

The Glorious Gift of Justification

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Romans 3:21-28

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 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. 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. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Romans 3:21–28

Brothers and sisters, “The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever” Isaiah 40:8.

I. WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION (v.21-23)

Justification is the answer to the question that Romans 3:21-23 raises. If all (without exception) have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, there is not a more ultimate question than, “how can this sinful man be made right with a Holy God?” As sinners, we are in the wrong before God. We have broken His Law and justly deserve punishment.

The holiness of God disallows Him to respond indifferently or with complacency toward our sin. The perfection of His nature requires Him to recoil in righteous indignation (Murray 117). But God doesn't only recoil with Holy anger, His holiness demands that He strikes in wrath. The Prophet Isaiah tells us that we are all wayward sheep seeking our own way (cf. Isaiah 53:6). This is the very definition of sin. This sin, which we are all culpable of, brings us under the just condemnation of God.

Justification is a legal term, a forensic term, a courtroom term. Justification is the declared purpose of God to regard and treat those sinners who believe in Jesus Christ as if they had not sinned, on the ground of the merits of the Savior. This glorious doctrine stands against the flabby sentimentalism that has brought God down to our level. We live in a culture that is

steeped in a high view of man and low view of God. The culture we live in sees very little need for a doctrine like justification because the cultural God we've created doesn't really have much of a problem with our sin. But nothing could be farther from the truth. God hates sin. God has always hated sin. The prophet Habakkuk tells us that God's eyes are too pure to look on sin (cf. Habakkuk 1:13). A high view of the majesty of God, the righteousness of God, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin will lead a man or woman to the joy and peace that only justification with God can bring.

Let me make an important distinction regarding Justification and forgiveness. Though justification includes forgiveness, it goes beyond forgiveness. Not only are we forgiven because we are in Christ, but God also declares us righteous in Christ. God requires two things of us: punishment for our sins and perfection in our lives. Our sins must be punished, and our lives must be righteous. [The problem is] we cannot bear our own punishment (Ps. 49:7-8), and we cannot provide our own righteousness. "None is righteous; no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). Therefore, God, out of His immeasurable love for us, provided His own Son to do both. Christ bears our punishment (forgiveness), but He also performs our righteousness. And when we receive Christ [by faith] (John 1:12), all of His punishment and all of His righteousness is counted as ours (Rom. 4:4-6; 5:1, 18-19; 8:1; 10:4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:8-9). Glance over at Romans 4:7. Paul quotes Psalm 32:12 saying, "Blessed are those whose lawlessness deeds are *forgiven*, and whose sins are *covered*; blessed is the man against whom the Lord *will not count his sin*."

If Paul ended his epistle to the Romans right here, at the end of verse 23, we would all be hopeless. But praise God that's not the end of the story; God justifies wicked, guilty, vile sinners just like me and you. How does He do it?

II. HOW DOES GOD JUSTIFY A PERSON? (v.24-25, 28)

A. A person is justified by the grace of God as a gift (v.24a)

[All] are justified by his grace as a gift,

"All" doesn't mean that everyone is justified. Rather, it means everyone that is justified is justified in the same way – by grace. There are many ways we try to justify ourselves. We try to justify ourselves by our moral living. We try to justify ourselves by our careers. We try to justify ourselves by our scholastic performance. We try to justify ourselves by our physical appearance. We try to justify ourselves by our expertise or technical skill. We try to justify ourselves by the way we keep our home. We try to justify ourselves by our externally perfect marriages. But all of these attempts to self-justify will never work. First, they will never erase our guilt. Secondly, they cannot lessen our shame. Third, they can never impute righteousness to our otherwise bankrupt accounts. God does all three as a gift of His grace.

The NIV translates verse 24, “All are justified *freely* by his grace...” The word *freely* or “gift” in many of our translations means gratuitously – without charge. But don't think for a second that this doesn't cost.

B. A person is justified on the basis of the death Christ Jesus (v.24b-25a)

Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,

The word “redemption,” ἀπολύτρωσις, comes from the market place. It is closely related to the word “lutron”, which means ransom. In ancient times a person of means could buy slaves from the marketplace. The slaves would often be stripped bare so that potential purchasers could observe the product and see if it meet their desires. If so the buyer would purchase the slave with a price (lutron). God sees us in all our reality and realizes there is nothing in us that could merit redemption and he buys us anyway. Jesus paid the price for our redemption and he has the right to declare us righteousness because he bought us with his blood. The price of justification was huge, but we paid none of it. He paid it all so he has the right to justify us.

C. A person is justified through faith (v.25b)

to be received by faith.

It is important to understand that we are justified *by* or *through* our faith and not *because* of our faith. In other words, your faith is not your righteousness; Christ is your righteousness. Faith is simply the instrument by which the righteousness of God in Christ becomes ours. You might think of it in terms of faith being the hand that receives grace. Let me give you a couple mental pictures that I trust will clarify my point. If you have ever been snorkeling, you know that the snorkel is only an instrument. You don't breathe the snorkel, you breathe air through the snorkel. Another way to illustrate this is to think of the coupling or linkage that connects two train cars together. The coupling has no power of its own; the engine provides the power and the coupling connects the train car to the power of the engine. This is not a trivial distinction...If your faith is in your faith, your faith is misplaced.

D. A person is justified apart from any of their own effort or striving (v.28)

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

The 17th century puritan John Flavel once wrote, “How dangerous it is to join anything of our own to the righteousness of Christ, in pursuit of justification before God! Jesus Christ will never endure this; it reflects upon His work dishonorably. He will be all, or none, in our justification. If He has finished the work, what need is there of our additions? And if not, to what purpose are they? Can we finish that which Christ Himself could not complete? Did

He finish the work, and will He ever divide the glory and praise of it with us? No, no; Christ is no half-Savior. It is a hard thing to bring proud hearts to rest upon Christ for righteousness. God humbles the proud by calling sinners wholly from their own righteousness to Christ for their justification.”

Let me illustrate this for you. Imagine a man stands before a judge and has been given the choice of paying \$100 or serving 90 days in jail for his crime. The man doesn't have a penny to his name, but he His story is so heart wrenching that the courtroom spectators are moved with pity and take up a collection to help pay the man's fine. Although it is unlike him, even the judge contributes to the fine. All together they raise \$99.95. Even though they are only five cents short, the judge, who is just, declares that the entire \$100 must be paid, and orders the bailiff to take the man to jail. Dejected, the man walks out of the courtroom and thrusts his hands deep into his pockets where he finds - a nickel! Elated, he rushes back into the courtroom and slaps it on the bar before the judge, declaring "I'm free, I'm free!" Now, in this man's mind, what saved him? Was it the \$99.95, or the five cents? If we did anything to merit our salvation, we would be forever boasting about it in heaven. The fact is that we could do nothing, so Jesus paid it all.¹

III. WHY DOES GOD JUSTIFY A PERSON (v.25-26)

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 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.

A. For His Glory

Perhaps a more foundational question is, "Why does God do anything He does?" Friends, God does everything He does for His Glory. Notice what Paul says in verse 25. He says, "This was to show God's righteousness..." "Show" is the Greek word, ἐνδειξις. It means to point out, manifest, or make a public declaration. God does everything He does, including justifying wicked sinners, to set His Glory on display.

B. For your good.

IV. THE GLORIOUS FRUITS OF JUSTIFICATION (Romans 5:1-11)

A. Peace with God (v.1)

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,

B. Access to the grace of God (v.2a)

¹ Charles Ryrie.

² John MacArthur

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand,

C. Joy in God (v.2b)

and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

As justified believers, we have great reason to rejoice in God. Paul said in Galatians 6:14, "Far be it from me to boast *except* in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." We rejoice in who God is and what He has done. The cross shows God to be just, not simply in the fact that he forgives, but in the way he forgives. To pass over sins would show mercy, but it would not show justice. Forgiveness by the way of the cross shows both.

1. Rejoice in God's wisdom displayed at the cross. (Romans 11:33–36)
2. Rejoice in God's grace displayed at the cross. (Ephesians 2:4–5)
3. Rejoice in God's power displayed at the cross. (Colossians 2:13–15)
4. Rejoice in God's love displayed at the cross. (1 John 4:9–10)

D. Growth in God (v.3-4)

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

E. Hope in God (v.5a)

and hope does not put us to shame,

Christians should be the most joyful, hopeful, peace-filled people on the planet because we know that we will one day stand before the throne of God without even a hint of blame, shame, or disappointment. Paul says in Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope *fill* you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may *abound* in hope." I love this little word "abound." The Greek word for "abound" has the idea of abundance. The God of hope wants us to be full of hope in this life. He wants us to be full of belief in who He says He is and what He says He will do.

Let me ask you this question...What is the basis or foundation of our hope in the Christian life? I hope (no pun intended) you would say that your hope is grounded in the faithfulness of God. We trust, believe, and hope in a God who is faithful and will make good on every promise that He has ever made. Let me remind you here that if your hope is attached to anything other than God alone, it's inevitable that you will be let down and disappointed.

But hoping in the character and promises of God will never disappoint or shame you. Paul writes in Romans 10:11, “Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame.” I am reminded of the wonderfully biblical hymn lyrics written by Edward Mote: *My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.* I love the concluding verse: *When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh may I then in Him be found; Dressed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne.* This is the hope of every believer; and this hope will never leave you disappointed.

F. The love of God (v.5b-8)

because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

How do we know that our hope won’t disappoint us? What proof do we have that we will never be put to shame? Paul gives us great assurance here when he says, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” God wants His children to know how much He loves them. He wants us to never waiver in the reality of His great love for us in Christ. One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to pour out, literally to overflow, the love of God in your heart. God doesn’t just trickle a little bit of His love on you from time to time. He draws His children under the waterfall of His love. God loves you so greatly, so magnanimously, so grandly that He has literally put Himself in you.² I am reminded of Paul’s prayer for the church in Ephesus in Ephesians 3:16-19. He prayed that they would understand and live in light of God’s immeasurable love for them.

According to the riches of [God’s] glory may [He] grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith - that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:16-19

If you ever doubt God’s love for you, and you will, look no further than the cross! The writer of Hebrews encourages us to, “[Fix] our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” Hebrews 12:2. Isaac Watts penned these words: *See, from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down. Did*

² John MacArthur.

e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown. God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

G. Security in God (v.9)

Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

The argument Paul is making is that if God has justified you, a guilty sinner, by the blood of Christ, you can be confident that He will save you from His wrath. Paul is using a method of argument from “heavy” to “light”. In other words, if God can do the “heavy” thing, namely justify you by the blood of Christ, then surely He can do the “lighter” or easier thing of saving you from His wrath. We need to be clear about the fact that there is a day coming when God will call all men to account, and judge the world of its sin. On that Day, God will unbridle His wrath towards the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who have suppressed the truth (cf. Romans 1:18). But for the believer, God’s wrath has been satisfied because He emptied it on Christ, who was our propitiation, at the cross. I love the lyrics to the Hymn Hallelujah What a Savior: *Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my place condemned He stood; Sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah What a Savior!*

H. Friendship with God (v.10)

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Not only has the judicial status been changed for those who have been justified, but their relational status has also been changed. The justified are no longer enemies, but friends.

I. Reconciliation with God (v.11)

More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

V. HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO SUCH A GLORIOUS TRUTH (v.27)

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.

A. No boasting in self.

The gift of justification by faith wipes away every ground for boasting. I didn't earn it. I couldn't merit it. It was God's doing and He alone gets the glory. God, through the prophet Jeremiah said, “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the strong man boast in his strength, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he

understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord" Jeremiah 9:23-24. Paul said, "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" Galatians 6:14.

B. Humble gratitude to and adoration of Christ.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Much like a judge declares someone innocent or guilty in a courtroom, so too we will one day stand before the Judgment Seat of God. We will either have Jesus as our Advocate and God will declare us innocent for Christ's sake, or we will stand before the throne and bar of God drenched and stench with our sin and rebellion. Friends, I urge you to repent and believe - trust Christ's righteous life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection. Receive His glorious gift of justification.

CLOSING BENEDICTION

Hear this benediction as we bring our corporate worship to a close, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" Romans 8:33–34. That, brothers and sisters, is very good news! And all God's people said, "Amen!" Go in peace!