

Twelve Great Truths about the Doctrine of Justification

Romans 3:21-31

Introduction: 1) In Job 9:2 one of those ultimate questions in life is asked, “how can a man be righteous before God?” This is a question that confronts all of us. It is a question that should concern each of us. Can you, can I, be right with God? To say it another way, how can we ever hope to be accepted in eternity by God when all of us have scorned and rejected His infinite worth and glory so fully by treating Him as if He had less worth than a weekend hobby? Can we be right with God after all this?!

2) To that question of the ages Paul provides a resounding “Yes!” A man, a woman, a boy, a girl, anyone and everyone can be right with God when, as v. 24 wonderfully summarizes, they are justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus!”

3) –The doctrine of justification is one of the great doctrines of the Bible.

–It is a uniquely Pauline doctrine.

–It is a doctrine that was at the heart of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century launched by men like Martin Luther and John Calvin.

–It is a doctrine that separates not only Protestant from Catholic, it is a doctrine that separates works salvation from grace salvation, that separates what I do salvation from who I trust salvation.

4) Now, what do we mean by this idea of justification? In its simplest form it means “to be declared righteous in Christ in our standing before God.” The wonderful evangelical scholar J.I. Packer helps us and expands on this definition. Justification is “God’s act of remitting the sins of guilty men, and accounting them righteous, freely, by His grace, through faith in Christ, on the

ground, not of their own works, but of the representative, law keeping and redemptive blood shedding of the Lord Jesus Christ on their behalf” (*New Bible Dictionary*, 637).

Transition: From this excellent definition and description, let us walk thru this text and explore 12 marvelous aspects of this glorious doctrine. Of this text John Calvin said, “There is not probably in the whole Bible a passage which sets forth more profoundly the righteousness of God in Christ.” Leon Morris said of 3:21-26; it is “possibly the most important single paragraph ever written” (*Romans*, 173).

I. Justification of sinners cannot be obtained by good works. 3:21

- “But not” marks a major turning point in Romans. It draws a contrast with 1:18-3:20, and in particular 3:9-20.” The righteousness of God “reconnects us with the theme of Romans in 1:16-17 which says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, the just shall live by faith.”
- Humans apart from Christ are spiritually depraved, dead, lost, rebellious and without hope of a right relationship with God. Note 3:10-13, 18, 20. We are not good or neutral. We are bad!
- We love sin not God.
- Our hearts are idol factories.
- We do not love God’s law and we could not meet its demands if we wanted to. We are completely incapable of living the lives God wills for us to live. Our default answer to the will and ways of God is “No!”

- Romans 1:18-3:20 unveiled the terrible wrath of God. Romans 3:21-5:21 unveils the marvelous grace of God.
- We need justification apart from religious and moral obedience and God in grace thru Christ has provided it!
- Curtis Vaughn of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary: “God’s way of giving men right standing with Himself-is in no way dependent on the law, is not earned by fulfillment of its requirements” (p.45). Mark Dever says of our hope of salvation, “God predicted it, did it, and then he interprets and explains it” (“*Propitiation*”, 115).

II. Justification of sinners was promised to us by God.

3:21

- God’s way of justifying sinners is not a new or novel thing.
- God promised a coming deliverer in Genesis 3:15, the *protoevangelium* (the first proclamation of the gospel). There is a marvelous portrait of Him that is continually unfolded throughout the whole of the Old Testament (ie, the Law and the Prophets) that reaches a beautiful peak in a text like Isaiah 53 and the *Suffering Servant of Yahweh*. Indeed Isaiah 53:11 says, “The Righteous One, My Servant, will justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.”
- God’s way of justifying sinners has always been the same: by faith in the promise of God! Old Testament saints looked forward to Christ. New Testament believers look back to Christ.
- Yes, it was always by faith! There is no contradiction in God!
 - ❖ Genesis 15:6 says, “And he [Abraham] believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” (See Rom 4:1-4; 9-25). The Law!
 - ❖ Psalm 32 and David are cited also in Rom 4:5-8 as evidence.

- ❖ Habakkuk 2:4 says, “Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.” The Prophets!
- God promised to do for us what we could never do for ourselves! And Jesus tells us in John 5:39 and Luke 24:27,44 all of scripture (the Old Testament when he spoke) testifies of Him! God promised a justifying Savior was coming!

III. Justification of sinners results in a right relationship with God. 3:21-22

- The word “righteousness” appears in Romans 35 times and is in the Greek language related to the word “justify.” The phrase “righteous of God” is found 4 times in our text (3:21, 22, 25, 26). It is an aspect of the character and glory of God. It speaks of the just and acceptable standard of God that He extends to sinful and undeserving sinners. In other words it is a righteousness coming from God to us. It is God’s way of giving unworthy sinners a right standing and status before Him as His righteousness is in some amazing way given to us!
- John Piper, “The acquittal of the guilty takes place on the basis of a divine transaction that happens in the experience of Jesus....Something happened in the death of Jesus that is so stupendous that it now serves as the basis for the acquittal of millions and millions of sinners who trust Christ.” (9-7-80).

IV. Justification of sinners is only thru faith in Jesus Christ. 3:22, 28

- Faith is mentioned 8 times in this text and 38 times in Romans! It is the instrument or means whereby one is saved. It is noted that Martin Luther wrote 2 words in his Bible as a young Augustinian monk: *Sola Fide* (faith alone).
- Faith is a confident trust that involves both the mind (knowledge) and the heart (will).

- Faith does not save! Christ saves! “Faith in faith”, “keep the faith” are nonsense! Faith must have an object and the object of saving, justifying faith is Jesus Christ! V. 22 → faith in the *person* of Jesus Christ that gives us a right standing before God. V. 25 → faith in his blood atonement (His *work*)
- Again, my friend Mark Dever gets it exactly right, “we need to know that there is no salvation apart from despair of our self-righteousness. If you are treasuring hope of your own righteousness before God, you have no room in your heart to treasure the righteousness of Christ as your only hope. Christ is not one among many options. You cannot have him as just one part of a mixed portfolio of religious trust. The only way to have faith in Christ is to realize your complete and utter need of him. We cannot be saved until we realize this. Jesus cannot be our help until we realize we are helpless. We will not see him until we acknowledge our spiritual blindness. We will not hear him until we know our rejection of his Words. We will not live until we have known and acknowledged our spiritual deadness. Conviction of sin always precedes conversion.” (p. 119).
- In Ezekiel 33:11 God says, “I do not delight in the death of the wicked.” Justified by faith and faith alone, God gladly and with great delight reckons His righteousness to guilty and undeserving sinners when we trust in His Son.
- In the cross God is saying to sinners, “Trust my Son. Run to my Son. Cast yourself on my Son as your only hope.”
- Jesus is my plan A. I have no plan B!

V. Justification of sinners is something every person needs. 3:22-23

- Sin is an impartial assailant, a universal “grim reaper!” It longs to capture all.

- No difference: it preys on all regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, social status or religious affiliation.
- All (3X) in vs. 22-23
- Sinned – missed the mark, broken the law, rebelled against God. Piper: “Sinning is always a valuing of something in the world more than God. It is a belittling of His glory. It’s dishonoring His name. (3-22-92).
- Fall short – fall behind, come up short, lack, are found destitute. This is our condition.
- Glory of God – His perfections, standards flowing from His majestic awesomeness and splendor. Because of sin, we fall short of reflecting the glory of God and conforming to His image. (Oh, but note Col 1:15 and one who does!)
- The means of justification is the same for all because the need of all is the same. All of us stand spiritually and morally bankrupt before a holy and glorious God apart from justifying faith in Jesus. Again, Piper says, “All sin is despising of God and His glory. All sin is a preference for the fleeting pleasures of the world over the everlasting joy of fellowship with God. You demean God’s glory....This is the meaning of sin – failing to love God’s glory above everything else.” (3-15-92).

VI. Justification of sinners is by grace thru redemption in Christ. 3:24

“Justification” is a legal term from the law courts. It speaks of our new status as righteous men and women before the Judge of the universe. We might summarize its vital components in 4 concise statements:

- 1) Justification is declared by God.
- 2) Justification is accomplished by God.

- 3) Justification is received by faith.
 4) Justification is evidenced by good works.

Being justified freely by His grace – The verb is passive. It is something God does for us that we cannot do for ourselves. It is a gift that cannot be earned. A gift we do not deserve. You cannot buy your justification! No amount of anything can purchase it.

Some form of the word justify occurs 6 times in vs. 20-30. It is a key idea in both Romans and Galatians. 27 of its 39 occurrences (70%) as a verb are in the writings of Paul. 58 of its 91 as a noun (64%) are in Paul. It has both a positive and negative idea.

—Negative: God sees me just as if I'd never sinned.

—Positive: God sees me just as if I'd always obeyed Him perfectly. And Paul says it is by grace (95x in Romans). God's Riches at Christ's Expense!

—Important to note: Paul does not mean we become in and of ourselves actually righteous for we are not. The process whereby we grow in holiness and righteous is called sanctification. Justification leads to and makes possible our sanctification. The two ideas are related but he kept distinct. The following chart can help us.

A Comparison of Justification and Sanctification

JUSTIFICATION	SANCTIFICATION
Justification is by grace.	Sanctification is by grace.
Justification is instantaneous.	Sanctification is a life-long process.
Justification is by faith.	Sanctification results in faithfulness.
Justification is not of works.	Sanctification includes good works.
Justification concerns Christ's imputed righteousness.	Sanctification concerns my growing in righteousness.
Justification involves my position in Christ.	Sanctification involves my practice in Christ.

Justification considers what God has done.	Sanctification considers what I am doing.
Justification is God's commitment to me.	Sanctification is my service to God.
Justification requires obedience to one command; to believe the Gospel	Sanctification requires obedience to all of Christ's commands.
Justification <u>focuses</u> on the cross which Jesus took up once and for all.	Sanctification <u>focuses</u> on the cross which I am to take up daily.
Justification is finished at the moment of faith.	Sanctification is not finished until I go to be with the Lord.

So in justification he means we are now regarded as righteous, declared righteous because when God sees us, He sees the righteous of Christ imputed to us! He counts all our sins forgiven: past, present and future! Marcus Loane, a former archbishop of Sydney, puts it this way: "The voice that spells forgiveness will say: 'You may go, you have been let off the penalty which your sins deserve.' But the verdict which means acceptance [justification] will say: 'You may come; you are welcome to all my love and my presence.'" (Stott, *Romans*, 110).

Redemption – 1) Our justification comes at no cost to us, but it was purchased at great cost to God! Indeed the price magnifies the wonder and greatness of the grace.

2) Redemption notes a releasing brought about by the payment of a price. It is the language of the Exodus and also of the common marketplace in Paul's day. For the justified sinner, redemption is a deliverance from the guilt and consequences of sin made possible by the blood payment of Jesus Christ. The bloody death of the sinless Son of God freed us from the imprisonment of sin and shattered the chains of our guilt.

VII. Justification of sinners is possible thru a blood satisfaction. 3:25

C.E.B Cranfield said that it is here that we discover "the innermost meaning of the cross" (*Rom.* Vol. 1, 213).

- Propitiation – 1) to atone, have mercy. The idea is that Jesus by his death (His blood) satisfied the wrath of God and thereby turned it away from us as it was poured out on Him!

2) God saw His glory despised and rejected by sinners, by you and me. He saw His worth and value made light of and His great Name dishonored and profaned by our sins. But...rather than vindicate His value and glory by slaying sinners and pouring out His wrath on them, He instead slayed His Son and poured out His wrath on Him!
- By His blood – it was a death, a murder, a bloody and brutal thing. And who did it? The Jews? The Romans? You and me? Yes! But, read the text!

Whom God set forth – put on public display and exhibition. God did it! God set His Son before the whole world and poured out His wrath on Him at the cross as an incontrovertible display of His grace and love for sinners. God killed His Son instead of you and me! God demanded satisfaction and God made satisfaction. There are no pagan overtones of our appeasing an angry deity! Listen to how John Stott puts it: “It would be hard to exaggerate the differences between the pagan and the Christian views of propitiation. In the pagan perspective, human beings try to placate their bad-tempered deities with their own paltry offerings. According to the Christian revelation, God’s own great love propitiated his own holy wrath through the gift of his own dear Son, who took our place, bore our sin and died our death. Thus God himself gave himself to save us from himself.” (p. 115, underlining mine).

- ❖ In the Christian faith the God who is holy and just and who demanded a satisfaction for sin is Himself the one who provided it. As Isaiah 53:6 & 10 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all....Yes it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief.”
- The Lord Jesus is our propitiation, our satisfaction with the Father. Out of love for the glory of God and the good of sinners like all of us, Jesus absorbed the full measure of the wrath of God that was rightfully ours. He experienced our hell for us!

VIII. Justification of sinners in Christ demonstrates God’s righteousness. 3:25-26

- The penal substitutionary death of Jesus that satisfied the wrath of God and made it possible to justify sinners is a clear vindication of the righteous character of God.
- The basic thrust of vs. 25b-26 is something like this: the death of God’s Son on the cross as a payment for sin served to vindicate how God had dealt with sin in the past prior to the cross. In His forbearance He had, for a time, suspended or postponed the pouring out of His wrath on sinners. It seemed, at least for a time, that sin was not as big a deal to Him as some may have thought.
- Again Curtis Vaughn says it so well, “His justice, it seemed to them, slumbered in the face of wicked deeds which obviously deserved punishment. The cross however, stands as the divine vindication of the righteousness of God in reference to His treatment of sins committed in the foregoing ages of the world” (p. 49).

- God therefore in the cross has demonstrated His righteousness. God therefore in the cross has demonstrated that He is just. God therefore in the cross has demonstrated He justifies anyone who trusts in Jesus and Jesus alone as their justification before God. The atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus made it possible and visible to all that the justification of sinners does not compromise the moral character of God. He has and will deal with sin. Do you doubt this? Then look to the cross!
- Once more we see the truth: “The person who has Jesus plus nothing has everything. And, the person who has everything minus Jesus actually has nothing.”

IX. Justification of sinners thru Christ excludes any personal boasting. 3:27

- Verses 27-31 highlight what some have called the “grand results” of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. It is for the glory of God alone!
- We are saved and justified by God and grace not by man and works! We are saved by faith in Jesus not obedience to the law whether written in Scripture or on our hearts (Rom 1:18-3:8).
- Therefore any personal boasting of “God, I deserve heaven” is excluded, shut out and shut down.
- God hates pride. Why? 1) It caused both the fall of Lucifer and Adam. 2) It is the root cause of sin. 3) It is the greatest problem of the human race. 4) It suppresses the truth that God is the greatest reality in all the universe. 5) It turns humans made in God’s image into fools. 6) It says I can save myself without God’s help. 7) It says God really did not need to kill His Son for our salvation.

- Works call attention to the worker and what he does. Faith calls attention to the one we trust and what He does!
- Adrian Rogers said, “Until you come to the end of you, you won’t come to the beginning of Him... Salvation is not rooted in the merit of man but in the mercy of God.” (*Adrianisms*, 184-85).
- “If you come swaggering to God as a prince, you’ll go away as a beggar. But if you come as a beggar, you will go away as a prince” (Ibid., 187).

X. Justification of sinners thru Christ is something God provides for all. 3:29

- God saves all sinners the same way. There is not a Jewish plan and a Gentile plan, or any other artificial distinctive a fallen human mind might devise.
- All human persons must come by way of the cross of Jesus Christ or they do not come at all.
- There is only one way to be justified by and with God, but anyone can come!
- Here is the missionary impulse of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. The word translated “Gentiles” is the Greek word “*ethne*.” In Matt 28:19 we are told to go and make disciples of all the “nations.” The word is “*ethne*!”
- Since He is the God of the nations we must go to the nations!
- John Piper: “That God is the God of the nations means he is ready to justify anyone, anywhere, from any nation through faith alone in Jesus Christ. There is one way of salvation for all the nations. God is God of the nations because he has made a way for them all – the same way and it is a way of grace.” (6-13-99).

XI. Justification of sinners thru Christ is a testimony to the oneness of God. 3:30

- The one way of salvation is grounded in the fact that there is only one God!
- Since there is only one God to whom all persons must give an account, the means of justification is the same for all.
- One God = one way.
One Savior = one way.
One Sacrifice = one way.
- The text clearly implies that all religions are not the same. The text clearly implies that all religions are not true. The text clearly implies that all religions do not lead to heaven.
- Crucial point: we do not worship 3 Gods but 1! The mystery of the Trinity, and it is a mystery, will always be a stumbling block, particularly for Jews and Muslims and secularists.
- However, out of love we must affirm the exclusivity of the gospel and the truth that Jesus is the only way to the one true and living God.

XII. Justification of sinners thru Christ establishes the goodness of God's law. 3:31

- God's law is good and perfect. The problem was never with the law. The problem was with us! God's means of justification establishes the goodness and purpose of the law.
- A perfect law honoring Savior whose righteousness is imputed to us by faith honors the law, vindicates the law and establishes the law!
- Further, the law of faith always leads to the law of love and the law of service!
- The Reformers taught

- We are saved not by “faith + works” but by a “faith that does work.”
- We are saved by “faith alone” but not by a faith that is alone.”
- So Paul says the law is rendered null and void by faith? No way!
 - Accepted, I delight to obey!
 - Loved, I long to serve God and others!
- I think Romans 13:8-10 nails what Paul means to hammer home in our theological understanding: “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

Conclusion:

- I saw the glorious and gracious nature of the imputed righteousness of Christ in justification by faith alone apart from any works put on beautiful display in the salvation of my mother-in-law as she lay dying on her death bed in May 2005. If salvation was by works she literally did not have a prayer. Yet, she did, the prayers of a daughter who never gave up on her. One week before she died, in simple child-like faith, she trusted in Jesus and Jesus alone to put to her spiritual account His perfect justifying righteousness. And, He did (!) as a marvelous display of the truth that anyone can be “justified freely by His grace thru the redemption that is in Christ Jesus thru faith in Him.
- Works religion says I obey so God will accept me.
Faith religion says God loves me and so I will trust Him.

- John Piper, “at the heart of our gospel stands the sentence: God justifies the ungodly who trust Him.” (9-7-80)
- Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God thru our Lord Jesus Christ.”