

# JUSTIFICATION

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

Romans 3:24

## INTRODUCTION

In Luke 18:10-14 it says two men went up into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a publican. Now two things characterized the prayer of the Pharisee – He was loud and he was proud. In his mind he was already righteous.

But the prayer of the publican was very quiet. He stood afar off it says and he would not lift up his eyes. From the tone of the passage suspect that his voice was barely audible at all. And his prayer was with deep humility rather than with prided. And he beat on his breast and he said, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Now here is the outcome of his prayer. It says that the publican went down to his house justified.

Now I suppose that when the publican left his house that morning that he was not justified. But when he went home he was justified. The Pharisee went home in the same condition that he came. But this poor publican went home justified.

This morning we are going to take a quick look at this concept called justification. But before we do, I think we should fully understand that justification is only one part of the whole process of salvation. It is perhaps the part that stands out in the mind of the sinner. It is a most important part of salvation. But it is not the whole by any means.

Oftentimes we may ask someone, “When were you saved?” And what we mean is, “At what point in time were you converted? When did you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? What day was it when you recognized your sinful condition? What day did you beat on your breast and say, Lord be merciful to me a sinner? What day did you go home justified?”

But though this may be the day that stands out in the sinner’s mind, the Scriptures are clear that the sinner’s salvation began long before and will continue long after that day of justification.

We are studying Ephesians in the women’s Bible study on Tuesday mornings and we have barely begun the first chapter and Paul is telling us

about this great concept called salvation. And like most storytellers, Paul takes us back to the beginning to start the story. In fact, he takes us back before the beginning.

*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world . . .*

Paul says, "What a magnificent salvation we have. Let me tell you where it came from."

And he doesn't talk about justification, but he talks about election. This is the starting line. The finish line is with glorification and eternal joy on the back side of eternity, but the start is on the front side. And it says, he chose us before the foundation of the world. And in between the start and the finish, the great work of salvation is brought to pass by the sovereign power of our God.

Yes, using the words of the Scriptures themselves, Epesians 4:5 says,

*Having predestinated us unto adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.*

Now it is not our business this morning to set anchor here on these great doctrines of election and predestination, but let's take a few moments and just take note of the various parts of salvation so that we can see the big picture.

Paul, in Ephesians 1, says it starts with election. It says that he chose us in him, that is, in Christ. Before we were ever born, God chose us and placed us in Christ. He didn't choose the world in general, but he chose his people in particular.

Romans 9 says, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated . . . that the purpose of God according to election might stand."

Now election was before the foundation of the world. But then, in the course of history, we were born. And God's election unto salvation must be brought to pass in the course of time.

Now Jesus said, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John 6:44) There is a fundamental truth about every man who is born into this world. He will not come.

*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Sprit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.*

I Cor.2:14

So, if men in their natural condition will not come, then God must draw them. And God draws the elect with a powerful calling.

Hebrews calls it a heavenly calling. (Hebrews 3:1) It is not a general calling. It is not a powerless calling. But it is a calling full of the power of God. It is a great spiritual magnet that draws the elect away from the world and to God. Theologians refer to it as an effectual call.

Example: Now if you have a dog, sometimes you will go to the door and call him. But if he is like many dogs, if he is interested in something else, he will not come.

And sinners are interested in sins and they will not come.

But when the owner wants the dog to come, he goes out and puts a leash on the dog and brings him home. This is an effective call.

And God comes and gets us and calls us home with an effective call.

There are many other parts of salvation. There is regeneration. This is the act of God whereby he makes his elect alive. "Nicodemus, Ye must be born again." Regeneration is another exclusive act of God whereby the sinner is brought out of the grave of spiritual death and he is given newness of life.

With regeneration comes another great gift of God. God stirs up the heart with a godly repentance from sin and with a faith that believes God. Whereas before there was no disposition to believe, now the heart clings to the Word of God as the very word of life.

Ah, but God's salvation has barely begun. When the regenerate heart

believes in the atoning work of Christ, God justifies the sinner. There is a court of law in heaven and God takes the bench and he declares that the sinner is no longer subject to the guilt and penalty of the law. And the sinner is set free and he goes to his house justified.

During the course of life, God sanctifies the sinner by teaching the sinner about himself, by loving the sinner unconditionally, and by showering the sinner with grace time after time. And all of this is salvation just as much as the act of justification.

One day God will transform our bodies into incorruptible bodies. And he will save us further by introducing us to that great heavenly city which he has prepared for his elect.

So, you see that salvation is one long process.

See Romans 8:28-30.

This morning we are going to look briefly at one part of this process – the part that we call justification.

I. Justification is a work of God.

You will notice that our text says, “Being justified.” Like all of the other parts of salvation, justification is a work of God. It is something that God does for us. We cannot justify ourselves. We must be justified by God.

Example: Wouldn't it be silly if a criminal stood in the courtroom and announced that he was declaring himself not guilty. Why, the bailiff would tell him to shut up and sit down because the accused has no right to declare himself not guilty. It is the judge that has such a right.

And God has the right to justify whom he will. And if ever a sinner is justified, it is because God stood up in heaven and announced that the sinner is to be set free.

*Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision by faith.*

Romans 3:30

II. Justification is not a work of man.

The Pharisee thought he had justified himself. He said, "I thank you Lord that I am not and extortioner. I am not unjust. I am not an adulterer. I fast and I give my tithes.

But the Pharisee did not remember that no man is justified by works.

Even 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: Now what if I wanted to go to Europe. And, being rather naïve, I drove to the east coast and I found that there was an ocean in the way. And so, I take off running and I get up a head of steam and when I get to the edge of the water I leap as far as I can go. And I would find that I cannot leap all the way across the ocean. 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.*” (Mt.19:26)

**III. 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. But God does all the work.

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. Everyone remembers the OJ Simpson trial. And the jury declared that he was not guilty.**

Now, this declaration didn't necessarily change the person on the inside at all. It didn't have the effect of making him a better person. It is something that is done on the outside. It affected his standing with respect to the law and he was declared to be in good standing with the law. Though he may very well have been guilty in fact, the declaration by the jury declared him 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.

Paul said, “We are out from under the law.”

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

**II. Justification is done freely.**

*Being 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 “dorian.”* 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 in Romans 3:24 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.*

Salvation is completely unmeritorious. It says God justifies us 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, he converted us and now we see that he justified us freely, by his grace.

Does that make chill bumps go up and down your spine; to finally come to the realization that he has saved you by the sheer grace of God.

**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.

You stood in his courtroom as a doomed sinner. You stood there naked and undone. You stood before Almighty God in your unholy condition, and yet, he justified you.

What grace is this? It is pure grace. It is not grace mingled with works at all. You didn't coop your justification. It was not part God and part you. It was a holy God pardoning an unholy sinner. It was 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 something in us that caused 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.

Do you remember our study of faith in Hebrews. Faith is merely a receiving instrument. Faith does not cause God to act. Faith is not some meritorious work that compels God to do something. Faith merely receives what God has promised.

Our justification shall always be caused by the blessed work of our Savior and merely appropriated by the natural exercise of the 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.

IV. Free justification by grace humbles the sinner and glorifies God.

*Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.*

Romans 3:27

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)

Are you justified by the sheer grace of God? Then to God be the glory and to him alone.

V. The legal transaction 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 legally justified in his sight. Let me show you some of the legal transactions that resulted in your justification. 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)

Some people think that Jesus atoned for all of your sins that were committed before you were saved. But what about those committed after you are justified. God declares you “Not Guilty” and then you go out and sin again.

In Roman Catholicism you are required to perform works to be absolved to these sins after conversion. And if you have not worked off your debt, then you will spend time in a temporary hell called purgatory until your payment is complete.

But I tell you that the Scriptures teach no such thing.

Our passage this morning confirms that Lord will not impute sin!

And how thankful we are that our justification is from all of our sins, both past and future.

Now if our past sins are forgiven and God will not charge us 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 us acceptable to God. There is a positive requirement to be accepted by him. We must have a righteousness that God will accept. And so, when God justified us, he made one last legal transaction.

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

Now this righteousness that God gave us 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 us, he imputed the very righteousness of Christ to our 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,

VI. 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? And if thou believest, then, thou shalt be saved.”

**Example: That poor publican 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 be justified indeed.