



Faith: The Gateway to God's Grace

Brownsburg Church of Christ

by Edwin Crozier

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

What is the difference between the saved and the lost? What is the difference between those who receive God's eternal wrath and fury and those who receive His eternal life? Think about that for a moment. Get your idea firmly fixed in your mind. Because the real answer may surprise you.

Discussion:

- I. What many of us think; but we would be wrong.
 - A. What's the difference between the saved and the lost? That's easy. Right? **Romans 2:6-11** explains the answer, doesn't it? The difference is their works. Those who receive eternal life are those who do good, seek glory, honor, immortality, and peace. Those who do evil, seek self, do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness will experience tribulation, distress, wrath, and fury. The difference between being saved and being lost is not whether you are a Jew or a Gentile. God is not partial. He will treat us all the same. The difference is whether or not we are good enough at obeying Him. Right?
 - B. But, let's read this text again in the context of **Romans 1-3**. God says He will treat everyone the same way based on how they measure up to this difference. So how do we measure up? Paul talked about how Gentiles measured up in **Romans 1:18-32**. Did they persevere in doing good? No, they did evil (**Romans 1:29**). Did they seek glory? No they exchanged the glory of the Creator for images resembling creatures (**Romans 1:23**). Did they seek honor? No. They did not honor God (**Romans 1:21**). Further, they dishonored their bodies, and God gave them up to their dishonorable passions (**Romans 1:24, 26**). Did they obey the truth and righteousness? No. According to **Romans 1:18** they suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. So, based on the distinction of the lost and the saved in **Romans 2:6-11**, where are the Gentiles? Lost. Every last one of them. And based on **Romans 1:20**, they are without excuse.
 - C. But what about the Jews? Surely they did better. Imagine how the Jews would likely have reacted if they had only read **Romans 2:6-11**. They would have nodded their heads knowingly, thinking to themselves, "Those poor Gentiles who didn't have the law. They didn't keep the law. They will be judged. But we Jews had the law. We are so much better than they are. Maybe they can ride into heaven on our coattails." In fact, they would probably have read it a whole lot like we church-going people read it as we consider all those bad, sinful people out in the world. However, according to **Romans 2:17**, the Jews relied on the law and boasted in God, but did they do good? No, they broke the law (**Romans 2:23**). Did they pursue honor? No, they dishonored God, causing Him to be blasphemed by others (**Romans 2:23-24**). Did they obey the truth? No. While they believed they had the truth in the law, they did not keep it (**Romans 2:20-23**). While Paul doesn't go into as much detail about the Jews as he did the Gentiles, **Romans 2:1** is quite clear. The Jews had done the very same things. In fact, notice the similarity between **Romans 1:32** about the Gentiles and **Romans 2:1-2** about the Jews. **Romans 2:3-5** brings it home to these Jews who think they can pass judgment on the Gentiles. They will not escape judgment, but are storing up for themselves wrath (and fury). And, like the Gentiles (**Romans 1:20**), they were without excuse (**Romans 2:1**).
 - D. Then Paul leaves us with no doubt. Just in case we missed the point in **Romans 1-2**, Paul continues in **Romans 3:9-18**. He begins by saying, "For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin..."ⁱ But notice the verses he quotes from the Psalms and Isaiah to charge everyone with sin. It is almost as if he went specifically for verses that would take us back to **Romans 2:6-11**. Has anyone actually obeyed righteousness? No. No one is righteous (**Romans 3:10**). Has anyone persevered in doing good? No, not even one (**Romans 3:12**). Has anyone obeyed truth? Nope, they are all liars (**Romans 3:13**). Has anyone pursued honor? Nope, their mouths are full of curses and bitterness (**Romans 3:14**). Further, there is no fear of God in their eyes (**Romans 3:18**). Has anyone sought immortality? No. Rather, they have all pursued death (the shedding of blood), and in their paths are ruin and destruction (**Romans 3:15-16**). Is anyone going to receive peace? No. They have not known the way of peace (**Romans 3:17**).
 - E. **Romans 2:12-13** states the problem if we are simply going to let **Romans 2:6-11** be the difference. Those who sinned without the law will perish without the law, while those who sinned under the law would be judged by the law. It is not enough to have heard the law to be justified by law; you actually have to do it.

And Paul has spent the better part of three chapters explaining that none of us has done that. We who sat in judgment on the sinful world saying, “Yeah, see, if you want to go to heaven, you have to be like us. You have to do good. You have to seek glory, honor, and immortality like we do at our church,” are in big trouble. Because if God is going to judge us based on our works. None of us makes it. We are all in trouble. We are all headed for tribulation, distress, wrath, and fury. Sure, glory, honor, peace, and eternal life awaits those who have done good, sought glory, honor, and immortality. But the only person to have ever done that is Jesus. The rest of us are toast if the difference between the lost and the saved is works.

- F. And then Paul wraps this whole section up with a bow in **Romans 3:19**. All of us who wanted to go back to **Romans 2:6-11** and boast about our salvation because of how good we are are stopped. Our mouths are shut. We have no defense. We and the whole world are held accountable to God.
- G. But there is hope. There is **Romans 3:20**. Praise the Lord! No one is justified by works. The difference between the lost and the saved won’t actually be about that.

II. The difference between the saved and the lost is God’s grace.

- A. If we aren’t justified by our works, what are we justified by? Paul answers that in **Romans 3:21-26**.
- B. The righteousness of God has been manifested to us apart from any kind of law, even though the Law and the Prophets testified to this righteousness. We are justified by His grace (**Romans 3:24**). It is a gift, through the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ. As **Romans 5:9** says, we are justified by Jesus’ blood.
- C. Paul talks further about this free gift in **Romans 5:15-21**. He contrasts Adam’s transgression that brought sin into the world with Jesus’ obedience that returned righteousness to the world. Certainly, this passage can be confusing. But notice what the passage says about Jesus’ free gift. **Vs. 15**—this grace abounded to many. **Vs. 16**—this free gift brings justification. **Vs. 17**—those who receive the free gift will reign in life. **Vs. 18**—Jesus’ free gift leads to justification and life. **Vs. 19**—by Jesus’ free gift many will be made righteous.
- D. The difference between the lost and the saved is not our meritorious works. It is not that some have earned salvation and some haven’t. It is not that some of us were good enough and others weren’t. The difference is grace. As Paul says in **Romans 4:4**, if it is by works, it isn’t a gift but something due us. Then connect that with what he said in **Romans 11:6**. Since justification is by grace, it is not based on works—otherwise it wouldn’t be grace.
- E. **Romans 6:23** makes it clear. If we are going to stand before God with only the hope of receiving wages for what we have earned by our works, we will receive death. We are sinners (**Romans 3:23**). The wages of sin is death. Life only comes by the free gift of God.
- F. So, what’s the difference between the lost and the saved? The saved receive the free gift of God. They receive the grace He offered through the blood of Jesus Christ. The lost don’t. But this very statement leaves us in a quandary. Why the distinction? Why doesn’t everyone receive God’s grace? If everyone doesn’t get it, how do we make sure we are standing in His grace and in Jesus’ blood?

III. Faith is the gateway to God’s grace.

- A. **Romans 5:2** provides our answer. Faith is the gateway to God’s grace. In fact, this was already established in **Romans 3:21-26**. In that passage it said we are justified by grace. But notice who is justified by grace. **Vs. 22**—“...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” **Vs. 25**—“...whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” **Vs. 26**—“...so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” Paul goes on in the next few verses. **Vs. 28**—“For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” **Vs. 30**—“...since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” And isn’t this what Paul established as his theme for the entire book in **Romans 1:16-17**—“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”
- B. In **Romans 4**, Paul turns to Abraham as the ultimate example of justification by faith. No doubt, he chose Abraham in order to impress this point on the Jews who were boasting in the law. Abraham was the ultimate earthly head of their family/nation. He was the ultimate patriarch. They rested in being his offspring. But how was he justified? By law? No, by faith (**Romans 4:2-3**).
- C. Abraham was no more righteous than all the Jews and Gentiles described in **Romans 1-3**. If Abraham were going to stand before God and receive the wages of his works, he would receive death just like the rest of us. He could work and work and work as hard as he wanted to keep God’s law, but that would only prove that he was a sinner. That’s not what Abraham did. Instead, Abraham believed in the One who justifies the ungodly, and that faith was counted to him as righteousness.

- D. Then Paul quoted David, the greatest king of the Jews, to explain this from the other angle. Righteousness is credited to the account of those with faith because their transgressions and sins are forgiven and not credited to their account. Their debt is removed by the blood of Jesus Christ (**Romans 4:6-8**).
- E. In **Romans 4:9-12**, Paul drives home how faith is the means of justification for everyone—"to the Jew first and also the Greek." When was Abraham's faith reckoned as righteousness? After he was circumcised? Did he have to be circumcised before being counted as righteous? No. This happened before he was circumcised. The statement that Abraham was justified is found in **Genesis 15:6**. The covenant of circumcision was not instituted until **Genesis 17:9-14**. Paul says the reason God did it like this is because He was looking forward to this day when Jews and Gentiles would need to know that both could be justified by faith and not by works of law (**Romans 4:11**).
- F. Why circumcision then? According to **Romans 4:11**, it was a seal. A token or proof of the righteousness he had by faith. In other words, because he had faith, he was willing to submit to God's will and that submission demonstrated that he had the faith that produces righteousness.
- G. Finally, it is not just any faith that is the gateway to God's grace. It is faith in Jesus. If we look at **Romans 5:2** and simply see the faith as the access to God's grace, we will miss the point. The verse says, "Through him we have also obtained access..." This is not simply faith that we are in God's grace. This is faith that Jesus and His death have brought us to God. Notice **1 Peter 3:18**—"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit..." It is Christ's death that brings us near. **Ephesians 3:11-12** also says, "This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him." Then there is **Hebrews 10:19-22**—"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith..." Not just any faith is the gateway to God's grace. It is faith in Jesus and His work on the cross.
- H. Trying to be justified by works of the law is putting our faith in us and our ability. The faith that justifies is one that puts our confidence, our hope, and our trust in the work of Jesus on the cross. And grasping this has been a problem from the very beginning. As Paul explains in **Romans 9:30-33**, the Jews struggled with this because they could not fathom having righteousness apart from their own ability to righteously keep a law. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. They couldn't fathom having righteousness by the work of Jesus on the cross. The Gentiles, however, were grasping the point. They were not pursuing their own righteousness, but were pursuing faith. Guess what they got from that. They received righteousness. I fear that sometimes I have pursued my Christianity the same way the Jews did their religion. I am trying to establish my own righteousness (**Romans 10:3**). I sometimes cannot fathom righteousness apart from proving my own ability to keep a law. But **Romans 1-3, 7** clearly explain that I cannot. I have given myself over to sin and now it is in control. The only way I can break free is by faith in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.

IV. How does faith grant us access to God's grace?

- A. In **Romans 4:16-24**, Paul continued to use Abraham as his example and explained how faith introduces us to God's grace.
- B. God had promised Abraham, "I have made you the father of many nations" (**Romans 4:17; Genesis 17:5**) and also that his descendants would be as the number of the stars—"So shall your offspring be," (**Romans 4:18; Genesis 15:5**). Further, in **Genesis 17:15-16**, God explained that it wasn't through just any child of Abraham's, but it would be a child through Sarai (newly renamed Sarah). The problem is Abraham was 100 years old, his body "was as good as dead" (**Romans 4:19**) and Sarah was 90 and they had been trying to have children for years but she was barren (**Genesis 17:17; Romans 4:19**). This promise seemed a long-shot. In fact, when Abraham first heard it, he laughed and asked the Lord if he couldn't just go ahead and accept Ishmael as the promised offspring (**Genesis 17:17-18**). But God said it would be through Sarah and they would call him Isaac (**Genesis 17:19**).
- C. Probably for folks my age, this doesn't seem like a huge deal. Taking action on this promise would happen almost naturally anyway whether trying to have a baby or not. But try to put yourself in the shoes of your grandparents (if they are still alive). God says to them, "Go make a baby." Paul's point in **Romans 4:19** is they were beyond attempting that. That wasn't something natural for them anymore. So, if Abraham has no faith in God's promise, what would he do? Put it off. Try once or twice, but if it doesn't work, stop trying. Give up on Sarah and go back to Hagar who clearly could conceive. And what would have happened with God's promise? Absolutely nothing. The grace of offspring would have been completely missed.

- D. But that isn't what Abraham did. Abraham believed God against hope (**Romans 4:18**). That is, this promise seemed more than could be hoped for, but Abraham hoped for it anyway. That is, not that he had wishful thinking that maybe it could happen, but that Abraham anticipated and expected it to happen. Further, when he considered his own body and Sarah's, he did not allow his sight to discourage him (**Romans 4:19**). He walked by faith, not by sight. Further, his faith grew even stronger and he continued to give God the glory (**Romans 4:20**). By the way, if I understand that verse correctly it isn't talking about giving God the glory after the pregnancy came along and after Isaac was born (though that would have happened too). This was giving God the glory for the promise itself while he was awaiting its fulfillment. Then **Romans 4:21** brings it home. Abraham was fully convinced God could and would fulfill His promise. So he acted on the promise.
- E. While Paul doesn't bring it up here, do you think there was a Jew who heard this that didn't think of the other time when this promise was put to the test? Don't you know, just like us, they remembered the time God told Abraham to take that promised son and kill him. What did Abraham do? Did he waver? Did he refuse? Did he disobey? Did he question how on earth God would keep His promise? No. He trusted God. He believed that whatever God asked him to do with Isaac, God would keep his promise, even if it meant bringing Isaac back from the dead (**Hebrews 11:17-19**).
- F. So, how did faith grant Abraham access to God's grace? Faith in God and His promises is what prompted Abraham to do the very things that God said would bring grace into His life. Think of it in worldly terms. If I told you, I had \$10 million that I wanted to give to you, but to get it you have to run around the Circle Centre mall, dancing a jig, shouting "I'm king of the world," what would you do? Probably laugh. But there are two keys that will cause you to do what I told you. First, you have to want the promise really badly. Do you want \$10 million badly enough to do what I've said. Second, and this is our key, do you really believe I can and will give you \$10 million. If I were an independently wealthy multi-billionaire known for giving away money just for fun, you'd be much more likely to do what I've asked than in my present circumstances. That is exactly the point of **Hebrews 11:6**. The only way to please God is to believe that He is and that He really does reward those who seek Him. That is, we have to want His promise badly enough, and we have to believe that He really can and will do what He has promised. When we believe it, we'll surrender to what He says will give us the promise we want. Then we will receive the grace He has offered. Otherwise, we won't, because we won't surrender to His way. Think about it, it doesn't matter how much ability I have to give you \$10 million or how willing I am to do it. If you don't believe it enough to run through Circle Centre mall, dancing a jig, and shouting, "I'm king of the world," then you won't get the money.
- G. According to **1 Peter 1:5**, faith grants us access to the grace of God because it is through our faith that the power of God guards us and preserves us for salvation in the end. As **Hebrews 10:32-39** says, it is faith that keeps us hanging on to the promise of God even when we are harshly treated by enemies, when we are reproached and afflicted for our faith. It is faith that keeps us from throwing our confidence away. It is faith that keeps us from shrinking back to destruction. It is faith that keeps us hanging on to God when everyone else tells us it just can't be so. It is faith that pushes us forward to the preservation of our souls.
- H. But what faith? In **Romans 4:24-25**, it is the faith that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead for our justification. This is more than just faith that Jesus was raised from the dead. This is faith that because Jesus was raised from the dead, we will be justified and, therefore, we will be raised from the dead. Look again at the example of Abraham in **Romans 4:19-21**. Abraham did not just have faith that God could raise someone from the dead. He didn't just have faith that God had raised someone from the dead. He had faith that God could essentially raise him from the dead. His body was as good as dead, but He believed the promise of God that God could put life in His body and produce life from his body.
- I. And while this includes looking forward to the resurrection at the end of time (cf. **John 5:28-29**). This is talking about here and now. This is about recognizing that our bodies, spiritually, are as good as dead. We have given ourselves over to sin and now sin has taken control. No matter what we do trying to keep the law, we find that we cannot keep it. And like Paul in **Romans 7:24**, we cry out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Paul had considered his own body. It was as good as dead. He had tried to have life in himself, but he couldn't do it. But in **Romans 7:25**, he had an answer. God could produce life in Him. God could bring him to life (**Romans 8:10-11**). And because Paul believed that, he hung on to God. Isn't that exactly what he says we should do in **Philippians 2:12-13**? He doesn't say "work out your own salvation" because if you work hard enough you can do it. He says "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." And so, do you believe the promise of **Romans 8:28-30**? Do you believe that God will cause all things to

work together for good for you, if you love Him? If so, then you will love Him and you will have His grace in your life. And His grace in your life will change you.

J. Consider these promises found throughout the New Testament:

1. **Romans 15:25**: “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...” (ESV).
2. **Ephesians 3:16-17**: “...that according to the riches of [God’s] glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...” (ESV).
3. **I Thessalonians 5:23**: “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (ESV).
4. **II Thessalonians 3:3**: “But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one” (ESV).
5. **I Peter 5:10**: “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (ESV).
6. **Jude 24-25**: “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (ESV).

K. Do you believe those promises? Do you believe God will do that for you? Then you will surrender to His way, believing that His way really works. If you don’t believe these promises, you’ll either abandon the Lord altogether, or you’ll continue spinning your wheels trying to prove to God how great you are, but knowing on the inside how much you are failing. Do you believe in Christ’s work on the cross and God’s work in your life? Or do you believe in your works? The second will bring despair and distress; the first is the gateway to God’s grace.

Conclusion:

This brings us full circle back to **Romans 2:6-11**. As we clearly pointed out at the beginning of this lesson, if we plan to stand before God based on our works trying to prove that we patiently did good and sought for glory, honor, and immortality, we know we are going to receive distress, tribulation, wrath, fury, and judgment. However, if we come to God through faith in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross, God will change us by His Holy Spirit (**Romans 12:1-2; Titus 3:5**). He will make us into those people who pursue good and receive life. That is exactly what Paul hints at in **Romans 2:29**. So whose work will you have faith in? Your own? Or Jesus’? Don’t obey, thinking you can prove to God how good you are and, therefore, be saved. Rather, put your faith, confidence, and trust in Jesus and His work, and let that faith change your life to one of obedience (**Galatians 2:20**). After all, faith is the gateway to God’s grace (**Romans 5:2**) and you don’t want to miss that.

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