

Justified And What It Means

Title: Innocent

Text: Romans 3:21-31

Introduction: My aim in this sermon is to open up what God did for us, even though we were in sin and rebellious. Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Webster’s Dictionary defines demonstrate as “a practical exhibition.” It can also be used as “to show beyond doubt, confirm, constitute proof.”

For context, Romans 3:9-18 define the whole of man, who we are and how we behave. Every single person born falls under this. You can be a “moralist” and you are still under this fact. You can put on the external righteousness, church membership, saying all the right phrases about God, but still under this truth.

POINT 1 - THE TRUTH OF THE LAW (VS. 19-20)

We see vs. 19 start with the “now we know” and it implies that whatever the law says, that’s the truth. We know the ole cliche’ which says, “that’s the law of the land.” Every person will give an account to the law. For not keeping the letter of the law. Of course no one can keep every single letter of the law, no matter how hard, or aware they are. Vs. 20 gives us this paramount truth, “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight.” Not a single person can keep every law. **NOTE:** You can’t keep the law even on your way home. You will not fully stop at a stop sign, and you may go one mile an hour over the speed limit. You will do something, no matter how close you live to the church to break the law.

The purpose of the law is to show you (vs. 20) how bad you are. It affirms Romans 3:9-18. By not being able to keep the law you see just how unfaithful you are. And God shows us this in the law, He reveals to us who we are, who we always have been and who we can’t be on our own. It is the word of God that shows us our sin, filth and despair.

Application: Here are the facts. We are not good. We can’t be good. We can’t do anything good. We don’t even acknowledge God. We don’t seek God. You have been indicated. We have been found guilty. No amount of pleading, begging or any attempt to make yourself good will work. There are no excuses. No matter how hard you have tried. No matter your intentions. Guilty.

POINT 2 - THE HOPE OF JUSTIFICATION AND WHAT IS IT?

What is a man to do? Nothing. God in His patience, forbearance and love, substituted a payment for sin. Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” No matter your intentions you will always be short of what is required. God gave the law to show you who you were, cf. Romas 3:20. Now He provides the remedy. Vs. 24-26 define this remedy. A justifiable substitution. A substitution for your life, one that is satisfying to God.

We are justified as a gift of God, by His grace, through redemption in Jesus Christ. Just what exactly is justification? According to Grudem’s Systematic Theology, “Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God, in which He (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in His sight.”¹ Thus we affirm vs. 28, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”

¹ Systematic Theology; Wayne Grudem, pp. 723

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POINT 3 - A LEGAL DECLARATION BY GOD

The verb justify in the New Testament (*dikaioo*) has a range of meaning, but the most common usage is to “declare righteous.” This is never more clear than in 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.” In other words, he doesn’t work for salvation, but believes. Romans 8:33 affirms that God declares us righteous, “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies.” Wayne Grudem notes, “to condemn anyone is to declare them guilty, the opposite of condemnation is to declare them not guilty.”²

POINT 4 - GOD IS THE SOLE ONE WHO CAN DECLARE JUSTIFICATION

God sent Christ to be the propitiation “the act of appeasing” our sin (vs. 25). This propitiation is the substitute satisfactory to God. Romans 8:1, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” David understood this in Psalms 103:12, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

Application: according to theological scholars, the mere aspect of the declaration of being justified simply makes us neutral before God, as Adam and Eve were before the fall. The second part of justification is that God doesn’t just declare us justified, we must be righteous in His sight.

POINT 5 - THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST DECLARED UPON US

There is a wonderful biblical words called impute. And by justification, God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us. It literally means “God thinks of Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, or regards it as belonging to us.”³ Stop to consider this for a moment. Considering Romans 3 and the declaration of no good in us, and now God sees us as He sees Christ.

Romans 4:3, “For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Furthermore, we see in Romans 5:17, “For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” Again, we see the imputation of righteousness to us.

There is another aspect of imputation that we see in Romans 3 as well. When Adam sinned he imputed sin to us. God viewed sin as belonging to us. We didn’t make the choice in the garden, we weren’t there, but because of this disobedience, it was imputed to us. Now consider this, when Christ suffered and died for our sins, our sin was imputed to Christ. God thought of our sin as belonging to Christ. Therefore, Christ paid the penalty, to atonement, the propitiation of our sin. And because of this, the sin of Adam was imputed to us, our sin was imputed to Christ, and the righteousness of Christ was imputed to us.

It’s not our own goodness that saves us. Paul tells the Corinthians of this in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.”

² Systematic Theology; Wayne Grudem, pp. 723, 724

³ Systematic Theology; Wayne Grudem, pp. 726

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NOTE: At the heart of the reformation was this huge difference between Roman Catholicism and the Protestantism. The Roman Catholic believes the believer cannot be sure they are in a state of grace. Unless you have received special revelation from God. Furthermore, they believe **God's justification is a mix between God's grace and our own merit as well**. Having this view also will distort other key doctrines such as **regeneration** and **sanctification**.

POINT 6 - THE JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

This doctrine is **cemented in the work of God not ours**. Romans 1:18-3:20 define that no one will ever be able to **justify themselves before God on their own**. This is found in Romans 3:20, "**because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight**." Let's go back to Romans 3:23-24 to see we are all sinners and by God's gift of grace we are justified. **Grace is literally "unmerited favor."** We are **completely unable to justify ourselves**. We are **completely** unable to **earn God's favor**. Thus, **justification is a work solely of God**, apart from our **work**, **given to us** as a **gift** with **no strings attached**.

Ephesians 2:8-9, "**For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.**" Titus 3:7, "**so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**" NOTE: **God did not have any obligation to impute our sin to Christ or His righteousness to us**. It was only because of the **unmerited** favor of **God** that He did this.

But why faith? This is a key element. **In fact, faith is the opposite of trusting in ourselves**. When we come to faith in Christ we are essentially saying "I give up." **I won't depend on my good works, or my own merits because I know I cannot be righteous before God on my own**. This alone is one of the fundamental tenets of the **reformation** and why it's faith alone ~~and faith plus one work merit we do~~.

CONCLUSION

The practical implication of justified by faith is we can share such hope with unbelievers who think they have done "too much" or "gone too far." It removes the **thinking** of you **have to do** or **earn something**. It also gives us the hope that **God will not make us pay for the penalty of sins forgiven on Christ's merits**. We still may **suffer** in this **body** as a **believer**, and we will **endure God's correction** as well. But God won't take **vengeance** on us because we have been **justified by Christ's righteousness and He sees that**. In other words in the **courtroom** of **God's** justice we are **declared "not guilty."**

If you think of yourself standing before God on judgment day, would you think you have been faithful enough, done enough or having the righteousness of Christ imputed to our account? The hope of being fully justified by the righteousness of Christ affirms our text in Romans 3:27-28, "**Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.**" **Can we boast in what we have done? No**. We have confidence today that God is faithful and we rejoice He has justified us. May that be evidenced in our life.