

Righteous in Christ

Romans 8:4

“God has done what the Law... could not do. By sending his own son... he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Romans 8:4-5

God chose not to condemn us for our sin, instead condemning SIN in the flesh of His Son. All of the just wrath of God against you and against me was poured out on Jesus. As our Lord suffered on the cross, he drank the cup of God's fury - every drop. There is nothing left hanging over us. Sin has been condemned in the flesh of Jesus, so there is NO condemnation waiting for us.

If you are in Christ, judgment is not in your future because it already happened in the past! **“God has done” what we could never do.** Jesus paid the price we could never pay. As Jesus hung on the cross he breathed out those wonderful words: “It... is... finished.”

Oh, hear that good news, brothers and sisters. ***“It is finished.”*** God has done the work of salvation. “Jesus paid it all! All to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow.”

Look at v. 4: ***“God has done what the law... could not do. By sending his own son... he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”***

There are two parts of this verse, separated by a very important comma in the middle. “In order that” shows us the PURPOSE of our salvation and “who walk” shows us the RESULT of our salvation. Those will be the two parts of our message today - the purpose of our salvation and the results of it.

First, **The PURPOSE of our salvation - to perfectly satisfy God's requirements IN US.** ***“He condemned sin in the flesh, IN ORDER THAT the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us...”***

“In order that” is a statement of purpose and intention. This is WHY God has done all of this. This shows God's goal and rationale - the purpose of His entire plan of salvation: to perfectly satisfy the righteous requirements of His law ***in us.***

Have you ever thought about this? Why in the world did God go to such great lengths to save US? What was He thinking? Why all this headache? Why all this drama? Seriously?

- The entire Old Testament and the history of Israel...
- The persecution and suffering of the early church...
- The Crusades and the Inquisition of the middle ages...

- The self-reliant religion that gave birth to the Reformation...
- The self-exalting humanism of the Enlightenment...
- The constant division and infighting that produced thousands of denominations...
- The spinoffs of cults and nonsense like Scientology...
- The worship wars of the '80s and '90s...
- Knock-off attempts at Christian versions of things like GODTUBE - remember that one?

Why? In the sovereign wisdom of God and His master plan for history... Why does he bother with us?

Here is the reason. **"In order that."** Here is the goal to which everything was moving. Here is the reason Jesus came, the reason He died and the reason He will return to finish what He started.

"In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled IN US." These are miraculous words. This is game changing truth.

God's purpose was not just to satisfy the requirement of His law. He could have done that by wiping us all out in an outpouring of fiery judgment. The wages of sin is death. He could have incinerated world and consumed every one of us in the blazing lava our sins deserve. That would have satisfied the righteous requirement of His law. But it would not have fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law **IN US**.

No. To accomplish that God had to take the radical, history changing step of sending His own Son to become fully human. Born of the virgin Mary - born under the Law. Jesus grew as a young man and explained to his parents, "I had to be in my Father's house," where he could learn about God's Law and ask questions about how to obey it.

Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished..." Matthew 5:17-18

"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:20

God's Law did not fail in its purpose. The purpose of God's law was not to REMOVE sin - only a perfect sacrifice could do that. ***The purpose of God's law was to REVEAL sin***, and thereby to ***reveal the righteous character of God*** the Law-Giver.

Jesus did not come to abolish this good and holy Law. He came to FULFILL it. He came so that Matthew 5:20 could become true for His followers. The only ones who will get into

my heaven, Jesus said, are those who are righteous even beyond the exacting standards of the scribes and Pharisees.

That was no idle comment. ***The scribes and Pharisees were insane in their discipline.*** They memorized the entire Torah - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Have you read Leviticus recently?!? They memorized all of the Psalms and Proverbs. Those were the minimum standards - the Torah, Psalms and Proverbs. The really impressive guys memorized every word of the entire Old Testament. Every word.

In addition to their ridiculous pursuit of knowledge, they were equally committed to disciplines. They fasted two or three days EVERY WEEK - no food, just water. Every week! They spent hours upon hours praying long, impressive prayers. Granted, they did this on the street corners because they wanted the attention. But still, they were like Augustinian Monks before there were Augustinian Monks, like Augustine.

How in the world can our righteousness surpass THAT? It can't - weakened by our sinful flesh. It can't. It never will. EXCEPT that it can IN CHRIST. In fact, in Christ IT WILL. Our righteousness WILL exceed that crazy commitment to knowledge and discipline.

For that is the whole purpose of our salvation. "In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be FULFILLED IN US." That's the point of it all! There are two glorious sides to our salvation - the subtraction of sin and the addition of righteousness.

First, for God's righteous requirements to be satisfied in us, **God had to remove our sin.** That is called forgiveness. When God pronounces your sins forgiven in Christ ***he takes an accounting ledger*** that documents every single evil thing you have ever done or said or thought - ever single good thing you should have done but did not do - every one of your sins in your past, present and future. Think of what that ledger would look like... God takes all of those DEBITS and ***does a BALANCE TRANSFER of them from your account to the account of Jesus.***

Every one of those DEBTS that you owe - if each sin was assigned a dollar amount and some were big ticket items and others were smaller - your life would have a total DEFICIT - let's call it \$10 Billion dollars, just for a nice round number. That whole list - every single cent - was transferred from your account to Jesus' account. Your debt has been forgiven. God has released you from it. Sin has been completely removed from your account. Praise the Lord!

Do you know ***the Dave Ramsey scream?*** After you've endured the discipline of cash in envelopes and that whole business and you pay off all of your debts and you go on Dave's show and shout, ***"I'm debt free!"*** Some of you know exactly what that feels like financially - while others of us know what it's like to be on the other side and to be carrying some debts right now.

But ALL OF US who belong to Jesus Christ can join in this shout together, because in Christ WE ARE DEBT FREE! We have to do it. Join me - on the count of three, and shout out this gospel truth with me - "I'm debt free!" Ready? 1-2-3... "I'M DEBT FREE!" Isn't that wonderfully good news? All of our debts have been paid!

But the good news doesn't stop there - God not only forgives us in Christ, *He also pronounces us JUSTIFIED*. He declares us RIGHTEOUS. So not only does Jesus pay all of our debts, but He immediately, in the same transaction, does another balance transfer from His account to yours! *CREDIT for Jesus' righteousness has been added to your account!*

And do you know the wealth that is in Jesus' account? Jesus lived a life of complete and untarnished righteousness. He was tempted in every way as we are but never once gave in to sin. He obeyed every direction of the Holy Spirit. He fulfilled every detail of the Father's plan. Jesus, through His earthly life, fulfilled ALL of the requirements of God's Law. Remember that's what he told John the Baptist. Go ahead and baptize me... "for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Matt. 3:15

Jesus did nothing wrong and He did everything right. So in His life, Jesus satisfied the righteous requirements of the Law of God. If life gave a grade and the best of us would get a D-, Jesus is the only one in the world who ever got an A+, 100%. The only one.

But in the glory of Gospel accounting, God has transferred the perfect score of Jesus to the account of everyone who belongs to Jesus. Or to go back to finances, God has transferred the INFINITE WEALTH of Jesus into your righteousness account, and mine. We are not just a little righteous in Christ. We are PERFECTLY RIGHTEOUS!

The Law, weakened by the sinful nature, would never have been able to get this done. But God has done this very thing, "IN ORDER THAT the righteous requirement of the Law might be FULFILLED IN US."

- Forgiveness: Sin has been completely removed from our accounts
- Justification: The perfect righteousness of Christ has been credited to our accounts

That was the PURPOSE of our salvation: *to perfectly satisfy God's requirements in us*. He did not go part way. God has done this miracle of grace. The Catholic Church calls this a "legal fiction," but it is spelled out right here in Romans 8:4. And it is no fiction - this is truth in its most glorious form. Through no merit of our own, God has not only pronounced us forgiven in Christ, He has pronounced us RIGHTEOUS!

This morning is a bit of a grammar and syntax lesson, so look again at this verse.

*"In order that
the righteous requirement of the law
might be fulfilled in us,
who walk*

*not according to the flesh
but according to the Spirit.” Romans 8:4*

The second half of this verse shows the result of our salvation - that we live or walk or behave in a certain way - a way that is not driven by our sinful nature but is guided and empowered by our new life in the Spirit.

The RESULT of our salvation - we will walk in step with the Holy Spirit.

We walk through each day in accord with the Spirit who lives in us, not following the flesh that used to control us. Let's look at four conclusions we should NOT reach from this verse and then two conclusions it should lead us to.

Four False Conclusions:

- Our behavior is THE CAUSE of our salvation - “because we walk”
- Our behavior is THE CONDITION of our salvation - “if we walk”
- Our behavior ADDS to the full righteousness of Christ imputed to us - “as we walk”
- Our behavior DOESN'T MATTER - “who walk however they want”

First, Our behavior is NOT THE CAUSE of our salvation. The verse does not say “the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us **BECAUSE** we walk” a certain way. That was precisely the teaching and mindset of the Pharisees that Jesus so often confronted. Strict, disciplined adherence to God's Law CANNOT save a person. Not even the most committed Pharisee. You simply cannot reach the “righteous requirement” of God. His standards are way too high.

If you want to get to heaven based on your own efforts, you have to be PERFECT. You cannot mess up even one time. You have to do nothing wrong and do everything right. The book we give away to our first time guests is *How Good is Good Enough?* This book wrestles with that question - if good people go to heaven (as so many assume today), how good do you have to be?

Many people make the massive assumption that you just have to be a little more good than bad - that there are giant scales of justice somewhere in the universe and in the end God will weigh everything out and as long as you are 51% good, you'll get in. This sounds fairly reasonable but the problem with it is that there is absolutely no reason to think it's true. There is no holy book from any religion that teaches it - and certainly not the Bible!

According to the Bible, the standard to get into heaven based on works is 100% perfect. 0% failure. If you think you can meet that standard then by all means, keep at it. But don't stake your eternity on the modern wishful thinking that the 51% good go to heaven. Stake your eternity on Jesus and His perfect righteousness!

The second false conclusion - **Our behavior is THE CONDITION of our salvation.** This is a slight variation on the first one. The verse does not say “*the righteous requirement of*

the law might be fulfilled in us IF we walk...” God does not withhold His judgment in a wait and see / hope for the best life-long testing. Imagine the stress and worry if he did?

When I was in college I got to know my Grandma Anderson by going to visit her in her nursing home. She had been a pretty nominal Methodist most of her life. When she got sick with colon cancer and it was clear she didn’t have a lot of time left, I asked her some questions most of you have probably heard.

I said, ***“Grandma, if you die today do you think you’ll go to heaven?”*** She said what lots of people tend to say - ***“I HOPE SO.”*** So I asked the follow up question - “If you stood at heaven’s gate and God asked you, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’ what would you say?”

Again, she said what a lot of people say, “I think I’ve been a pretty good person...” So I shared with my Grandma that she didn’t have to hope and wonder and worry about heaven. She could know what would happen when she died. But she had to put her faith in Jesus - she had to trust in HIM and not in HERSELF and how good she might have been in her life. Grandma prayed with me that day, and I think we’ll see her in heaven. But ***it won’t be because she satisfied the CONDITION of getting in by living a “good enough” life.***

If she is in heaven it will only be because in the last few months of her life she chose to give her heart and life to Jesus Christ and He transferred her sin to His account and His righteousness to her account!

Our good behavior is not the cause of our salvation, nor is it the condition of our salvation. The third false conclusion is that ***our behavior ADDS to the full righteousness of Christ*** imputed to us. This verse does not say, ***“the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us AS we walk...”***

Do you see how grammar matters? Pay attention in your English classes, kids! Prepositions matter! “Because... If... as...” AS we walk in the Spirit and resist the flesh we are not filling up a righteousness quotient. That quotient has already been fully met by Jesus and we could not add to it if we wanted to. This was the error of the Galatians who wanted to add a couple of things to the work of Christ. Yes, believe in Jesus, but ALSO get circumcised (if you’re a man) and keep the Sabbath and some dietary laws...

Following Jesus is good, but following Jesus with this set of additional rules is the BEST. Lots of different groups out there have an additional list of rules. Some of you - like me - grew up with these rules. Mostly, for me, they were “thou shall nots” - like “thou shall not listen to rock music; thou shall not drink alcohol ever for any reason; thou shall not dance; thou shall not play cards or watch movies on Sunday...” It’s good to believe in Jesus but it’s even better if you follow this list of rules.

Later in my teen years I sort of created a new legalism so that I felt like I was scoring points if I did certain things - "thou shall read your Bible at least an hour every day; thou shall pray for a long list of missionaries and random people; thou shall share the gospel at least once a week; thou shall memorize a verse every day; thou shall be even holier if you memorize 2-3 verses each day..." You can see how lists of do's and don'ts like this can become a heavy burden in a hurry - especially if you feel like your salvation sort of depends on it. Not all the way, but a little bit... Like you have Jesus, sure - but your effort sort of add on top of His.

No - it does not say AS you walk you help fulfill the righteous requirement of the law. Finally, the fourth false conclusion is that **our behavior DOESN'T MATTER**. This verse does not say, ***"the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk however they want."***

The gospel of grace is not a free pass to indulge our sinful nature. "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? Absolutely not!" Paul answers with a sanctified, "Heck no!" That is some twisted sinner logic - the more I sin the more God has to forgive and the more glorious He therefore is in His grace. So... let's sin all we can! NO! That misses the whole point of the Gospel!

The PURPOSE of our salvation was the satisfy God's holy and righteous requirements IN US. That is the whole point of everything! His purpose was not to give everyone a free pass to live like cretins on this earth. ***His purpose was to prepare a holy people to live with Him in heaven!***

We've seen four conclusions NOT to draw from Romans 8:4. Let's close with two conclusions we SHOULD draw. ***"In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, WHO walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."***

The RESULT of our salvation is that WE WILL walk in step with the Holy Spirit. This is neither the condition for nor the cause of our salvation. It is the RESULT of our salvation. Those who are truly saved - those who truly belong to Jesus - WILL live a certain way.

This doesn't mean we won't mess up. Jesus is committed to making us perfect, but that process won't be complete until we die or Jesus comes back. We will not be perfect in this life, but we WILL make progress. We will keep moving forward. We will grow more and more into the image of our Savior and Lord.

Hear that promise - WE WILL.

For the non-believer, the commands of God are **a burdensome warning** - "You shall not bear false testimony... you shall not commit adultery... you shall not covet..." But listen to this wonderful Gospel reality. For the believer in Jesus, **the commands of God turn**

into PROMISES. In Christ and empowered by His Holy Spirit, “You ***shall not*** bear false testimony... you shall not commit adultery... you shall not covet.”

That is what is happening here in Romans 8:4. For the non-believer it reads as a warning - “who walk NOT according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” What better describes your life? Does your regular, daily behavior reflect the holiness of God? Do your practices bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? Or is your life more characterized by following your own desires, by giving in to your temptations? What does your regular conduct reveal about you? If you don’t belong to Jesus, this should stir up a warning in your soul.

“In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in US, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Are you included in the US who have a certain lifestyle? To connect with our Momentum Bible study - do you hunger and thirst for righteousness?

“The pursuit of holiness is the distinguishing mark of a person who stands in grace.”
Colin Smith

Being holy and hungering and thirsting for greater holiness is not what makes you a Christian but it is the sign that you ARE a Christian. If you have no interest in becoming more like Jesus then you should wonder if you really are a Christian. If you have no interest in holiness, no desire to avoid sin, no hunger to know God’s Word - you should wonder if you are a Christian.

These are the RESULTS of salvation. If you have been forgiven and declared righteous in Christ then you WILL walk in step with His Holy Spirit. You may stumble from time to time, you may stray from the path once in a while, but the Holy Spirit will always pick you up and draw you back.

The sign that someone does not belong to Jesus is that they do not continue to walk in step with the Holy Spirit. That may sound harsh to some of you who have children or loved ones who are not walking with the Lord. But Scripture is clear that the way to know if someone is a follower of Jesus is by their FRUIT. It is not by “a childhood profession of faith” that you will know them. It is not by “a zeal for evangelism in college” or “excitement about Jesus at a youth conference 20 years ago” that you will know them. It is by their FRUIT. Their current, right now, present day behavior (Matt. 7:18-20).

This is heavy truth, but when it comes to serious matters we need to be sure that we are letting Biblical truth inform our feelings and actions and not wishful thinking. I have people close to me who are in this category and it weighs heavily on my heart that they are not walking in step with the Holy Spirit. I pray for them that they will come back - that they will surrender to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and turn from their sin and come back to Christ.

But I don't deceive myself into thinking that they are fine. Anyone who is not walking with Jesus is decidedly NOT FINE. Growth in holiness - the pursuit of holiness - is THE distinguishing mark of someone who is truly saved. Not just being nice - but being HOLY. Knowing God and longing to be like Him.

And the other side of this is a hatred for sin. **The second result of our salvation is that we will fight the remaining sin in our lives.**

We know our old master, named the flesh. We know that voice all too well. But we learn not to listen to it. We learn to tune our hearts and minds to the Spirit of Life who lives in our hearts. We learn to listen to His promptings and when He says "RUN" we run.

A lot of our falling in to sin is nothing but careless disregard for our holiness. We are like the fool described in Proverbs who wanders into a seedy part of town, all nonchalant and uncaring. All at once a wayward woman comes toward him like a spider and he stumbles right into her web.

Come on, guys. If you're going to be out of town in a distant hotel room by yourself - don't you think you will need some extra accountability that night? Personally, I never place myself in that situation. This week I will be in Texas for a conference with our denomination and I have arranged to stay with a pastor friend of mine from Iowa. Every electronic device in our house is protected by Covenant Eyes. That is just sensible, like wearing a seatbelt. Sometimes the reasons we fall into sin are painfully preventable. We need to be ruthless when it comes to fighting sin!

Ladies, you're not off the hook. If you know that you tend to gossip about a certain person every time you meet with your little group - don't just coast along thinking the situation will just get better on its own. Pull one friend aside from the group and resolve together to quit using prayer request time for gossip. (I don't have a real situation in mind there - just assuming that women have sin issues just like men even if I'm not real clear what they are.)

Single people, don't be fools. There are additional temptations in the air around you just because you are single. If you are young, you should be all the more cautious. Think situations through before you wander in to them. Students, don't just show up for a party if you don't know who is hosting it. College students, don't go to some guy or gal's apartment that you just met and "see what happens." Guard your holiness! The Holy Spirit will warn you about this sort of thing - LISTEN TO HIM!

Married couples, don't be stupid. Marriage is hard work. Anyone who tells you different is selling something. If you think you don't need the marriage seminar in two weeks that almost certainly means that you do. Marriage is one of the hardest areas of life to fight our sin precisely because it's so good at bringing our sins and weaknesses to light. So it is much easier to deny or avoid discussing our problems than it is to bring them into the

light and actually work through them. That's just stupid. Get help EARLY. Don't let the cancer of unresolved conflict grow in your marriage.

We are not those who walk according to the flesh. We are those who walk according to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ lives in our hearts. We are IN CHRIST and HE is in us. We belong to Him and are defined by His desires, His character and His plans.

God's purpose in salvation is to satisfy His righteous requirements IN US. He has declared us righteous in Christ and throughout our lives He will make us more and more like Christ. For that is the result of our salvation - we will walk in step with the Holy Spirit and we will fight sin. We will not tolerate it or make compromises. We will identify our sin, renounce it and enlisting help when we need it we will KILL the remaining sin in our lives.

Because we ARE a holy people in Christ. We HAVE His righteousness growing in us. And we long for more and more of that righteousness in our lives.