

Justification by Faith

Lesson Scope: [Romans 3:21-4:25](#)

Lesson Focus

The first lesson from Romans was an introduction to the Gospel, which is "the power of God unto salvation." The second lesson painted a dark picture. All men, Jew and Gentile alike, are guilty before God and are unable to save themselves. Romans 3:20 summarizes by declaring that no flesh can be justified by the deeds of the Law. Rather, the purpose of the Law was to make men aware of sin.

With the words but now (Romans 3:21), the apostle Paul begins this declaration of the Gospel. He explains how sinful man can be made righteous by believing in Jesus Christ. He again uses the phrase "the righteousness of God" in referring to that which is accomplished for man by the grace of God "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This lesson is the first of several that will look more deeply into the marvels and mysteries of redemption.

For an introduction we refer to the words "but now" in Romans 3:21. They alert our attention to the fact that something has changed. In the preceding verses, the apostle shows that the Law was not able to make a person righteous. Rather, it brought condemnation. It was a dark picture! Now a light that changes the whole outlook shines forth. There is hope for mankind! A way has been made for man to be righteous. It applies not only to those in the present and future but also to those in the past who lived by faith.

It is important that we understand and explain the reference to "his righteousness" in Romans 3:25. When the apostle speaks of "the righteousness of God," he is referring to the righteousness that is ours through belief in Jesus Christ. But "his righteousness" refers to God's righteousness. He declares forbearance by passing over the sins of the past that were covered by Old Testament sacrifices. "But now" God can be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus.

"All the world [stands] guilty before God." Through Christ's redemptive work, however, God can be "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

Lesson Aim: To present the great principles of justification by faith.

Theme Verse: [Psalm 85:10](#). Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Lesson Text

Justification Provided

[Romans 3:21-31](#) ²¹ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ²² Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴ 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; ²⁶ To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. ²⁷ Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. ²⁹ *Is he* the God of the Jews only? *is he* not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: ³⁰ Seeing *it is* one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. ³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Justification Appropriated

[Romans 4:1-10](#) ¹ What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? ² For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. ³ For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. ⁴ Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. ⁵ But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. ⁶ Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God

imputeth righteousness without works, ⁷ *Saying*, Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. ⁹ *Cometh* this blessedness then upon the circumcision *only*, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰ How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

Romans 4:18-25 ¹⁸ Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. ¹⁹ And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: ²⁰ He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; ²¹ And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. ²² And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. ²³ Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; ²⁴ But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; ²⁵ Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Questions for Study

Justification Provided

1. How is a person justified?
2. Why cannot God simply erase sin?
3. Explain the meaning and importance of propitiation.

Justification Appropriated

4. Explain the doctrine of imputed righteousness.
5. How can we reconcile Romans 4:2 with James 2:21 concerning Abraham's justification?
6. What is the blessedness mentioned in Romans 4:6-9?

Analyzing the Passage

Propitiation (Romans 3:25) refers to the sacrifice that Jesus made in the shedding of His blood. This sacrifice declared God to be righteous in His divine forbearance. He had passed over the sins that had been covered by the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Now the shed blood of Christ makes it possible for God to forgive sins and still be just and

righteous. In this light, it is clear that man is justified by faith and not by works ("the deeds of the law"). This eliminates all grounds for boasting.

In chapter 4 the apostle shows that imputing righteousness in response to faith is in harmony with the entire history of Israel. He presses the point by recounting the experience of Abraham. He shows that Abraham was accepted and rewarded through faith and not through works.

Counted (Romans 4:3-5), reckoned (Romans 4:9-10), and imputed (Romans 4:22-24) come from the same Greek word meaning "to reckon or take into account." These words reveal how God thinks, not what God does. He sees righteousness when He looks upon a man who is motivated by faith in Him. It is the same today; God counts as righteous those who believe in the precious blood of Jesus.

It is noteworthy that the apostle Paul uses the Old Testament frame of reference to clinch his point. It was not easy for the Jewish people to lay aside the Law in favor of faith in Christ. However, all of God's dealings with man in the Old Testament pointed forward to and moved toward the Gospel.

Principles and Applications

Justification Provided

1. The Law foreshadowed and the prophets foretold justification by faith (Romans 3:21). The New Testament does not contradict the Old Testament; the New fulfills the Old. Faith was then and is now the criterion for justification. Before Christ, faith was expressed by obedience to the Law. Today faith is expressed by obedience to the teachings of Christ.
2. Justification is the gift of God's grace through the redemptive work of Christ (Romans 3:24). Justification cannot be earned; God grants it as an unmerited favor. Jesus is our near kinsman. He paid the price of our redemption. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).
3. The sacrifice of Christ is effectual for both Old and New Testament saints (Romans 3:25). This principle is somewhat incidental to the context. The main thought is that God was not unrighteous in extending mercy to the Old Testament saints, because it was done in the light of Christ's future work. The practical application is that God is always

righteous in extending mercy, regardless of the point in life when a person repents.

4. The sacrifice of Christ satisfied God's justice for sin, thus enabling Him to be the Justifier (Romans 3:25-26). God recognized the work of Christ on Calvary as an adequate sacrifice for sin. This enabled Him to extend mercy and pardon without any change in His attitude toward sin. This view helps us to see the cross of Christ as a monument not only of God's mercy and love but also of His justice and holiness. Our faith in Christ makes forgiving our sins a righteous act on God's part.

Justification Appropriated

5. Justification is found through faith in the blood of Christ rather than through the works of man (Romans 4:1-5). Man can do nothing to merit or earn salvation. Salvation is possible only by the grace of God. He devised the plan and worked it out for us. We embrace the plan by faith. The Book of James deals with the matter of faith and works. He also uses the experience of Abraham to show that works are an integral element of faith. "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (James 2:22).

6. Justification is the forgiveness of sins (Romans 4:6-8). Forgiveness is a wonderful experience. It removes the guilt and clears the slate. But what responsibility do we have, as an expression of faith, in this matter of forgiveness? First John 1:9 states it forthrightly: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

7. Justification involves faith in the promises of God (Romans 4:20-22). Not just any declaration of faith will do. We must be fully persuaded that God can do the impossible and that He will keep His promises. We must be willing to move forward with the confidence that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

8. The resurrection of Christ is foundational to justification (Romans 4:24-25). God's acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary is clearly proven by the resurrection. "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Important Teachings

1. The Law foreshadowed and the prophets foretold justification by

faith (Romans 3:21).

2. Justification is the gift of God's grace through the redemptive work of Christ (Romans 3:24).

3. The sacrifice of Christ is effectual for both Old and New Testament saints (3:25).

4. The sacrifice of Christ satisfied God's justice for sin, thus enabling Him to be the Justifier (Romans 3:25-26).

5. Justification is found through faith in the blood of Christ rather than through the works of man (Romans 4:1-5).

6. Justification is the forgiveness of sins (Romans 4:6-8).

7. Justification involves faith in the promises of God (Romans 4:20-22).

8. The resurrection of Christ is foundational to justification (Romans 4:24-25).

Answers to Questions

1. How is a person justified?

Justification comes to us by divine grace. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). We are justified by faith. Belief is a necessary response on the part of man. "And by him all that believe are justified" (Acts 13:39). This is true because works are an integral part of faith. Finally, "It is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33).

2. Why cannot God simply erase sin?

God cannot simply erase sin, because in doing so He would be unrighteous (Romans 3:25-26). God's holiness demands justice, and God's justice is satisfied through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The text declares that it is only because of Christ's sacrifice that God can "be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." It is significant that man's response of faith is included in this statement.

3. Explain the meaning and importance of propitiation.

Propitiation means that man is brought back into favor with God through the sacrifice of Jesus. God has provided redemption for all men, but it becomes effective on an individual basis only through faith in Christ's shed blood.

Propitiation is important because there is no other way to be reconciled to God. Without this provision we would be condemned to death.

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through

Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

4. Explain the doctrine of imputed righteousness.

The text uses three words that have the same meaning: counted, reckoned, and imputed. The doctrine is understood by combining their usage. We are accounted as righteous when our sins are forgiven. We are reckoned to be righteous, since no one can be righteous through his own merit. Righteousness is imputed because we can never secure it for ourselves. Imputed righteousness is God looking upon us as righteous when we exercise faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

5. How can we reconcile Romans 4:2 with James 2:21 concerning Abraham's justification?

The answer to this question lies in the context of the verses. The works in Romans were understood to be meritorious in nature. They are void of faith and stand in contrast to saving faith. James discusses works as the expression of faith. They are an integral part of faith. Faith necessarily affects how we live. Thus by works is faith made perfect.

6. What is the blessedness mentioned in 4:6-9?

It is the blessedness of having our sins forgiven and washed away. It is the blessedness of justification and a living hope. It is the blessedness of a restored relationship with God through the propitiatory work of Jesus.

Summarizing the Lesson

The plan of redemption and the providing of a Redeemer is solely the work of God. We have no merits upon which to stand and are absolutely helpless. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4-5). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). Faith will inspire continuing obedience to Him.

Research Guide

1. The Amplified New Testament helps to make the teaching in Romans 3:25-26 concerning God's righteousness easier to understand.
2. Read James 2:14-26 concerning the involvement of works in justification.
3. In *Doctrines of the Bible*, read the chapter on "Justification."