

Week 15

Justification

Key Verses

Romans 3:23-25 "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." (ESV)

Romans 4:1-5 "What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness..." (ESV)

+ Introduction

When typing a word document on the computer, there are typically pre-set margins. On the left-hand side, the default is justified, meaning it is straight all the way down the page. On the right-hand side, the default on my computer is not justified, which means the sentences get all the words they can on the line and then move to the next line. The right-hand side is all crooked.

If the margin is straight, it is justified. If the margin is crooked, it is unjustified. It is a very simplistic way of looking at justification. But if someone asks the question, "how can I be justified?" They are really asking, "how can I be made straight before God?" ¹

Justification is foundational for Christianity. It sets us apart from other religious groups who depend upon works to be "good enough" for God. If we were to depend on works to be in right standing before God, we would never succeed. We are a crooked, messed-up people; our margins do not line up straight before God. The doctrine of justification reminds us that justification before God is not based on what we do but on the faith we have in what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. Justification is the doctrine that answers the question, "how can I be made right with God?"

Sometimes people talk about justification and forgiveness as if they were the same thing. They are not. It is true that they happen at the same time and are inseparable. **No one is forgiven who is not also justified. No one is justified who is not also forgiven.** But they are not identical.

- Forgiveness is the subtraction of that which is sinful from your record.
- Justification is the addition of that which is righteous to your record.²

Today we will focus on justification – that which God has done for us to make us right before Him.

+ What Is Justification?

Justification is a legal term related to the idea of acquittal; justification refers to the divine act whereby God makes humans, who are sinful and therefore worthy of condemnation, acceptable before a God who is holy and righteous.

Justification is necessary because God is holy, and humans are sinful. Since Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve gave into temptation and sin entered the world, we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory and righteousness of God (Romans 3:23). None of us deserve to be right before God. But the grace of God is abundant for each of us, not based on what we do or do not deserve.

Paul addresses this in his letter to the Romans.

ROMANS 4:5 *But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness. (NASB)*

There are those who believe they are not good enough to be loved by God. They believe they have lived such a wicked, sinful, horrible life that they would never be able to be forgiven by a holy and righteous God. But Paul reminds us that God *"justifies the ungodly."* God's grace abounds for those who **believe** and have **faith**. Notice the last part of Romans 4:5, *"his faith is credited as righteousness."* The word *"his"* is referring to the *"ungodly."* The word *"faith"* is referring to the person's belief and trust in God. The sinful person is not deserving, but they have been justified before God; their lives have been *"credited as righteousness."*

More appropriately described as "justification by grace through faith," this key doctrine of the Protestant Reformation asserts that a sinner is justified (pardoned from the punishment and condemnation of sin) and brought into a relationship with God by faith in God's grace alone.

Wayne Grudem makes this observation about justification:

"A right understanding of justification is absolutely crucial to the whole Christian faith. Once Martin Luther realized the truth of justification by faith alone, he became a Christian and overflowed with the new-found joy of the gospel. The primary issue in the Protestant Reformation was a dispute with the Roman Catholic Church over justification. If we are to safeguard the truth of the gospel for future generations, we must understand the truth of justification. Even today, a true view of justification is the dividing line between the biblical gospel of salvation by faith alone and all false gospels of salvation based on good works."³

A. Justification is By Grace Alone

Christianity is unique because it teaches justification by grace (Romans 3:24). Justification is God's declaration that the demands of His Law have been fulfilled in the righteousness of His Son. The basis for this justification is the death of Christ. Paul tells us that *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them"* (2 Corinthians 5:19). This reconciliation covers all sin: *"For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified"* (Hebrews 10:14). Justification, then, is based on the work of Christ, accomplished through His blood (Romans 5:9), and brought to His people through His resurrection (Romans 4:25).

When God justifies, He charges the sin of man to Christ and credits the righteousness of Christ to the believer (2 Corinthians 5:21). Thus, *"through one Man's righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life"* (Romans 5:18). Because this righteousness is *"the righteousness of God"* which is *"apart from the law"* (Romans 3:21), it is thorough; a believer is *"justified from all things"* (Acts 13:39). God is "just" because His holy standard of perfect righteousness has been fulfilled in Christ, and He is the "justifier" because this righteousness is freely given to the believer (Romans 3:26; 5:16).

His justification is not based on what we accomplish; it is solely dependent on what His Son, Jesus Christ, accomplished on the cross. The death and sacrifice of Jesus were not based on any of us being "good enough." In fact, it was while we were yet sinners this incredible act of grace occurred.

ROMANS 5:8-9 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.*

B. Justification is Through Faith Alone

Although the Lord Jesus has paid the price for our justification, it is through our faith that He is received, and His righteousness is experienced and enjoyed (Romans 3:25–30). Faith is considered righteousness (Romans 4:3, 9), not as the work of human beings (Romans 4:5), but as the gift and work of God (John 6:28–29; Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29).

The New Testament sometimes seems to speak of justification by works and actions. For example, Jesus spoke of justification (and condemnation) *"by your words"* (Matthew 12:37). Paul said, *"the doers of the law will be justified"* (Romans 2:13). And James concluded that *"a man is justified by works, and not by faith only"* (James 2:24).

These statements seem to conflict with Paul's many warnings that *"by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight"* (Romans 3:20), and that the attempt to be justified through law is equivalent to being *"estranged from Christ"* and *"fallen from grace"* (Galatians 5:4).

It has been said that religion is spelled with 2 letters, D-O. People focus on all things they must "do" to be right with God. They "do" church. They "do" baptism. They "do" good things for people less fortunate. But Christianity is spelled with four letters, D-O-N-E. Christianity is not based on what we do but on what Jesus Christ has already done. ⁴ We have faith in the work Jesus accomplished,

and based on that belief and relationship, we, in turn, want to do good works.

The solution to this problem lies in distinguishing between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16–25). Not only is Christ's righteousness legally accounted to the believer, but Christ also dwells in the believer through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:10–11), creating works of faith (Ephesians 2:10). Certainly, God's works are declared righteous (Isaiah 26:12). In this context, the order of events in justification is grace, faith, and works; or, in other words, by grace, through faith, resulting in works (Ephesians 2:8–10).

C. Justification is In Christ Alone

It is Christ alone who endured the wrath of God, who paid the penalty of our sin. And by faith and grace, we can obtain salvation in Christ alone. Paul says this in Romans 5, and it is based on his argument in Romans 3:21–26:

ROMANS 3:21-26 *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. (ESV)*

These verses focus on Jesus Christ. In verse 21, Paul shows that the Law and Prophets (our Old Testament) point to Jesus as the manifestation of the righteousness of God. It is available for all who believe. It does not matter the background, lifestyle, sinfulness, education, or lack thereof. The good news of Christianity is summarized in verse 22, *"the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction."*

It comes down to a belief in Jesus Christ and what He did through His death, burial, and resurrection. Paul even points out that this is a gift (v.24) that is offered to all who believe. This gift was not by accident but with purpose. Verse 26 explains, *"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."*

+ The Results of Justification

The negative result of justification is what we are saved from: *"Having now been justified . . . we shall be saved from wrath"* (Romans 5:9). The positive result is what we are saved to: *"Whom He justified, these He also glorified"* (Romans 8:30).

There is security in these verses. God sees you through the filter of the cross and what Jesus did for all humanity.

Jesus is right; therefore, you are right.

Jesus is holy; therefore, you are holy.

Jesus is accepted by God; therefore, you are accepted by God.

Jesus is seated in heaven; therefore, you are seated in heaven with Him.

There are practical implications of this doctrine of justification.

1. This doctrine enables us to offer genuine hope to unbelievers who know they could never make themselves righteous before God.
2. This doctrine gives us confidence that God will never make us pay the penalty for sins that have been forgiven based on Christ's merit. Romans 8:1, "*Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"⁵

+ Conclusion

For those who are seeking to be right with God, it all comes down to what Jesus did on the cross and our faith in what Jesus did for us.

Paul's doctrine of justification shows clearly:

1. that all humans are sinners, helpless to save themselves;
2. that only the perfect work of Jesus saves sinners;
3. that only faith, not works at all, receives the saving effect of Jesus' work;
4. that God in Christ receives all the glory for justification;
5. that this justification brings peace to the heart and mind of the believer.

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¹ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/by-faith-alone/>

² Ibid.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England; 1999, p. 315.

⁴ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/by-faith-alone/>

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England; 1999, p. 322-323.