

## Justification and Faith

Romans 1:16–17

Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 59–61

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**P**AUL wanted to get to Rome so he could “preach the gospel” there (v. 15). Then he said famously: **For I am not ashamed of the gospel** (v. 16). Why would he be ashamed? It seems some were speculating that he hadn’t shown up yet because he *was* ashamed—ashamed as a messenger who was not a powerful Roman rhetorician; ashamed of his message of a crucified Savior. This is so relevant for you and me today. Hear me loud and clear! Ever since this congregation began with 20 people in a living room, had 40 people in a school cafeteria, topped out around 125 people in this chapel, and had ups and downs ever since, I have been tempted by people within and people without to give up thinking preaching is the most important means of building a church. I have been told again and again that the way to grow a church is through creating a musical experience. Here we are this afternoon. Many of us are emotionally and spiritually down because we’ve lost many great families this summer due to moves. We’re wondering if God will bring us new members of our church family. We’re a little burned

out because fewer have more to do to make the life of our church family vibrant. Here's my question for you: will you re-commit right now with me as a church family that no matter how much ridicule we receive for preaching, no matter how little our results, the soul of our church will be preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ? If you're with me say "**Amen!**"

**I am not ashamed of the gospel.** Why not? **For** [the gospel] **is the power of God for salvation** (v. 16). That's the irony. Multi-media shows look, sound, and feel so powerful, but the real power is the Holy Spirit using preaching! How can preaching be powerful? **For in** [the gospel] **the righteousness of God is revealed** (v. 17). As we're going to see today, preaching brings us sinners Jesus Christ, whom we embrace by faith, which is the means of being declared righteous in God's sight as justified. So after the last 18 sermons on the Apostles' Creed as the historic summary of "all that is promised us in the gospel" (Q&A 22), we're asked a question of what does believing the gospel do for me: "But how does it help you now that you believe all this?" Let's say the answer together:

**A. That I am righteous in Christ before God and an heir to life everlasting.**

What an astonishing claim! We believe and preach that the gospel of Jesus Christ makes us sinners righteous in the sight of God—it justifies us! As sinners we have broken God’s holy laws and are unrighteous. Therefore God must punish us in his justice. But we say that trusting in God’s promise to save causes us to be righteous and heirs of eternal life. What a gospel! How can believing a message that is preached do this? In the gospel **the righteousness of God is revealed** (v. 17). As Martin Luther read that he had “a burning desire to understand” it. He said, “I hated that word” [righteouenss] because it was understood to mean the righteousness that God is and by which he punishes sinners. “I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners...I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, ‘Isn’t it enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments? Why does God heap sorrow upon sorrow through the Gospel and through the Gospel threaten us with his justice and his wrath?’” But here, when Paul says in the gospel **the righteousness of God is revealed** he’s using this phrase differently. The same Psalms that declare, “The LORD is righteous,” also pray, “In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me” (Ps. 71:2; 31:1). This is not the righteousness that God is but gives

in his grace. Luther grasped this and said, “All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates.”<sup>1</sup> The righteousness that God judges; the righteousness that he gives justifies. So how does the gospel preached do this? Our Catechism asks, “How are you righteous before God?” Answer with me:

**A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God’s commandments, of never having kept any of them, and of still being inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me—if only I accept this gift with a believing heart.**

The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (1:16). And the righteousness that God gives is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “**The righteous shall live by faith**” (v. 17). We place faith alone in Jesus Christ to accept God’s gift of righteousness; we don’t work to earn his righteousness. Faith does not *make* us righteous; it receives Christ’s righteousness so that we can be *counted* as righteous. That’s why our Catechism says **without any merit of my own** but instead **out of sheer**

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<sup>1</sup> “Preface” to his Latin *Works* (1545).

**grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ.** Then there's this line that sounds too good to be true; but is it true: **as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me.**

“Me? God's looks at *me* as sinless and as righteous?” Notice something really practical as you go back into the world this week. Note the contrast between *my conscience* and *Jesus' accomplishment*. ***My conscience* accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments. *My conscience* accuses me...of never having kept any of [God's commandments]. *My conscience* accuses me...of still being inclined toward all evil.** What's the remedy when your conscience accuses you like this, this week? When ***my conscience* accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments** I need to tell it that **the perfect satisfaction** of Jesus Christ for all my sins against God's commands is mine! When ***my conscience* accuses me...of never having kept any of [God's commandments]** I need to tell it that the **righteousness** of Jesus Christ in keeping all God's laws is mine! When ***my conscience* accuses me...of still**

**being inclined toward all evil** I need to tell it that the **holiness** of Jesus Christ is mine in the place of my evil heart, mind, and actions!

Faith alone receives Christ's accomplishments. It's not faith itself. Our final question this afternoon asks: "Why do you say that through faith alone you are righteous?" (Q&A 61). Let's say the answer together:

**A. Not because I please God by the worthiness of my faith, for only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness are my righteousness before God, and I can receive this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than by faith alone.**

We don't believe we're justified *because of* faith alone but *through* faith alone. Faith is a hand that receives Christ; faith is not Christ; faith is not a work; faith is not something you add up to use and get whatever you want from God in a "name it and claim it" way.

**I am not ashamed of preaching the gospel.** It's God's message and God's method of bringing unrighteous sinners like you and me before the throne of grace to exchange our sins for Christ's righteousness. No other means or method can give that to sinners, no matter how great they might feel afterward. Are you committed to supporting the preaching of this gospel no matter what? Let's pray...