

Justification By Faith

Romans 3:21-29

Dr. Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher

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INTRODUCTION

1. Please take God's Word and turn to Romans chapter 1.
2. This Tuesday is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.
3. It was on October 31, 1517 when a 33-year-old theology professor at Wittenberg University walked over to the Castle Church in Wittenberg and nailed a paper of 95 theses to the door, hoping to spark an academic discussion about their contents. In God's providence and unbeknownst to anyone else that day, it would become a key event in igniting the Reformation.
4. Martin Luther was later told to recant his views.
5. Upon which he said, "I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen."
6. As we celebrate this day, I want to talk about what Martin Luther understood that brought him salvation.
7. Namely, "justification by faith."
8. Romans 1:17 (NASB) For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as

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it is written, “ But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

9. Luther said, “At last meditating day and night, by the mercy of God, I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith. Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open.”
10. As Paul writes the letter of Romans, he makes his case perfectly shutting all under sin by showing us three groups: the unrighteous Gentiles (1:18-32), unrighteous Jews (2:1-3:8), and unrighteous Humankind (3:9-20).
11. In other words, he has just given the bad new of the Gospel.
12. Man is under sin and without excuse.
13. What can he do?
14. This is now where the gospel becomes good news.
15. **In 3:21-31** Paul begins the subject of justification by showing us the Source of Righteousness.

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16. Notice in Romans 3:21 the phrase “the righteousness of God.”
17. The righteousness that God requires sinners cannot provide.
18. The only righteousness man possesses or attains within himself is unrighteousness, because that is the character and substance of his fallen nature.
19. Man’s “righteous deeds,” Isaiah declares, “are like a filthy garment,” referring to a menstrual cloth (Isa. 64:6).
20. The light of righteousness comes only from above.¹
21. So, the righteousness that God requires is that which He alone gives.
22. Verse 22 says it comes through “faith in Jesus Christ.”
23. Before we proceed into this chapter, let’s define what we mean by “justification.”
24. Because as “Luther insisted, . . . justification by faith alone is the article upon which the church stands or falls, and if the church does not get this right, the

¹ John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996). 199–200.

church ceases to be an authentic church. If the church denies or obscures the doctrine of justification by faith alone, it is no longer a Christian body.”²

I. The Meaning of Justification

First, we need to make clear that...

A. Justification is Not an Act of Divine Pardon

In justification, God does not pardon the sinner.

When a criminal is pardoned, he is forgiven of his crime and set free.

Justification does involve forgiveness but we need not confuse the act of divine justification with an act of pardon.

B. In Justification God Makes a Legal Declaration

We call it a forensic declaration.

Forensics has to do with judicial judgment or declaration.

The New Testament shows us that in the act of justification God makes a judicial declaration about a person's status before he makes his judgment.

² R.C. Sproul, *Romans* (Kindle Book). Location 1599-614.

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What happens in justification is not a pardon; it is an act whereby God declares a person to be just.

This is not a change in the sinner's character or nature, only a change in his status, but it carries ramifications that guarantee other changes will follow.

Forensic decrees like this are fairly common in everyday life.

When a man and woman are married, they stand before the minister and recite their vows and at the end of the ceremony, the minister says, "By the authority vested in me by the state of ???, I pronounce you husband and wife."

Instantly they are legally husband and wife.

Whereas seconds before they had been an engaged couple, now they were married.

Nothing inside them actually changed when those words were spoken.

But their status changed before God, the law, and their family and friends.

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When the minister spoke those words, it was a legal declaration only.

In a similar manner, when a jury foreman reads a verdict, the defendant is no longer the “accused.”

Legally and officially he instantly becomes either guilty or innocent—depending on the verdict.

Nothing in his actual nature changes, but if he is found not guilty he will walk out of court a free person in the eyes of the law, fully justified.

In biblical terms, justification is a divine verdict of “not guilty—fully righteous.”

It is the reversal of God’s attitude toward the sinner.

Whereas He formerly condemned, He now vindicates.

Although the sinner lived under God’s wrath, as a believer he or she is now under God’s blessing.

Justification is more than simple pardon; pardon alone would still leave the sinner without merit before God.

So when God justifies He imputes divine righteousness to the sinner (Rom.4:22-25).

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Christ's own infinite merit thus becomes the grounds on which the believer stands before God.

So justification elevates the believer to a realm of full acceptance and divine privilege in Jesus Christ.³

So justification is the act by which God judicially declares a person to be righteous in his sight.

Before we look at Romans 3:21-31, let me read some history on the debate on justification between Protestants and Catholics.

In R.C. Sproul's book on *Romans*, he writes, "In the sixteenth century both Roman Catholics and Protestants agreed that, in the final analysis, the act of justification is something God does, and it is a judicial declaration. Both sides, Catholic and Protestant, agreed that justification does not happen until God declares a person righteous. The issue then and now is this: on what grounds does God make that declaration? Why would God look at us, when he sees one who is dead in sin and trespasses, and say, "You are a just person," when manifestly we are not just people? The good news of the gospel is that God

³ John MacArthur, Article on *Justification By Faith*. <http://www.gty.org/resources/print/article/22>

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pronounces people just, astonishingly enough, while they are still sinners.

That was the debate with Rome. Rome set forth their doctrine—and still does—that God will never declare a person just until that person actually, under divine scrutiny, is found to be just. In the sixth session of the Council of Trent, in the middle of the sixteenth century at the heart of the Counter-Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church defined her doctrine of justification, which it has continued to echo through the centuries, declaring without equivocation that before God will ever declare a person just, righteousness must inhere in that person. The Latin word is *inherens*. In other words, when God looks at us, he will not say that we are just until he sees that we really are just.

Rome teaches that we cannot be just without grace, that we will never become just without faith, and that we will never become just without the assistance of Christ. We need faith, we need grace, and we need Jesus. We need the righteousness of Christ infused or poured into our soul, but you must cooperate with that grace to such a degree that we will in fact become righteous. If we die with any impurity in our soul, thereby lacking complete righteousness, we will not

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go to heaven. If no mortal sin is present in our life, we will go to purgatory, which is the place of purging. The point of the purging is to get rid of the dross so that we become completely pure. It may take three years or three million years, but the object of purgatory is to make us righteous so that we can be admitted into God's heaven.⁴

Next we need to understand...

II. The Meaning of Faith

A. Faith Means That We Place Our Trust in Christ and His Righteousness

We do not trust our own righteousness because we do not have any.

When we trust Christ's righteousness on our behalf and embrace him, then God transfers legally his righteousness to us.

B. A Double Transfer is Involved In Salvation

Christ dies for our salvation, but he also lives for our salvation.

⁴ R.C. Sproul, *Romans* (Kindle Book). Location 1658-72.

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Our sins are transferred to Jesus, and he died on the cross for us to bear those sins.

This is a legal transfer.

God did not reach down into our souls and grab a hunk of sin and place it on the back of Jesus.

God assigned our guilt to his Son.

He transferred it from us to Christ, but that is only half the transaction.

The other half is that he took Christ's righteousness and assigned it to us when we believed so that now when God looks at us, knowing all of our righteousness is as filthy rags, we will not perish.

He has given us the cloak of the righteousness of Jesus.

That is the righteousness of God that Paul introduced in Romans 1, the righteousness not by which God himself is righteous but that which he makes available to all who put their trust in Christ.

For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His

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grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus
(vv. 22—24).

Now that's what we see as we look at begin our look
now at 3:21-31.

God provides the solution to man's problem of sin
and judgment by sending Jesus Christ to earth to take
the judgment sinners deserve.

Jesus, who is perfectly righteous and has no sin,
became sin on the cross.

He took man's sin and punishment upon Himself, thus
freeing those who trust in Him of sin and making
them righteous before God.⁵

This is why "this section has been called 'the heart of
the epistle and of the Pauline message.'"⁶

It addresses man's sin and condemnation by providing
the righteousness of God which is available by faith
in Jesus Christ.

⁵ Jim George, *The Bare Bones Bible Handbook* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2006). 206.

⁶ Alan F. Johnson, *Everyman's Bible Commentary: Romans* (Chicago: Moody, 1974, 1976, 1984, 2000). 71.

Now notice the phrase in verse 21...

III. The Righteousness of God

God's righteousness is different from all other kinds of righteousness in many ways.

First of all, it is different because of...

A. Its Source

Which is God Himself.

Isaiah 45:8 (NASB) "Drip down, O heavens, from above, And let the clouds pour down righteousness; Let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit, And righteousness spring up with it. I, the Lord, have created it.

Second, God's righteousness is different in...

B. Its Essence

It is a comprehensive righteousness that fulfills both the precept and the penalty of God's law, under which all men stand judged.

The precept of God's law is the perfect fulfillment of it.

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In other words, it is sinless perfection, which only Jesus fulfilled.

He kept every requirement of God's law without even the most minute deviation or shortcoming.

Hebrews 4:15 (NASB) For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin.

In order for Jesus to fulfill the penalty of the law for sinful mankind, God “made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor.5:21).

1 Peter 2:24 (NASB) and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

God's righteousness is different because of its source and essence and also because of...

C. Its Duration

His righteousness is everlasting righteousness, existing from eternity to eternity.

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Throughout Scripture His righteousness is referred to as everlasting.

Psalms 119:142 (NASB) Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, And Your law is truth.

Isaiah 51:8 (NASB) "For the moth will eat them like a garment, And the grub will eat them like wool. But My righteousness will be forever, And My salvation to all generations."

Daniel 9:24 (NASB) "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy *place*.

The person who therefore receives God's righteousness receives everlasting righteousness.

Now as we come to the next section, verses 21-31, "Paul teaches that what we could not effect ourselves (righteousness) because we are under the wrath of God, God has provided as a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ."⁷

⁷ Alan F. Johnson, *Everyman's Bible Commentary: Romans* (Chicago: Moody, 1974, 1976, 1984, 2000). 72.

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IV. How Believers Are Justified (vv.21-31)

Notice several things about the righteousness that God gives to the sinner...

- A. It is Apart From the Law (v.21)
- B. It is Witnessed By the Law and the Prophets (v.21)
- C. It is Through Faith in Jesus Christ (v.22)
- D. It is Only for Those who Believe (v.22)
- E. All have Sinned According to Verse 23.
- F. Justification is a “gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (v.24) so...
- G. It is Provided Only Through the Redemption of Christ (v.24) and the “propitiation in His blood” (v.25)

CONCLUSION

Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ?

Let's pray.