

Justification: Declared Righteous

Romans 3: 23-26

As we continue the series, *Understanding Christianese*, I want to consider a term that every believer should know and embrace – justification. For those who have attended church over the years, you have heard this word spoken many times, but I am not sure the modern church truly comprehends the enormity of justification. It is impossible to argue that justification by faith lies at the very core of Christianity. Martin Luther declared justification was “the cornerstone of Christianity.”

As I began to prepare this series, I thought of dealing with justification first, simply because of its centrality to the Christian faith. We have already discussed redemption and propitiation; these two divine acts are clearly involved with our justification. I thought we might better understand the doctrine of justification if we already had discussed the previous two doctrines.

As we begin our study today, I want to offer a clear and concise definition for justification. This core doctrine simply means “*to be declared righteous*.” We will discuss the implications of that in depth today, but I hope you will keep that definition in mind. Those who are justified by faith in Christ have been declared righteous by God. Let’s examine the [principles](#) within the text as we discuss: [Justification – Declared Righteous](#).

I. The Reality of Sin (23) – [For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God](#). In order to receive, and fully appreciate justification by faith, one must first embrace the reality of sin. Consider:

A. The Extent – [For all have sinned](#). Paul emphatically declared that sin was universal and all inclusive. All have sinned. I realize our world has embraced an unhealthy view of what constitutes actual sin, but there can be no doubt that we are all sinners. We are sinners by virtue of our birth. We received the fallen nature of our father, Adam. As I said previously – we are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. That is the nature of every human being prior to salvation in Christ! Our sin is a byproduct of our fallen nature.

B. The Enmity – [For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God](#). Due to our fallen nature and the presence of sin in our lives, we all come short of the glory of God. He is holy and righteous. God will not have fellowship with sin. Because of our sin we are at enmity with God; we are the enemies of a holy God, separated from Him and condemned because of our sin. Those who remain in sin are the enemy of God. We desire to satisfy the flesh instead of pleasing God.

- Do you remember the definition for justification? – being declared righteous. Apart from Christ, yet in sin, we have no righteousness. We remain in our sin, viewed as sinful and unrighteous before the God who demands complete righteousness. This raises the questions – what are we to do; how do we obtain the righteousness that God demands? How are we justified, declared righteous, in the eyes of God? Paul reveals that as we continue in the text. Consider:

II. The Resolution for Sin (24-25) – Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ^[25] Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. Paul reveals that God knew the reality of our sin. He also knew we were incapable of atoning for our sin. In essence, we were in a hopeless state apart from the provision of God. Thankfully God provided a resolution for our sin. Notice:

A. The Plan (24) – Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

There can be no doubt that we were guilty of sin: all have sinned. We were incapable of becoming righteous before God in order to be accepted by Him. Thankfully God had a plan in place to provide the righteousness we lacked. Long before sin entered the heart of Adam, and subsequently the entire human race, God planned to offer His Son as the atonement, the payment for our sin. This was all an act of God's grace. Through His marvelous grace, His unmerited favor, He freely offered His Son so that we could be justified in His eyes. God had a plan for our justification long before we realized our need to be righteous before Him.

B. The Process (24-25) – In these verses Paul discussed the process through which our justification is obtained. Let's take a moment to consider each element involved.

- **Redemption** – Like our first study, Paul again speaks of the redemption provided in Christ. In order for fallen humanity to be justified, declared righteous by God, redemption was necessary. The act of redemption reveals that "*one is purchased, removed from the slave market all together, and set at liberty from the bondage of sin.*" Christ purchased our redemption, paying the ultimate price as He died on the cross to ransom us from sin. The debt we owed is marked "paid in full." Christ paid our sin debt as He redeemed us from our sin.
- **Propitiation** – This is act of grace we considered in our last study. It too is a vital element in our justification. This reveals "*a sacrifice, a covering, the payment and appeasement for sin, fully satisfying the righteous demands of the Father – literally turning away His wrath and being*

reconciled to Him.” Jesus satisfied the debt that sin had caused. Through His gracious sacrifice on the cross, His righteousness is now imputed to our account. We are declared righteous through the propitiation of the Son. Had Christ not died for our sin, providing redemption through the propitiating sacrifice, we would have no hope of justification.

➤ **God’s Forbearance** – Paul spoke of an element that we may overlook, but it is very essential to our justification by faith. God in His mercy and grace was longsuffering toward us. He would have been just to have left us in our sin, forcing us to bear the penalty for our sin. We were guilty and worthy of death because of sin. Through His patient grace, God provided a sacrifice in His Son. As we walked in sin, God continued to be gracious toward us individually. He sent the Holy Spirit to convict our sin and draw us unto Himself. Were it not for God’s longsuffering and grace, none would receive salvation, being justified by faith.

C. The Provision (25b) – *to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.* Through His abundant grace, and the finished work of Christ, we are now declared righteous in the eyes of God. We received the remission of sins committed prior to salvation. This means “*to pass over, to overlook, to put aside without punishment.*” As God declares us righteous through Christ, He makes the conscious decision to forgive our sin, literally laying them aside without demanding the punishment they deserve. We are viewed as righteous in the eyes of God, just as He views His Son! This is only possible because Christ willingly took our place, bearing the judgment we deserved. Our sin is forgiven and forgotten – fully atoned and never remembered against us!

III. The Righteous without Sin (26) – *To declare, / say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.* Finally we must consider an essential principle regarding the justification of sinners. This would never have been possible were it not for the Righteous one making provision for us through His matchless grace. Paul declared:

A. He is Righteous (26a) – In order for God to demand complete righteousness, He must be righteous Himself. No one else could make such a demand because no one else possessed the righteousness of God. We must understand that God’s righteousness is holy and perfect. Had He been like humanity, He would have condemned us in our sin without making a way for our justification. Many today are self-righteous and have little, if any compassion toward others. God could have condemned us to death, but through His grace He provided for our justification.

- Such truth makes our justification more precious. God was in no way obligated to sinful men, but chose to provide salvation for us through the offering of His Son. We are the recipients of His marvelous grace, being declared righteous through Christ!

B. He is Just (26b) – [that he might be just](#). This reveals an aspect of our justification few pause to consider. God in His holy righteousness could never condone sin. He is just in all His dealings. Sin and iniquity could not go unpunished. There had to be a payment for sin. Sin had to be atoned to satisfy the righteous judgment of God. In His gracious provision, God chose to judge our sin in the body of His Son. His righteousness would not allow Him to leave sin unjudged, and yet His great love for humanity would not allow Him to leave us without a means of justification.

C. His is Savior (26b) – [that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus](#). Both God's righteousness and love had to be satisfied. Had He overlooked our sin without atonement for sin, His righteousness would have been neglected. Had He demanded humanity to become righteous with no way of securing such righteousness, His great love would have been neglected. God created a perfect plan – He sent His only begotten Son to die for our sin, providing atonement and securing our justification. God was not inconsistent to any of His attributes, determining to be the justifier of those who believe in Christ Jesus. He is Righteous; He is Just; and He is our Savior!

Conclusion: I hope you have a better understanding of justification by faith. Those who are in Christ are declared righteous by God. We are no longer viewed as sinful enemies of God, but righteous just as His Son is righteous. That is nothing short of a miracle of God's grace. I rejoice to be justified in Christ my Lord.

Where do you stand before God today? You are either viewed as righteous or condemned in sin. There is no middle ground. There is no in between. Christ provided the means of our justification through His great sacrifice for sin. If you are yet unsaved, come today in repentance and faith, believing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ unto salvation!