

Gift?

An imaginary dialogue A reformation sermon by Dr. Rod Rosenblatt

(The initial caveat from Dr. Rosenblatt when he delivered this,
“Don’t let anybody tell you I don’t hold to Sola Scriptura.
This is strictly a literary device, no more!”)

Romans 4:5 – But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. (N.A.S.B.)

Sinner: I see. I see for the first time. It’s clear to me. You died for me and for my sin. You took my verdict.

God: I did.

Sinner: So tell me what I can do to show you how grateful I am.

God: You’re not ready for that.

Sinner: I am. I am. Just tell me what to do. I feel like a runner on the starting blocks. Aren’t I supposed to do something “religious” now?

God: You imagine that I am impressed by “religion.” I am not. I hate “religion.”

Sinner: You hate religion? But you’re God! You’re supposed to like religion.

God: I told you. I hate religion. Religion was your idea – not Mine. You have forgotten what Anselm said: “You have not yet considered the depth of your sin.”

Sinner: But I want to show you I have. I really have. I know it is really deep. Talk to me. Teach me sanctification.

God: I told you. You aren’t ready for sanctification yet. You just imagine that you are ready. You are arrogant and you don’t know it.

Sinner: What do you mean? I am ready.

God: You are not. If you were, you wouldn’t be talking like you are talking.

Sinner: Well, what then?

God: Just sit there. Sit there for a long while.

Sinner: And do what?

God: Consider the shed blood. Consider that the blood was enough. Think about the fact that it isn’t your repenting that has saved you. Think about the fact that it isn’t your faith that is saving you.

Sinner: Can’t I just, as you said, just think about my sin and the depth of it?

God: That is a start. But you like doing that. You like it too much.

Sinner: This makes no sense. What are you saying?

God: I am saying that you like atoning for yourself by feeling guilty. And you like atoning for yourself by thinking about your faith.

Sinner: Well, what else is there?

God: There is Jesus Christ – but you don't consider Him. You are not used to gifts. You don't think much about them. Gifts make you nervous and tense. You don't know what to do, so you jump to trying to impress Me. I am not impressible.

Sinner: I'm confused.

God: You are.

Sinner: Are you saying that I find a thousand ways to avoid your graciousness to me in the cross of Jesus, the shed blood of Jesus?

God: I am.

Sinner: Are you saying that I try to buy your gifts, try to pay you for them so I don't think about them being gifts? Because I'm afraid that if they are gifts, it is really too good to be true?

God: That is what I am saying.

Sinner: You mean I don't like letting you freely justify me? I resist what is really a free justification?

God: Yes. You like what is inside of you. You like your commitment, your Christian life. And you shouldn't like it. You don't see that it is your enemy. You like seeing Me as your mother. I am a lot of things. But I am not at all like your mother. What impressed her does not impress Me.

Sinner: But remember how for years I responded to her needs when my brothers just indulged themselves. I was the one who listened to her needs and they just went out to play.

God: They knew that their play delighted Me. You did not. I am your Father. I conceived you and it was no accident. I chose to bring you into the world.

Sinner: You adopted me.

God: That's right. I adopted you. And you delight Me. You delight Me because of blood outside of you, because of a verdict based on Me – not on anything inside of you.

Sinner: You mean the substitution. You mean His righteousness imputed to me, don't You?

God: That is what I mean.

Sinner: Well, I'm going to worship you every day.

God: I don't need your daily worship. I don't need your daily anything. I am not your mother.

Sinner: Well, do you want me to remember Your greatness, Your glory every day?

God: That is a start. But even pagans recognize My greatness.

Sinner: Well, what then?

God: Remember the inheritance. I am about inheritances. Think about My generosity to you in the blood.

Sinner: But that's so free. It scares me to think about that. You scare me.

God: I know. That is why you want to skip to sanctification so quickly. You like thinking about your gratitude. You like thinking about you.

Sinner: Mom didn't see things that way.

God: I know. Your obedience impressed her. But it doesn't impress Me. I want you free.

Sinner: That sounds like some kind of "free lunch!" There is no "free lunch!"

God: My cross is the only "free lunch" that has ever been.

Sinner: Could I tell you something?

God: Yes.

Sinner: The Lord's Supper scares me. I go. But it scares me.

God: Why do you think that is?

Sinner: I wonder if I'm ever really ready to come to it.

God: I know.

Sinner: Well, why is that?

God: I told you why. My gifts make you nervous. You want to think about you. You like thinking about you. You would walk a thousand miles barefoot over glass shards to avoid My gifts to you.

Sinner: This is driving me crazy!

God: No, it is not. Right now, I am driving you sane. The sanity is in seeing the free blood – on the cross and in the cup. The insanity is your inclining to your devotion, your obedience, your commitment. That is what is insane.

Sinner: Why haven't I seen this?

God: Because you are a child of Adam.

Sinner: I know. But I'm not stupid. I have two master's degrees. I'm a child of Adam with two master's degrees.

God: It is not a matter of intelligence. It is a matter of sin.

Sinner: Well, what's the answer?

God: I've been telling you the answer all along. The answer is the gift, the blood. The answer is you looking for once in your life to something other than yourself. Your religiousness is your enemy! You don't hate it. And you should. I do.

Sinner: You hate my religiousness? You're kidding.

God: The object of your religiousness is your sanctification. It is not the gift. It is not the blood. The object of your religiousness is you.

Sinner: You mean I worship me?

God: That is what I mean. Your sanctification is your golden calf. You love thinking about your lack of it. And you love thinking of how full you are of it. Either way, you are your own favorite idol.

Sinner: Well maybe I'm not elected. Maybe you chose for me to be lost.

God: You are elected. You're just trying to "get off the dime."

Sinner: No, I'm not. I think I just need more information.

God: You do not need more information. You are just trying to avoid the gift. You want the blood not to be enough. You are avoiding Me and the free blood by using your intellect.

Sinner: That's not true. I just want to play my part.

God: You have no part.

Sinner: Well, a fine kettle of fish this is! A salvation without me as even a part of it.

God: That's the only kind of salvation there is.

Sinner: Well, I give up. There's just no cutting a deal with you.

God: You are beginning to see. What you just said is true. I cut the deal with Myself a long time ago. I did not consult you and I'm not consulting you now. You and your spouse and your children are the beneficiaries of My deal with Me, but it wasn't in view of your qualities. You don't have any qualities. Just be glad I never took your qualities into account other than to die for them.

Sinner: But this whole thing sounds so cold.

God: It is as hot as you will ever hear. You just think its "cold" because you can't impress Me. You imagine that if you can't impress Me, I don't love you.

Sinner: Well, that's how it is with everyone I've ever met.

God: I'm not "everyone."

Sinner: This is so good, I feel giddy!

God: I'm not impressed with your giddiness. Now you're using your excitement to avoid the free blood, the gift, the inheritance.

Sinner: Well, if You're not impressed by my thoughts or my feelings, what does impress you, anyway?

God: Nothing in you impresses Me.

Sinner: Well, does anything impress You?

God: My Son's shed blood impresses Me. And His shed blood is yours. It is reckoned to you. And you drink it every Sunday.

Sinner: What you are saying, then, is that all of this has to do with You and not me?

God: I didn't say that.

Sinner: Well, what are you saying, then?

God: You are my beloved child. And I made you that. You don't like it. But I am the Father anyway. You do everything that you can to avoid that I am your Father.

Sinner: I don't want to avoid it.

God: Yes, you do want to avoid it. But I know that.

Sinner: Oh, Father, I'm sorry.

God: You are. And I gave you that, too.

Sinner: You gave me, "I'm sorry?"

God: Yes.

Sinner: Is there anything good or true that I don't get from your generosity?

God: No.

Sinner: But why?

God: All you need to know about is the blood, the gift, the free inheritance. You need to think more often about the forgiveness of sins.

Sinner: I do think about that.

God: Yes, but only in a particular way. You wallow in the sin. You imagine the forgiveness is based on your devotion, your religiousness. It isn't. It is based on Me and on the blood. Your churchmanship and devotion suck.

Sinner: But not everyone in my church does what I do for You.

God: You're trying to impress Me with the church and your churchmanship. I could care less about your churchmanship. It's another way of you avoiding the blood and the gift. You are using it because you want to talk about you again.

Sinner: The church? As a way of avoiding your gift, your Fatherhood? You're kidding.

God: I am not.

Sinner: Well, I thought the church was your creation. What is it then?

God: It should be the place where the same thing I am telling you is delivered to you. The Gospel, the blood.

Sinner: But You're saying it isn't?

God: Not always. And you chose that church because you "liked it."

Sinner: Yes, but how else is one to choose a church?

God: On the basis of a real Baptism, the imputed righteousness, the Father's voice in the Gospel, the presence of the blood in the Supper. That's how you are to choose a church. The truth of the matter is that you were impressed by the legs of the Sunday School superintendent. How would you like it if I revealed that to your wife? Don't try to impress Me with your church choice. I am not impressible.

Sinner: All right. I get the idea.

God: I'm saying that you are using the church and your churchmanship to shift the subject back to you again. The church won't save you. And your churchmanship is just another way of you again trying to impress Me. I cannot be impressed.

Sinner: Do you mean that my being your child, my inheriting the kingdom, my being reconciled to You and made Your friend instead of Your enemy, my ticket into heaven and all the rest has nothing to do with me?

God: Almost.

Sinner: What do you mean, "Almost?"

God: Except for your sin. It was your sin I had to deal with. That had all to do with you. It required blood and death. And your blood and death was not enough. Only My blood and death would deal with your sin, would forgive you. So you were a part of the deal as a debit.

Sinner: You mean I had no part?

God: Your sin was your part.

Sinner: But my faith, my devotion, my Christian life are not?

God: All of those suck.

Sinner: Well, what was redeemable in all of it?

God: You were.

Sinner: But not on the basis of anything about me?

God: No.

Sinner: Why did you do it then?

God: Because I loved you before you were.

Sinner: But you've said that there was nothing in me that was attractive, right?

God: Right.

Sinner: Well, why then?

God: I told you. Because I loved you before you even were. And it cost Me the Son to do it.

Sinner: I can't take any more of this. But when I recover, can we talk again?

God: Yes.

Sinner: Will you still be like you've been just now?

God: Yes. I do not change. I was the Father from all eternity, I am the Father now, and I will be the Father tomorrow. The Good Father. Unchanging.

Sinner: Can I count on it?

God: Yes. And, in specifics, you can count on the shed blood.

Sinner: Alright. Thanks.

God: You're welcome, child.

Romans 3:21-28 – But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Where then is boasting? It is excluded By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. (N.A.S.B.)