this, it would have been forgotten long ago. People would not be excited to tell their friends and loved ones about the gospel. But those who believe the gospel truly find it altogether glorious. Those around them notice that they are different than other people. They live truly righteous lives with great joy, thankfulness and hope, even while they undergo suffering and persecution. As a result, those who observe them don't understand why they are so different so they ask them why they have such strong hope and are willing to suffer for the sake of what they believe. In this way, attention is drawn to the gospel and others begin to believe.

The effect of this "genuine" faith has its greatest impact when persecution is most wide spread. It was during the periods of most intense persecution that the gospel spread the most. This effect is conveyed in Jesus' parable of the leaven. He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? "It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened" (Luke 13:20-21).

The righteousness of God is revealed in the information of the gospel itself. But it is powerfully broadcast in living color to the ends of the earth because it is believed. The inhabitants of the earth observe its effects in those who believe. God uses the righteous attitudes and actions that prevail in believers to confront unbelievers about their sin and His righteousness. Often, they become angry at them and accuse them of judging and being self-righteous. But many of them learn the gospel as God draws their attention to it. As a result, they learn about God's righteousness and their need for a Savior because their lives appear unrighteous when compared to their believing neighbors and friends.

² No such person exists according to Romans 3:10-11.

As a result of these truths, there is no hope whatsoever for man to make himself acceptable to God. (See Romans 3:19-20.) Even though they should obey God anyway, they cannot muster any motivation to do so knowing that they are hopelessly and rightly condemned for their past sins. Those who try to reform themselves are motivated to do so for other reasons. Those who follow religion do so for a variety of reasons that address their own self-driven way of living. For example, many do so for the recognition and approval they receive from their loved ones or peers. Many who practice religion falsely think that this will appease God. They arrive at this false conclusion as they compare themselves with other people who seem to behave worse. But even the best of the religious people are completely corrupt inside and unable to please God.

So, in order to bring about the His ultimate desired effects in people, namely truly righteous lives, God had to deal with all of these issues. First, He had to legally punish sins so that sinful man could be reconciled to God. They could never be brought near to Him with their sins. The sins had to be legally removed. To accomplish this, God sent His Son as a sacrifice for sins. When Jesus died on the cross, He took the full punishment for sins and God accepted His sacrifice as payment in full. Now, God could receive anyone who places his trust in this finished work of Christ because his sins were punished. God's righteousness is not violated because the sins were punished. God legally remits the sins of all who believe. He has this right.

Many Christians seem to focus so much on this glorious work of God to reconcile sinners to Himself, they fail to see all of His purposes in it. They mainly appreciate how this work delivers them from the penalty of sin (hell). But this work also was necessary to bring about righteous living on the part of those who believe. For example, if our sins were not remitted, we would remain under condemnation and be headed for hell. What motivation would we have to live righteously if we knew that in the end, our righteous acts would not be able to save us? But because sin was judged on the cross, we are free from any and all condemnation. Since God did all this for us, we are thankful and naturally want to please Him by living obedient lives.

Paul makes known God's ultimate desired effects for saving us. (Chapter 6)

Having made the necessary preparation (legal reconciliation explained above), Paul now makes God's desired effects clearly known. Since Jesus took all the punishment, does that mean we continue to live as we used to live? (Seeking our own pleasure.) GOD FORBID! (See Romans 6:1-2.) To do so would suggest that we really do not believe the gospel. For example, the gospel shows that if we truly are believers, we have died to sin and are now alive to God. Following are some verses from Romans 6 that reveal that it was not God's intention to merely deliver us from the penalty of sin (hell). This work also was intended to enable the unleashing of truly righteous attitudes and actions on the part of those who believe the gospel.

Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.... For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those

things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life (Romans 6:6,7, 10-22).

To experience true life, we must live righteously. Otherwise, the end will be death, not life. (For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord- verse 23). The choice is ours and clearly God is trying to move us to live righteous lives so that we experience what He considers true life.

The righteousness God desires can't be produced by "living according to the letter of the law." (Ch. 7)

Knowing God clearly desires us to live righteously and has made preparations for it in the gospel, how are we to go about it? The truth of the gospel itself provides sufficient motivation for us to live righteously. Based upon the truth of the gospel, it would be insane for us to live any other way. In Romans 7, Paul warns that it is impossible for us to produce the type of righteousness God desires by merely living according to a set of rules. He said, *Now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter (Romans 7:6).* He taught that if we look to the Law for help in ordering our ways as an unbeliever would do as he attempts to reform himself, our sinful passions will be aroused by the Law which bear fruit of death. (See Romans 7:5.) Thus, part of the provision of the gospel was so that we become delivered from the Law so that we would serve in "newness of the Spirit." Paul would soon explain this in chapter 8 but before he does so, he explains the problems one encounters when attempting to live according to "oldness of the letter."

Beginning in Romans 7:7, Paul describes what it is like to attempt righteous living in one's own power. He points to his own experience. He said that like all who believe, he wants to obey God but there is a law in the members of his body that wages war against the law of his mind to obey. So, though he wants to obey, his sinful flesh hinders him. (See Romans 7:22-23.) His conclusion is that in himself, he does not have the power and needs someone to set him free from this law of sin and death that resides in his sinful body. He concludes stating that God is the only One who can bring deliverance through Jesus Christ. (See Romans 7:24-25.) This is why there first had to be remission of sins and reconciliation. Condemnation had to be completely removed to prepare for living in the newness of the Spirit. (See Romans 8:1.)

Now that condemnation is removed, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus set us free from the law of sin and death. (See Romans 8:2). We could not free ourselves no matter how much we were determined to obey. The Law was not able to deliver us because of the weakness of the flesh. (See Romans 8:3.) But God made a way by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. When He died, sin was judged and remission of sins made possible to all who believe. BUT then he tells us about God's ultimate desire in all of this. It was not merely to bring about remission of sins and reconciliation of sinners to Himself. It **was so that the righteousness of the Law would be fulfilled in us as we walk by the Spirit.**

Romans 8:4 describes God's intention to produce actual righteous actions and attitudes.

Paul's entire argument leads to no other interpretation. All of chapter six and seven discuss God's desired righteousness and how it cannot be produced by mere human determination. In 8:3-4, Paul states that the reason for the cross ultimately was **so that actual righteousness would be produced.** As this chapter continues, Paul describes how and why we can and will live righteously because the Holy Spirit has set us free from the law of sin and death.

He contrasts life lived according to the flesh with life lived according to the Spirit. This contrast reminds us of the truth contained in the gospel that is effective to bring about righteous living as the Spirit empowers us. So, it is a life of faith. As we believe the gospel, we are empowered to live righteous lives. We believe Paul when he says, *If you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Romans 8:13).* So, we find ourselves praying always, looking to Him to make His Spirit strong in us. We are motivated to have the righteousness of the Law produced in us because we really believe that this is what God wants to bring about. Plus, we know that the alternative is death. *If we walk by the Spirit,*

we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh, (Galatians 5:16). As a result, the righteousness of the Law will be fulfilled in us as we walk according to the Spirit.

The syntax of this passage does not prohibit this interpretation of Romans 8:4.

Those who believe that Romans 8:4 is talking about imputed righteousness assume that it is saying that the righteousness of the Law will be fulfilled completely or perfectly. To them, since Christians still sin, Romans 8:4 must be talking about the righteousness that was imputed when they first believed the gospel. But the syntax of this passage does not demand such an interpretation.

The verb “fulfilled” (πληρωθῇ) is in the subjunctive mood.³ In this case, it is a subjunctive of purpose. Through the sacrificial death of Jesus, sin was condemned in the flesh....SO THAT the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit. In this context, the emphasis is on God’s intention and desire to bring about actual righteousness in His people. (Imputed righteous was discussed much earlier in the book.) Actual righteousness will be produced as the believer walks according to the Spirit. The Christian who reads this chapter is thus made aware of God’s intentions and desires to bring about actual righteousness in them. Also, this word “fulfilled” is in the passive voice which indicates that it is God who is the One who is causing the righteousness of the Law to be fulfilled in us. It is not suggesting that we are the ones producing it.

There is nothing in the Greek text that requires us to conclude that Romans 8:4 is talking about imputed righteousness. Therefore, since the **THE** SUBJECT of Romans 6-8 is the production of actual, lived righteousness, the only logical conclusion is that, because it is clearly His desire and intention, God is at work producing actual righteousness in Christians as they walk according to His Spirit.

The lexical evidence argues that Romans 8:4 is talking about actual, lived righteousness.

Before concluding this discussion, let us also consider the meaning of the words Paul chose to use in Romans 8:4 to drive the final nail in the coffin. Earlier in the book of Romans, when Paul was discussing justification, he used the Greek word *logizomai* (λογίζομαι) which means “imputed.” In Romans 8:4, if Paul was talking about imputed righteousness, he would have used this word, or one similar to it. Instead, he used the concept “might be fulfilled” when he chose the Greek word *pleero* (πληρωω) in its subjunctive mood form. This conveys the idea of the object (us) being filled up with something (righteousness). Clearly, Paul is addressing the very problem he was talking about in Romans 7. He said the Law is righteous and that he desired to obey it but because the sinful passions of the flesh are aroused by the Law, the opposite affect occurred. But now, as he walks according to the Spirit, the very righteousness that the Law itself could not produce, is in fact being fulfilled in his life. So, the concept of imputed righteousness does not fit into Romans 8:4 no matter how you slice it. The context argues against it. The syntax does not demand it. The lexical evidence argues against it.

Summary

As a result of the information contained in the gospel AND its effects on the lives of those who believe it, the gospel is showing itself to be God’s power or means to bring about the salvation that will take place when Jesus comes back. When people believe it, they are justified and reconciled to God. Having all condemnation removed, they are motivated to live lives that please God. But they cannot accomplish this by mere determination to obey God’s Law. They must abandon this approach altogether and walk according to the Spirit.

Knowing it is God’s desire that the righteousness of the Law be fulfilled in them, they can pray with confidence, asking God to make His Spirit strong in them. The more this occurs, the more they will be

³ The indicative mood expresses certainty. For example, *The boy hit the ball*. The subjunctive mood is one that expresses the idea of probability. If we say, *The boy swung the bat in order that the ball would be hit*, we see the idea of subjunctive of purpose. It expresses why the boy swung the bat but it does not say that the ball was actually hit. The emphasis in this example more to specify why the boy swung the bat.

empowered to live righteous (Christ-like) lives. As a result, the world will be confronted with the gospel. For example, people will hear them talking about the gospel often. But they will also observe their loving, righteous attitudes and actions, even during times of suffering and persecution. All of this shines a light on the gospel as glorious and EFFECTIVE to change people.

Some who observe these righteous lives and hear the gospel will believe. Their lives will also be changed and they will tell others with enthusiasm. In this way, the leaven (gospel) spreads and yields a righteous crop of wheat that is ultimately gathered into God's storehouse. The chaff (those who do not believe), will be cast into the fire.

From all this, we understand that it is not just the cross work of Jesus, but also the gospel itself that is God's power unto salvation because of the actual righteousness that is produced in the lives of those who believe it. Without the production of this actual, lived righteousness, none would be saved. But because righteousness is produced, all who believe will be saved when Jesus comes back. Their righteous lives will actually condemn all those who do not live righteous lives as Noah's life condemned all who perished in the flood. (See Hebrews 11:7.)

So, God's ultimate reason for saving us was not limited to justification and reconciliation. He intended that our lives would be radically changed and characterized by actual, lived righteousness. This way, His righteousness would be revealed in the world.

Thomas Bear, 10/22/2018

Οὐαὶ μοί ἐστιν ἂν μὴ εὐαγγελίζωμαι (Προς Κορινθίους Α 9:16)