

Justification by Faith

This last week we experienced a day of parties, costumes, candy, and celebrations for many offices and young people. The greater, less celebrated occasion was that of Reformation Day. Five hundred years to the day on Oct. 31, 1517 Martin Luther nailed his '95 Theses' on the door of the Wittenberg castle. The Catholic church had been selling 'indulgences' in order to pay for the construction of the Cysteine Chapel. Indulgences were certificates of forgiveness which people could buy for a price, which were offered as ways to get family members and loved ones out of purgatory, or at least shorten their time. Luther's Theses contained 95 corrections against the false teachings of the Church, indulgences being one of them.

Another aspect of this had to do with Luther's timing. The day before "All Saints Day," when a large amount of relics would be sold in the Wittenberg castle. Luther was against this fraudulent and deceptive money scam, since people were promised forgiveness and spiritual blessings for possessing relics.

Luther's own conversion, along with the movement he began was all about the doctrine of Justification by faith. Verses like Romans 4:3 motivated Luther's life, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Paul summarizes several points leading to Justification by faith

Rom. 3:19-24

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰because **by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.** ²¹But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,** ²⁴**being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus...**

- ❖ All men are sinners and in need of righteousness. Vs. 23
- ❖ Keeping the Law does not make anyone righteous. Vs. 20
- ❖ Apart from the Law men are made righteous by faith in Christ. Vs. 24

Chapter five states with clarity that men are justified by their faith.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

Today I would like to highlight Justification by faith.

Luther's legacy: The Reformation, which was essentially a return to biblical exposition and justification by faith –

Nathan Ryan writes,

“Luther's Theses set in motion a transformation of the Church and a personalized faith by sola fide and sola scriptura (salvation by faith alone and scripture as infallible).”

Luther was a monk and a teacher and yet did not understand salvation.

R. C. Sproul explains Luther's own account of his conversion:

The English word *justification* came from the Latin word *justificare*.

And it came from the Roman judicial system. And the

term *justificare* is made up of the word *justus*, which is justice or righteousness, and the verb, the infinitive *facare*, which means to make. And so, the Latin fathers understood the doctrine of

justification is what happens when God, through the sacraments of the church and elsewhere, [make unrighteous people righteous.](#)

But Luther was looking now at the Greek word that was in the New Testament, not the Latin word. The word *dikaios, dikaiosune*, which didn't mean to make righteous, but rather to *regard* as righteous, to *count* as righteous, to **declare as righteous**. And this was the moment of awakening for Luther. He said, “You mean, here Paul is not talking about the righteousness by which God Himself is righteous, but a righteousness that God gives freely by His grace to people who don't have righteousness of their own.”

And so Luther said, “*Woa, you mean the righteousness by which I will be saved, is not mine?*” It’s what he called a *justitia alienum*, an alien righteousness; a righteousness that belongs properly to somebody else. It’s a righteousness that is *extra nos*, outside of us. Namely, the righteousness of Christ. And Luther said, “When I discovered that, I was born again of the Holy Ghost. And the doors of paradise swung open, and I walked through.”¹

When I was younger I had the privilege to sit under a great theology professor, Stanton Richardson, at St. Paul Bible College; he not only taught theology but wrote the textbooks. Concerning this doctrine of Justification Richardson wrote,

“Justification, according to Bible usage, is the act of counting, declaring or pronouncing one righteous and free from guilt and exposure to punishment. The sinner is declared righteous before God on account of the finished substitutionary work of Jesus. This declaration is made upon the condition of faith in the blood of Christ to propitiate God and cleanse man from his sins. The declaration is made in heaven, and is available to the sinner the moment he receives the truth of Christ as his substitute. As a result his guilt and penalty are removed and he is restored to favor with God.”²

If we were to look a little deeper into justification we would see that two things were involved in justification: 1) the remission of the penalty, and 2) restoration to God’s favor.

1) The remission of the penalty.

As a sinner the penalty for sin is death, spiritual, physical, and eternal. (Gen. 2:16,17; Rom. 5:12-14; 6:23)

¹ R. C. Sproul’s account in an article on Luther’s conversion, *Justification by Faith Alone: Luther and Roman’s 1:17*. (Nathan Bingham, Ligonier Resources, Oct. 25, 2017).

² Stanton W. Richardson, M. A., *Studies in Biblical Theology, Vol. 2.*, (St. Paul: St. Paul Bible College, 1969), p. 62.

If a man is to be saved this penalty must first be removed. It was removed by and in the death of Christ, who bore the punishment of our sins in his own body on the tree (Is. 53:5,6; 1 Pet 2:24).

Since Christ has borne man's penalty for sin, God now remits (*cancel*s) it in the case of him who believes on Christ.

“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.” (Acts 13:38,39).

“Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who **justifies**” (Rom. 8:33)

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Cor. 5:21)

2). Restoration to favor

The remission of the penalty is one thing; restoration to favor is another.

Hodge says: “A pardoned criminal may be restored to his civil rights, so far as the penalty remitted involved their forfeiture, but he is not reconciled to society. He is not restored to favor. Justification, however, does secure a restoration to the favor and fellowship of God we become the sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26)” (Hodge's Theology - op. cit., III p. 128)

A man is restored by two things:

- a. The forgiveness of sins and b. the imputation of righteousness.
- a. **Forgiveness of sins:** Christ's death provided for man's forgiveness

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul wrote,

In whom we have redemption through His blood,
the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (1:7).

To the Colossians Paul states,

And you being dead in your sins; having forgiven you all trespasses”
(Col. 2:13).

Again in Romans 4:7,

“Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered.”

b. Imputation of righteousness.

Paul wrote of the gospel,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 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.’

(Rom. 1:16-17).

Notice the contrast between the the first Adam and Christ, the second Adam:

“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”

(Rom. 5:17)

In other words, the sinner must not only be **pardoned for his past sins**, but also supplied with a **positive righteousness** before he can have fellowship with God. This need is supplied in the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer.

How is a believer justified?

1. Justification is not by the works of the Law

Rom. 3:20

“because by the works of the Law no flesh will be **justified** in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”

2. Justification is by the grace of God.

Rom. 3:23-24

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; being **justified** as a **gift** by His **grace** through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;”

Titus 3:7

“so that being **justified** by His **grace** we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

The source of justification

Justification originates in the heart of God. Realizing not only our lack of righteousness, but also our inability to attain it, He in His kindness decided to provide a righteousness for us. It was grace that led Him to provide it; it was His mercy to our misery.³

3. Justification is by the blood of Christ.

The blood is the “basis” of our justification:

Rom. 5:9

“Much more then, having now been **justified** by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”

Heb. 9:22

“And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

Jesus took our place as our substitute – His life for ours. Our sins were not excused but punished in the person of Christ our substitute. The resurrection of Christ is one proof that His death on the cross has satisfied God’s claim against us.

Rom. 4:25

“He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our **justification**.”

4. Justification is by faith.

Many Scriptures state that our justification is by faith.

So the results of justification are applied to us by faith.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, having been **justified** by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

The condition of justification: faith in Christ.

³ Op. cit., Richardson, p. 65

Rom. 10:10

“for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”

Gal. 2:16

“nevertheless knowing that a man is not **justified** by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be **justified by faith** in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be **justified**.”

Gal. 3:24

“Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be **justified by faith**.”

Justification leads to righteous living.

Righteous living is the result not the cause of justification.

John wrote,

“Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.”

(1 John 3:7)

These Scriptures are not about theology, they're about God's promises to all us us who have seen our need for God's forgiveness and gift of righteousness.

How are we justified?

Application Steps: ABC

A – Admit that I am a sinner

Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:9

B – Believe that Christ died on the cross for my sins and was raised from the dead.

C – Confess Christ as my Savior and Lord as I surrender my life to His control.