

TUTORIAL
3.7

The Basis for our Justification

Paul explains the implications of Christ's death for us as believers, one of which is being made righteous, allowing us to stand before a holy God. This module was developed from lessons presented by Bible Teacher Scot Keen.

Introduction

Last time Paul showed us that all humanity is guilty before God. No one is righteous and so mankind's only hope is grace. Now that Paul has our attention and we feel our need before a holy God, he moves on to give us the good news. He will begin to address the theological basis for our justification. He will answer questions like, "How can God declare us righteous and still remain righteous himself?" He will then provide us with some Old Testament examples of justification by faith.

Righteousness Revealed

Let's begin with the theological basis for our justification. In Romans 3:21 Paul says, "Now, apart from the law," which means apart from man's performance, "the righteousness of God has been manifested." The way to receive the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel Message, as seen in Romans 1:17, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'but the righteous man shall live by faith'". There are a few things I want us to catch here. First of all, Paul says that the righteousness of God is revealed. Now this is not referring to God's attribute of righteousness, rather it is referring to His saving activity. The righteousness here is God's gift to believing sinners which allows them to stand before Him in all his holiness.

Philippians chapter three talks about this righteousness as well. It is righteousness that is credited to sinners who believe the Gospel Message. To clarify, it does not mean to be made righteous, meaning once we believe the Gospel everything we do is now righteous. We know that is not the case. This righteousness is also bigger than God seeing us as if we have never sinned. Granted when we believe the Gospel, when we are justified, our sins are completely removed. But that is only half the story. It is not just that our sins are forgiven, but we are also credited with righteousness before a holy God. It is a

legal declaration because of God's credited righteousness. We're not just forgiven, we are also given the status of being righteous before a holy God.

Let's follow Paul as he explains this idea. Look at Romans 3:21-22, "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been manifested...even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe." This righteousness is God's righteousness. Think about the implications of this. Mankind's 'righteousness' is filthy rags, as Isaiah would say. But Paul is talking about God's righteousness. If we are credited with God's righteousness, then how could we ever be more legally right than the moment we believe the Gospel? To put it another way, if you receive God's righteousness by faith in Christ, that righteousness is perfect. It is God's righteousness and therefore cannot be improved upon.

That means you will never be more legally righteous than the moment you believe the Gospel, not in all of eternity. You cannot add to God's righteousness. You will never be more righteous than the moment you believe the Gospel. That is profound. A Christian author once said, "There are two questions that every believer must settle. Number one, does God completely accept me? Number two, if so, upon what grounds?" Does God completely accept us? If so, why? He completely accepts us because He completely accepted what Christ did on our behalf. After all, it is the righteousness of God we are talking about here which is perfect and so cannot be improved upon. Paul says the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ is for all those who believe, and there is no distinction.

Righteousness Received

When Paul says, "For all those who believe, and there is no distinction," he is alluding to the Jew-Gentile division we talked about previously. Paul insists that God's righteousness is for both Jews and Gentiles. There is universal need to be right before God. Look at Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." There is also universal provision. Christ died for all men. The righteousness of God is for all who believe. How can God do this? What are the grounds by which He can credit sinners as righteous? Notice verse twenty-four, "Being justified as a gift by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." These terms are loaded; *justified as a gift*, or as some translations say *justified freely by his grace*. We know that if something is given by God's grace, then it is underserved.

When Paul says "freely, and by his grace" he is roughly saying the same thing. But he says it, I believe, for the sake of emphasis. God's righteousness is both free and underserved. It is gracious on God's part to make us right through faith, "Being justified or declared righteous as a gift by God's grace, and that is through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Think about redemption, a term that has history in the Old Testament. Property could be redeemed, slaves could be redeemed and prisoners of war could be redeemed. Those

acts were called redemption, and the prices paid were called ransoms. Christ was a ransom for sinners. He died, and his blood paid the price for us to be set free from our sins. While Paul is speaking about redemption here, these analogies go further.

Righteousness Upheld

Look at Romans 3:25, speaking of Christ, “Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith.” Propitiation is a big word. It is not one that we often use in conversation, if ever. But it is a word that also has history in the Old Testament. It refers to God’s wrath turning away by means of a substitute. In the Old Testament the Israelites had a tabernacle. Inside it was the mercy seat, underneath which were the tablets of the law. The mercy seat was exactly like it sounds, a place of mercy. Blood would be sprinkled on it which communicated that what should bring judgement, God's Law, was covered over because of a provision of a sacrifice, and so sinners could find mercy there. Propitiation speaks about the turning away or the aversion of God's wrath.

I like to think of it this way. Picture a lightning rod. They are placed in a certain spot to channel the fury of a storm away from people and into the ground. They are set up for that very reason. In the same way God publically put Christ in open view of all the world on the cross at Calvary. He did that as a propitiation, averting God's wrath away from sinners and towards Jesus as He became sin for us. Also mentioned in the Old Testament is the day of atonement. The day of atonement meant death for the lamb, but mercy for the sinner. When the lamb’s blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat, it was death for the lamb, mercy for the sinner and satisfaction for God's righteous standard.

Jesus is the Lamb of God. He made propitiation for our sins. It meant death for the Lamb of God, mercy for the sinners, and satisfaction for God. This is something I hope that we pause to think about. If God is completely satisfied, the real question is, “Are you satisfied?” Don’t take me wrong, I’m not saying that God exists to satisfy either you or me, but I mean that if God is accepting what Christ did, what more can be done? God is resting in what Christ did on our behalf. He is satisfied. When we believe the Gospel we are saying, “God, I place my faith where you placed my sin,” and that is on the Son of God who died in our place. Remember it was death for the Lamb of God, mercy for the sinner and satisfaction for God's wrath.

I'll give an illustration that might turn your stomach. In the States we celebrate Thanksgiving every year. It's a major holiday. One of the things we do is gorge ourselves on food. We always have turkey, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, salad, broccoli, squash, all kinds of vegetables and cranberry sauce. We can only fit one little spoonful from each dish on our plates and still our plates are heaping over. We eat all the food we can possibly hold and then sit down on

the couch and watch a football game. Then it's time for cake or pie and ice cream. It feels like we cannot eat another bite. We're satisfied.

Now, imagine being in that situation where you have eaten to your heart's content, you can't take another bite, and someone gives you some rancid meat to eat. I told you it would turn your stomach! You are so full you can't take another bite and yet they spoon feed it into your mouth. It just turns my stomach to think about it. But you know what? When we try to offer something to God with our own works while He is completely satisfied in His Son, we are doing that very thing. We are telling God that something more needs to be done when He is insisting that He is satisfied with what Jesus has done.

I have said before that the righteousness of God is not referring to God's attribute of righteousness. It speaks rather about God's act of declaring righteous those who believe in Christ. But in Romans 3:25, it is now speaking about God's attribute of being righteous. Jesus was crucified publicly to show the world that He is righteous. He demonstrated His righteousness by passing over the sins previously committed. When Adam sinned against God, God forgave Adam. When David sinned with Bathsheba, God forgave David. You could go on and on with Old Testament examples. That raises a question. How can God be a righteous God and forgive those sinners? We know from the book of Hebrews that the blood of bulls and goats cannot remove sin. How could God forgive them if their sins had been paid for?

I like to think of it like using a credit card. I pay for something with a credit card by swiping it at the store and so could argue, "I just paid for that." They let me leave the store because, after all, I did give them my credit card. I paid for it in a sense, but I don't really pay for it until I pay the bill that the credit card company sends. Likewise, it is like people were saved on credit, so to speak, prior to Christ paying for our sins. God forgave them in light of Christ's future payment. And God was righteous in forgiving them because the price would be paid by Christ.

God was righteous in forgiving Old Testament believers, and He is righteous when He forgives those of us today who believe the Gospel Message, because Christ died for our sins. Notice this statement, "So that he would be just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." A quote attributed to John Calvin comes to mind, "Just and the justifier is the marrow of theology." In other words, this is the heart of the Gospel. God can somehow be both just and the Justifier. God is not going to lower His standards to save man, He is going to maintain His justice. But He also wants to be the Justifier, the One who forgives sinners. How can God maintain a perfect standard, and yet forgive sinners who cannot live up to that standard?

In a sense, God faced a 'dilemma'. How could He maintain justice and also be the Justifier? The beauty of the Gospel is that God can be both just and the

Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. I like to say something that raises red flags. God does not forgive sin. Let me say it again: God does not forgive sin! Here is what I mean: God forgives sinners, but He does not leave sin unpunished. He is just. When Christ died, the full weight of God's wrath fell on Him so that He could be the Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. God was jealous to maintain that. He wanted to be just and the Justifier.

Implications

Christ dying for our sins made it possible for God to show full justice towards sin so that He could in turn show mercy and be the Justifier of those who have faith in Jesus. In conclusion Paul says, "Where then is boasting?" It's excluded. There is no room for boasting. On what grounds? He says, "By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith, apart from the works of the law." We cannot be justified by works. And if we are justified by faith we have nothing to brag about.

We cannot boast because we did not satisfy God's wrath, we simply trusted in the One who did. There is no boasting. Look at Romans 3:29, "Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one." Paul says, "Do we then nullify the law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the law." In this chapter Paul has laid the theological basis for our justification. God can justify us when we believe the Gospel because of the redemption that is found in Christ.



DISCUSSION POINTS

The Basis for our Justification

1. What is meant by the phrase "the righteousness of God"? Is it an attribute, an action, a thing? What does it mean?
2. When Paul says that the righteousness of God has been manifested what does he mean?
3. What does Paul mean when he says that the righteousness of God is manifested apart from the Law?
4. The righteousness manifested in the gospel is God's righteousness. What are the ramifications of this fact?
5. How would you explain 'redemption' to someone who is not familiar with the Bible?

6. How would you explain 'propitiation' to someone who is not familiar with the Bible?
7. In what way does propitiation demonstrate the righteousness of God?