
“Justification by Faith”

ROMANS 3:23-5:21

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BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

It’s one thing to know you have a real problem. It’s another to know there’s a solution. In week one of our overview series, we surveyed man’s fundamental problem: man rejects God and is subject to His just judgment. In week two, we survey God’s solution to our fundamental problem: God justifies sinners by faith!

INTRODUCTION

Romans 3:23-5:21 Last week we surveyed man’s fundamental problem – man rejects God, suppresses the Truth, and exchanges His glory for idols. This week we’ll survey the solution to man’s fundamental problem – God justifies sinners by faith alone.

Before we move any further, I think its important to understand the doctrinal term, **Justification** – a legal declaration, a pardon for iniquity. A release from the debt of sin and guilt. When a person is justified in a single moment of time, all his or her sin for all time is forgiven and the divine Judge, becomes our Father in Heaven. He declares us not guilty and adopts us into His family. (John 1)

THREE PARTS OF SALVATION

Here’s a helpful way to remember and keep it straight:

Justification – I was saved from the penalty of sin the moment I was born again.

Sanctification – I am being saved from the power of sin for the rest of my life.

Glorification – I will be saved from the presence of sin when I meet Jesus face to face.

ALL FALL SHORT AND ARE JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE

ROMANS 3:23-26 **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. **26** It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Propitiation – the removal of God’s wrath for sin after it has been atoned for by Christ. God’s wrath is removed from you based on Christ’s sacrificial atonement on the cross.

whom God put forward – this was God’s idea in the first place. Not only is God gracious to accept Jesus’ propitiation, He was gracious to initiate it in the first place. Our God is not a begrudging bestower of His mercy. He richly blesses us with His love and forgiveness.

Just and the justifier – He is not breaking his own Law to forgive us for breaking it. Redemption satisfies the **just** demands of the Law, namely that there must be a payment for sin, and simultaneously **justifies** the one who **receive[s] it by faith** in Christ.

ROMANS 3:28-30 **28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.**

Because faith is **apart from the Law**, and since no one is saved by the Law, we hold that God is able to save both **Jew** and **Gentile** alike. He is able to justify those who are **circumcised** by faith and those who are not, also by faith. Why? Because it's not circumcision that saves. It's faith alone that saves both Jews and Gentiles!

Now Paul is going to go all the way back to the origins of circumcision, Abraham, to establish that faith came before the Law and even before circumcision; that justification has always been by faith alone.

FATHER ABRAHAM'S FAITH

ROMANS 4:3-5 **3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it – what? His faith - was counted to him as righteousness.” 4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.** If Abraham had worked his way into right standing before God, righteousness would be his **wage**, what was **due** him.

5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. The sinner, or as Paul says **the ungodly**, who realizes they can never earn their salvation and places their trust fully in the work of Jesus, is **justified**, declared not guilty, by God. That's how it works. And that's the only way it works.

ROMANS 4:9-12 **9b For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. 10 How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. 11 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.** The sign served as a symbolic representation of his righteousness that had already been demonstrated by his faith.

11b The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, 12 and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Notice Paul appeals first to Gentiles, then to faithful Jews. Abraham was the father of the Jews, but Paul says the whole point of the covenant God made with him was that he would be the father of Gentiles **as well as** the Jews. But not just any Jews. Those **who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps** of Abraham's faith.

FATHER OF MANY NATIONS

ROMANS 4:16-25 **16 That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations...”** It was not that Abraham would just be a blessing to the nation of Israel, but *“in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,”* Genesis 22:18. It was through his offspring, Jesus, that all the nations would be blessed.

18 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. 20 No unbelief made him

waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

James appealed to Abraham's faith when he offered up his son, Isaac. It was not the offering up that made him righteous. But James says that his offering up Isaac was proof positive that Abraham did in fact believe God. He was **fully convinced God was able to do what He had promised.**

IT WILL BE COUNTED TO US WHO BELIEVE

22 That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." 23 But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. Paul isn't describing easy-believism or cheap grace. Where faith is counted as righteousness, the faithful is not only claiming faith, they're living by it. What is the substance of our faith?

It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. There's the gospel in a nutshell. God **raised** Jesus from the dead - Jesus really died. Jesus is **our Lord**, which implies our submission to Him. He was **delivered up for our trespasses** which implies without His death we have to pay for our own sin.

He was raised **for our justification**. God accepted Jesus' atoning sacrifice, indicating His acceptance by raising Him back to life, and as Paul says in Ephesians 1:20, "*seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.*" God accepted Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf and thereby justifies us, declaring us not guilty for our sin based solely on our belief in the Lord Jesus and His atoning work.

But I want to make sure no one misses this. **It will be counted to us who believe...** implies it will not be counted to those who do not. The Gospel is exclusive and it demands a sense of urgency and expectancy.

Many in the church deny that sinners will be judged and sent to hell. They convince themselves that this is what *they* believe, but they struggle to say, "Everyone must believe this or be judged by God."

If *you or I* made this up, if this was *our own* system of religion, I'd say they're be spot on. But we didn't make this up. We believe what God has revealed and therefore it's not up to us to change it or apologize for it.

We cannot, and shouldn't try to, coerce people into believing the Gospel. We proclaim it with passion, love, and compassion, but we cannot force anyone to put their faith in Jesus. It is not for us to judge those who reject it, but it is for us to warn them that there is a Judge who will. And to present them in the sincerest way possible, the invitation to be saved from His divine judgment by placing their faith in Christ and find peace with God. Peace with God is the essence of what faith does for us as we see in Romans 5.

PEACE, GRACE, GLORY

ROMANS 5:1-5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Peace, grace, & glory of God— these are the vocabulary of the redeemed! These were once deprived of us and now in Christ, we have **obtained access** to them. Like an all-access pass into the throne-room of God.

3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope

does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Our justification gives us real hope to persevere through the trials of life. For not only do we receive new life in Christ and not only do we have the mountain of sin debt forgiven, but we also receive **God's love through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**

The Holy Spirit constantly infuses us with God's love, which is the primary factor in all of this. Why did our Heavenly Father send His Son, Jesus? God loves us. Why did He deliver Jesus to the cross? God loves us! Why did He raise Him from the dead? God loves us! And it's not that He loves us now that we're saved, as if God waited for you to decide you want to be better before reluctantly giving you His love.

GOD PROVES HIS LOVE FOR SINNERS

ROMANS 5:6-8 6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly...8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

When did God prove His love for us? **While we were still sinners!** If He was waiting for us, we'd never be loved because we'd never save ourselves. But He loves us while we're **still weak, still sinners.**

ROMANS 5:18-21 18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men...20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What's on the other side for sinners who are justified by faith in Jesus? Eternal life with God in a real place called Heaven.

FOUR THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND AS WE PROCEED VERSE-BY-VERSE

To the not-yet-believers, I encourage you: Justification by faith is an exclusive and limited time offer. Don't hesitate. With the risk of sounding morbid, do you not know that people die every day? People die on their way to work? Shopping in grocery stores, malls, riding subways and buses, driving in cars and motorcycles? They die suddenly, unexpectedly. In the words of author Mark Cahill, you are one heartbeat away from eternity. Doesn't that cause you to contemplate what your fate will be when you die?

There is never a better time to repent of sin, confess Jesus as Lord, and believe that God raised Him from the dead than right now.

How do you do that? You tell the Lord that you believe He died for your sin and that He was raised from the dead and He sits enthroned in Heaven as Lord of your life. Ask Him to forgive you of your sin and give you His righteousness. Then tell someone you've done it so we can help you walk in your new life. What is stopping you from receiving God's gift of grace by faith? Will you do that today?

To the Christian: This is not only a limited time offer, it's also a limited time opportunity. We only have so much time to impact eternity. You and I have 80, maybe 90 years, of life on this side of eternity. Eighty or 90 years to impact the life to come that will never end. Heaven never ends, but our experience of eternity is connected to how we invest our time, talents, and treasure here in this life that does.

There's one thing you'll never do again once you enter eternity: you'll never lead someone else to Jesus. That opportunity ends when you take your last breath. Your kids and grandkids, your spouse, your co-workers, classmates, friends, & strangers, every one of them needs to hear the message that sinners are justified by faith in God's Son. Once your life is over, you will never lead a soul to Christ again.

To what extent does this limited opportunity *concern* you? How about *excite* you? Ask the Lord to give you fresh eyes to see that the harvest is ripe but the workers are few...and the time to be productive citizens of the kingdom is running out.

You have access to God's peace, grace, & glory. In Christ, God's throne room is open to us – to call out for help, for strength, for wisdom, for mercy, for shalom. Do you still try to fight your own battles? Withstand the storms in your own strength? Why? Why not enter in and receive what is freely yours?

Finally, I want to leave you with the awesome reality that God loves you. Let this truth reign in your hearts today and always, and especially when the enemy tries to convince you that you're not good enough, you're not loveable, you're not acceptable: **but God shows [demonstrates/proves] his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)**

You need no other sign of God's love than to look at the nail-scarred hands and feet, the sword-pierced side, and the thorn-crowned head of Jesus. And the next time Satan comes prowling around trying to remind you of who you *used* to be, you can declare with confidence that the Holy Spirit dwelling in you is all the proof you need that God loves you and you've been reconciled, redeemed, and made righteous in His sight!

Blessings to you, church!