

JUSTIFICATION

by Ron Harvey

TEXT: Romans 3:24

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

We saw last week that salvation is a work of God. And we said that if God doesn't save us, then we will not be saved.

And we can go one step further and say that,

Salvation is an **exclusive** work of God. That is, it is a work done by God and God alone. If God uses a witness or a Sunday School teacher or a preacher, they are simply tools in his hands. God is the saver of souls. And so, salvation is exclusively God's work. And we should point out that even the sinner himself doesn't lend God a hand in his own salvation.

The sinner is utterly helpless to save himself. But this is not what most people think. Most people think that there is something they can do to make themselves acceptable to God?

In fact, many people think that God accepts them because they are pretty good people after all. Compared to some of the baser sorts of this world they suppose that they are pretty good and therefore they hope God accepts them in their relative goodness. Perhaps they think of all the people in the world, and in terms of being a good person they rank themselves somewhere in the top 50 %. Therefore, if God accepts the top 50%, then they will probably make it.

Others think they are accepted by God because they are very religious. They engage in church or religious ceremonies thinking that this will make them acceptable to God.

Others comfort themselves by simply believing that God accepts them the way they are. God is a loving God, they say, and he accepts them with all their weaknesses and all their sins.

But the simple truth of the matter is that God **does not** accept us the way we are. He utterly rejects us the way we are.

Example: I visited my sister's church a few years back and the Sunday School teacher stated that God loves the sinner but hates the sin. Now that's a nice sounding little platitude, isn't it. And it sounds like it might be right. But it reflects a prevalent attitude these days which says, "Don't worry, God accepts us the way we are."

God does **not** accept us the way we are. The Bible says,

"God hateth all workers of iniquity."

Psalm 5:5

Let me say, this life that we are living is not a probationary period anyway. We had our opportunity to prove ourselves and that was in the Garden of Eden. Adam was our representative and we were in him. Our chance hinged on Adam. And God said, in the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die. And Adam ate and Adam died and we died.

And this life that we lead some 6,000 years later is not a probation period. It is not a second chance. It is not an opportunity to prove to God that we should be accepted. It is not an opportunity to see if we can improve ourselves so that God will accept us. The truth is, we are living out the spiritual death that came upon us when Adam sinned.

God does not accept us. Furthermore, he is not going to accept any efforts we make to please him. There is no human work that we can do to undo our spiritual death.

But, truth be known, most people probably don't even think that they are lost. And if they do think they are lost, they don't think they are irretrievably lost. They think there is something they can do to be saved. But the Bible clearly teaches that man is hopelessly lost and there is nothing he can do. He is blind and he cannot make himself see. He is a hopeless sinner and he cannot stop sinning.

Example: Occasionally a little mole or a chipmunk or some other little varmint will fall in our pool. And when he does, there is no way out. The sides of the pool are too tall and eventually he gets sucked into the skimmer and he can only swim so long and then he drowns and I scoop him out of the skimmer the next morning.

And that is a pretty good illustration of our condition. We have fallen into a cesspool of sin. And there is no way to climb out. And we exist in a living death day by day and there is no way to save ourselves - no, not by any works that we can do.

Now, Abraham found that he could not gain acceptance by works. (See Rom. 4:1, 2)

David found that he could not gain acceptance by works. (Rom. 4:6)

Now if two of the greatest men of the Old Testament could not gain acceptance by works, then it is quite certain that no one else can either.

Now Romans chapter 3 is very discouraging for the natural man.

There is none righteous, no not one. (v.10)

Now the sinner usually says, "I'm pretty good." But God says,

There is none righteous, no not one.

And the sinner might say, "Well, I do some good things." But God says,

There is none that doeth good, no, not one. (v.12)

And the fact of the matter is that the whole world, is guilty before God (v.19) and it is very clear that this includes every single person for it says, *that every mouth may be stopped.*

And the sinner says, Ah, but I will obey the law and God will accept me.

But Paul says,

By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight. (v.20)

And furthermore, it says,

We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. (v.23)

Now here is why we are rejected by God. We come short of the glory of God.

And the question would be, “What is that standard called the glory of God?” And I would suggest it is the sum total of his character and his attributes. It is the goodness of God, the love of God, the grace of God, the justice of God, the immutability of God, the truthfulness of God, the utter lack of imperfection of God. All of that and much, much more is the glory of God.

And we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. (v.23)

It is our duty as his creatures to conform to the holy requirements of God. But, who can do it? Because of the sin nature in us, and because we are the creature and he is the Creator, there is a great gulf between us and God. And yet, some think there is something they can do to step over that gulf and make themselves acceptable to Him.

Example: It is like going to New York City and finding a pier there that juts out a few yards into the ocean. And you get yourself a running start and you run to the end of the pier and you leap and try to jump all the way across to the shores of the English Channel. You see how impossible that is. And it is even more impossible to attain unto the very glory of God. There is a great, impassable gulf between our unrighteousness and God’s righteousness.

And so, as far as human effort is concerned, there is no hope of justification. There is nothing we can do. Our very best efforts would fall woefully and hopelessly short.

So, can a man be justified?

Jesus told his disciples, “*With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*”

This morning we will be talking about the great doctrine of justification. First of all, I want you to understand that,

I. **Justification is a judicial act of God that declares the sinner acceptable to Him.**

Now remember that salvation is a great and massive work of God that has many parts. God does some of this work outside of us and he does some of this work inside of us. Last week we talked about conversion which is one of the first works that God does **in** us, after regeneration.

But justification is a work that God does **outside** of us. It is a legal declaration. It is a declarative judgment of God, if you will.

Example: At the end of a criminal trial, the Judge or the Jury makes a certain declaration. In a case that concluded last week, the jury declared that Casey Anthony was “not guilty,” according to the law.

Now, this declaration did not change Casey Anthony on the inside at all. It didn’t have the effect of making her a better person. It is something that was done outside of her. It affected her standing with respect to the law and, with respect to the murder charges, she was declared to be in good standing with the law. Though she may very well have been guilty in fact, the declaration by the jury declared her to be right with the law.

And justification is that work of God that is done outside of us whereby God declares that the penalty for our sin and guilt has been paid in full and that we have been credited with acceptable righteousness and therefore we are in good standing with his law.

Now I want you to see first from our text, that

II. We are justified freely.

Now this word freely is a translation of the Greek word “*dorion*.” And this word means “without a cause.”

I want to show you another place where this word is used. It is used in John 15:25. This is Jesus speaking and he says,

They hated me “dorion.” That is, they hated me, without a cause. There was nothing in me that should have caused them to hate me. They hated me freely. They hated me for no reason.

And our text says, “*Being justified freely.*” That is, there was nothing in us that caused our justification. There were no good works. There was no good character. There was no bit of goodness in us that caused God to justify us. He justified us without cause.

Now here is the great principle. Salvation in general and justification in particular is completely separate from merit. It has nothing to do with merit.

This is why Paul goes on to say in verse 24, God not only justifies us freely, but he does so, *by his grace*.

You see, works and grace are mutually exclusive concepts.

Example: If someone does yard work for me, then he essentially is putting me in debt to him. If he works 8 hours, then I am in debt to him for 8 hours worth of pay. And, when I pay him, that is not a gift, it's compensation for his work that he has done. But if he does no work for me at all, and I walk up to him and give him a hundred dollars, for no cause whatsoever, that is a pure gift.

Look at Romans 11:6 to see how works and grace are not compatible.

And if by grace, it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

There you have the mutual exclusivity of works and grace.

Example: It is kind of like saying, if it is round, then it is not square. And, if it is square, it is not round. Works and grace are mutually exclusive concepts.

And so, we see in our text that we are justified freely, by his grace.

This is the hardest concept ever to grasp – that we are saved by the sheer, free, grace of God. We always want to believe that we did something to secure his favor. The fact is, he chose us, he did redemptive work for us, he regenerated us and converted us and now we see that he justified us freely, by his grace.

Example: I had a friend in Bible School who would always say, “It’s all grace, brother. It’s all grace.”

I’m not sure I understood him then, but I think I’m beginning to some 40 years later.

Most people think they have to become more godly in order to be accepted by God. Isn't that how we think sometimes? “If I can just get better, God will accept me.”

Let me show you something, look at Romans 4:5.

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Who is it that God justifies? It is the ungodly. You see, you are ungodly when he makes the justifying declaration that your sins are paid in full. He doesn't wait for you to become godly. He justifies you in your ungodly condition.

What grace is this? It is pure grace. It is not grace mingled with works. It is grace indeed.

Now, I want you to see next that,

III. The ground and the cause of our justification is the redemptive work of Christ.

Now from our point of view, we have seen from our text that we are justified freely. That is, we did nothing to earn our justification. We didn't hand over some payment to God to be justified. However, there **was** a cost. There was a redemptive price paid for our justification. And our text says it was *the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*.

Our justification, though free to us, was not free to him. He paid the price. And so, there is something after all that caused our justification. It wasn't **our** work at all. But it was **his** work. And his work was the ground of our justification. And his death is so closely associated with our justification that the Bible says, in Romans 5:9, that we are "*justified by his blood.*"

Was there a cause of our justification? Not in us, for we were justified freely, by grace. But our justification **was** brought about by works – the works of Jesus. That's why our text says,

Being justified freely, by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Now you might ask, "Didn't my faith bring about my justification. Because the Bible says, we are justified by faith." (Romans 5:1) And this is your old human nature trying to suggest that it was your offering of faith that secured your justification. You have finally realized that you are lost. You have realized that your works will not make you acceptable to him. You have realized that your religion will not make you acceptable. But you think, maybe your faith will make you acceptable.

And I would remind you that you are justified freely, by his grace. Your faith is no more the ground of your justification than your works. Your faith (which, by the way, is given to you) is merely the gracious instrument through which you are moved from condemnation to justification. God channels justification through faith, but doesn't ground it upon faith. Our justification shall always be caused by the blessed work of our Savior and merely appropriated by the natural exercise of the spiritual gift of faith. True faith is not a work at all. It is not even a possibility in an unregenerate soul. But when God imparts life in a soul, he imparts that faith that lays hold of the Savior and leads to justification.

So the true ground and the cause of justification is nothing other than the redemptive work of Christ.

Do you see how free justification by the grace of God humbles the sinner and glorifies God? The sinner has nothing to boast about and God gets all the glory for justifying a helpless soul. (See Romans 3:27)

Now I want to discuss briefly,

IV. The elements of justification

When God justifies us, he actually does a considerable legal work for us. Now there was a great impediment that prevented us from being accepted by God. And this impediment was the record of sins against us. There was first and foremost, that first sin of Adam. And since Adam

was our representative, his sin counted against us. And then, there were all of our own sins, all of our lies and deceit, all of our sinful lusts and adulteries, all the wicked and selfish desires of our hearts. All of these were recorded against us. And we came up woefully short of the glory of God.

But God has somehow saved us from all of that and has rendered us justified in his sight. Let me show you how God justified you. First,

1. God forgave all of your past sins. (4:7)

How many sins did God wipe off of your ledger sheet? Ugly sins and embarrassing sins and hurtful sins and rebellious sins. And God wiped them away. And he gave you a clean slate.

And you say, that is a wonderful thing, but I still will be unacceptable to God because I have sinned again after he did all that for me and I surely will sin again in the future.

But look,

2. God promised not to impute sin to your account. (v.8)

Now if your past sins are forgiven and God will not charge you with any sins in the future, that means at least there won't be any negative debits on your account.

But even that is not quite enough to make you acceptable to God. There is a positive requirement to be accepted by him. You must have a righteousness that God will accept. And so, when God justified you,

3. God gave you righteousness (4:5, 6)

Now this righteousness that God gave you is no ordinary righteousness. It is a perfect righteousness. It is a righteousness that is humanly unattainable. It is a righteousness that is equivalent to the perfections found in Jesus. This is the only righteousness that God accepts. And when he justified you, he imputed the very righteousness of Christ to your account.

And so, in justification, God wipes the debit side of your account clean and casts your sins as far as the east is from the west. And he stamps the credit side of your account with the very righteousness of Jesus. What a perfect justification he has devised for us!

And now, I want you to see,

- V. The instrument of justification – not the ground, or the basis, or the cause of justification, but the conduit through which we are moved from condemnation to justification.

The great turning point in the history of your soul, is when you stand at the foot of Calvary and you look up at the blood of Jesus flowing down the cross, and miraculously, by the grace imparted to you, you believe that his blood counts for you and makes you acceptable to

God. At that moment you are justified, because you have believed in the only begotten Son of God and his redemptive work. It is that simple and it is that immediate.

Example: Abraham was 75 years old when he was first called by God to leave Haran and go into the land of Canaan. And God promised Abraham children. And Abraham waited and waited and finally Abraham and Sarah had virtually given up hope. And when Abraham was 99 years old, God appeared to him again. And the Bible says he took Abraham outside to look at the stars. And God told Abraham he would make his seed as numerous as the stars. And do you know what Abraham did? He believed God. He did the one thing he could do without doing anything. He believed God. And Abraham was justified on that day. For the Scriptures say, “He believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”

And so, the instrument of justification is pure and simple faith in the promise of God. God says, “Salvation is in my son. Dost thou believe? Then, thou shalt be saved.”

Example: There was a poor publican who beat on his breast and cried out, “Lord be merciful to me a sinner.” You see, he believed in the promise of God, the promise of mercy. And it says this man went home justified.

Example: There was a thief who hung dying on a cross next to Jesus. And while he hung there he simply believed. And he said, “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus said, “Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.”

How does one pass from condemnation to justification? Through the instrument of faith.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

1. You may never fully understand all the work of salvation that Jesus has done, but what you must understand is your certain condemnation without him. Without him you are condemned. Without him you are **hopelessly** condemned with no way of escape. Without him the law condemns and God condemns you. And without him you are **already** guilty. And furthermore, none of your works can ever undo your guilt. Your crimes are already committed and the Bible says, “All the world is guilty before God.”

2. To be justified, you must give up all hope of your own works and rely on the work of Another. You must have a conviction that Jesus performed work that satisfied the just requirements of God against you. Do you believe God when he says the work of Jesus was sufficient for forgiveness of your sins? Then you have done no less than Abraham when Abraham believed God and God counted it unto him for righteousness.

Finally, let me say that,

3. If you believe God and the promise of salvation that he has made through the redemptive work of his Son Jesus, then God will pronounce you just and he will treat you as though you are just. And he will treat you as though all the demands of his law have been satisfied as to you. Do you want God to treat you as a righteous person? Then, believe on his Son.

The Bible says,

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. That is, thou shalt be justified. And when that gavel comes down in the courtroom of heaven and declares you just by the blood of Christ, then you will turn with a grateful heart to your attorney.

And you will find that your attorney, that is, your heavenly advocate, is none other than Jesus himself. And you will throw your arms around him and you will weep for joy . . . for your sins will have been forgiven and you will be righteous before the law and before the holy Judge and you will be justified indeed.