

# **You are made right before God only by Faith in Jesus**

## **The Doctrine of Justification by Faith**

By: Mike Porter

### **I. A Description of Justification/ How Justification is Achieved:**

At the end of Paul's introduction to *Romans 1:1-17*, Paul states the main message of the book of Romans, that the message of the gospel, or "good news" of Christ is God's salvation to everyone who believes in Christ. We all have a need before the righteous Judge of the Universe to be righteous or we will be condemned for our transgressions of His holy laws. Justification means to render just or innocent. Paul stated that in the gospel God has established a righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ,

"As it is written, 'the just shall live by faith.'" (*Romans 1:16-17*)

Thus justification is achieved through faith in Jesus Christ apart from works.

To understand the need for justification by faith, Paul laid out an argument of the futility of depending on our own good works and obedience to a set of laws to obtain justification before a holy God. All the religions of the world other than Biblical Christianity seek to obtain justification by works. Paul demonstrated in *Romans 1:18-3:21* that "no one is righteous" (*Romans 3:10*), and that the Law of God which is so righteous, holy and pure only condemns us- it can never save us. Paul shows firstly that God's wrath is being revealed against all ungodliness (rebellion against God) and unrighteousness (transgressing against our fellow man) (*Romans 1:18-32*). God has plainly made known His power, wisdom and sovereignty to every man through creation (*Romans 1:20-21*) and has written His divine law on their hearts (*1:21, 2:14-15*), yet man has completely rebelled against Him. Secondly, to the moralist who judges others, Paul reminds them that they too are guilty, having violated the spirit of the law (*2:1-16*) and will have to face a Holy God who will judge the secrets of what is in the heart of man. Thirdly, Paul demonstrated that the Jew, though he has the law and the sign of circumcision, is just as guilty, for it is those who fully keep the law that will be justified before a holy God (*2:17-3:8*). Paul then made a blanket summary that all men are condemned, that none are righteous and all are filthy and ungodly before a Holy God (*3:1-20*). Man has sought through obedience to the commandments of God to be justified, but these laws, instead of justifying man, demonstrate to the whole world that all are guilty. The Commandments, rather than justifying man, show man's utter sinfulness. (*3:19-20, 7:7,13*) Thus Paul begins his masterful painting of mankind and salvation in the darkest possible terms, that man is left without a scrap of hope in himself of justifying himself before God's perfect standard of judgment.

Paul then sweeps the amazing gospel of justification by faith across the dark canvass, illuminating it for all to see against the backdrop of the darkness. "But now" (*Romans 3:21*) are the words of brilliant light that flood the dark canvas.

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed” (*Romans 3:21*).

The law doesn't help this righteousness, rather, the law shows us that our works are wicked and that there is no hope or assistance in our good works to be saved.

“The righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood.” (*Romans 3:22-25*)

Justification comes from God, declaring us as pardoned before God's Holy Law and imparting to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is all accomplished by faith- a faith that Jesus Christ is the Author and Finisher of (*Hebrews 12:2*). God does all the work and we simply rest in it by faith and rejoice in the grace (the undeserved favor) that has been abundantly provided for us. He has redeemed us- purchasing us out of the slavery of sin, hell, judgment and condemnation, and delivering us into righteousness, eternal life, forgiveness and the Kingdom of Heaven. All this was accomplished because Christ became a propitiation for us- all of God's righteous wrath toward our sin was poured out on Jesus Christ who bore the penalty for our sin in our place.

God is just. In His forbearance (*3:25*), He patiently held back on His wrath, waiting for the time His Son would bear the sins of the world,

“that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (*3:26*)

Without Jesus taking our sins upon Himself, God could not be just in forgiving us- transgression of the Law requires justice, and that justice is death. Thus our justification is at the exclusion of boasting (*3:27*). A man is justified completely by faith and not at all by the law (*3:28*). This justification is for all, Jew and Gentile alike, through faith in Christ Jesus (*3:29*). The Law is upheld by this doctrine of justification by offering Christ as the payment for all sin. He paid the price of the law through being cursed in our place on that tree.

Because of our right standing before God through faith, we have peace with Him (*Romans 5:1*). We've gone from being enemies of God and children of wrath to becoming adopted into His family, forgiven, becoming His adopted children and no longer under condemnation or wrath.

## **II. Justification: a Greek Word Study**

The word for “justified” is “dikaioo” which means according to Strong's: “to render (i.e. show or regard as) just or innocent”<sup>1</sup>. MacArthur states,

“This verb, and related words from the same Greek root, occur some 30 times in Romans and are concentrated in *2:13-5:1*. This legal or forensic term comes from the Greek word

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<sup>1</sup> Strong's, NT1344

for “righteous” and means “to declare righteous.” This verdict includes: pardon from the guilt and penalty of sin, and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer’s account, which provides for the positive righteousness man needs to be accepted by God. God declares a sinner righteous solely on the basis of the merits of Christ’s righteousness. God imputed a believer’s sin to Christ’s account in His sacrificial death, and He imputes Christ’s perfect obedience to God’s law to Christians. The sinner receives this gift of God’s grace by faith alone.”<sup>2</sup>

An example today for justification would be in a courtroom with a man pronounced guilty and a sentence is determined as a fine. The defendant doesn’t have any money to pay the fine so he is about to be taken to prison when a person steps in and pays the fine in their place. Justice has been served- the fine has been paid, and the defendant is free to go. Jesus Christ paid the fine in our place. We deserved the penalty of eternal condemnation. He bore the fine in our place as God’s wrath was poured out on Him. Through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in our place, we’ve been pardoned of our sins- justified before God.

### **III. The Difference Between the Catholic and Protestant View on Justification**

The Catholic Church teaches “the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the world is not sufficient for our sins.”<sup>3</sup> Suffering was one way that saints worked for salvation. The Catholic Church Catechism states, “Union With the Passion of Christ: By the grace of this sacrament the sick person receives the strength and gift of uniting himself more closely to Christ’s passion ...Suffering...becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus.”<sup>4</sup> The prayers of the saints and especially Mary also worked for salvation, “They [the prayers] and good works [of the Blessed Virgin Mary] are truly immense... in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints...In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers.”<sup>5</sup>

The Catholic church also teaches that communion, confirmation and baptism are necessary works for salvation. Instead of seeing these as signs of the inner reality of a changed life, they see them as necessary works of salvation, just as the Jews of Paul’s day viewed circumcision as necessary for salvation. Paul had to strongly oppose this teaching, writing the book of Galatians to counter the attacks of the Judiazers. So too must we oppose all forms of rituals as necessary for salvation. Baptism is one example of this. Paul compares baptism with circumcision in *Colossians 2:11-12*. Baptism is not part of the gospel that saves (*1 Corinthians 1:17*), but rather a sign of the reality of the salvation that is already present in a person’s life- it is baptism of the heart that matters (*Romans 2:29, 4:11, 6:3-8*)

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<sup>2</sup> MacArthur Study Bible, 1997, NKJV, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> Catholicism vs. Christianity, Moxi, David, Lectures on Catholicism at Horizon Christian Fellowship, Indianapolis, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, paragraph 1521.

<sup>5</sup> Vatican Council II Documents, No. 6, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, 1 Jan. 1967, Volume 1, Section 5, p. 66

Through all the sacraments the Catholic Church binds its members to a works salvation that centers around the Catholic Church. *Romans 1:17* states about the gospel that it is the “power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith.” Pastor Brian Broaderson, an ex-Catholic, made this comment,

“The Roman Catholic church has completely missed the point of this [passage], resulting in fear and the dread of judgment. They see it as the righteousness God requires”<sup>6</sup>

rather than the righteousness that God freely gives by grace through faith in Christ’s atoning work on the cross.

The traditional Protestant position is that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of God that was completed when Jesus Christ died on the cross in our place. This is the message that is consistent throughout the Bible. No work can add or subtract to our salvation, for it is a free gift,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (*Ephesians 2:8-9*)

Paul told Titus the difference between works and mercy for salvation,

“When the kindness and love of God our Savior...appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.” (*Titus 3:4-5*)

#### **IV. Romans 4:1-5 vs. James 2:21**

Paul argued in *Romans 4:1-5* that a man is justified by faith apart from works (v.2). If a man were justified by his works, he would be able to boast before God, yet no man will glory in God’s presence. Rather, in eternity, we will be glorying in the “exceeding riches of His grace” (*Ephesians 2:7*). Abraham was declared righteous before God and God’s righteousness was imputed to him because of his faith, not because of his works. If his works justified him before God, then God would owe him something- a debt (*4:4*), but God owes no one anything- salvation is a gift- it cannot be earned.

In chapters two and four, Paul demonstrated that Abraham was justified by faith before his circumcision. (*compare Genesis 15 where Abraham was declared by faith to be righteous and Genesis 17, where he was circumcised*). Circumcision was to “be a sign of the covenant” (*Genesis 17:11*) between God and Abraham. Paul argued that

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<sup>6</sup> Broaderson, Brian, Course Lectures on Romans, Calvary Chapel Bible College, Spring 2005

“He is not a Jew who is one outwardly [by circumcision], nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter.” (2:28-29)

Later Paul stated that Abraham

“received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised.” (4:11)

Thus, the work of circumcision was an outward sign of the inward reality of a heart transformed by God through faith.

In chapters two and four of Romans Paul also demonstrated that Abraham was justified by faith 400 years before the Law was given. The Jews rested on God’s Law for their salvation (2:17), yet they were lawbreakers, for they had violated the spirit of the law. They sought to establish their righteousness through the law, but the law demonstrated only their lack of righteousness. The blessedness of God’s grace is that God “justifies the ungodly” (4:5) through faith, not works.

The book of Romans is a book of doctrine, whereas the book of James is a book of practical living. James encouraged his readers what their life should look like if indeed they were saved. If their practice consistently didn’t match their position as believers, then their position as believers should be questioned, and there was a danger that they had never been converted in the first place. James calls this kind of “faith” as “dead” (*James 2:17*)- it is a mere intellectual belief, such as the demons have, without the transformation of the Spirit of God (*James 2:19*). Living faith results in a transformed life as the power of the Spirit of God regenerates us (*John 3:3*) and gives us power over sin. When James spoke of justification, “was not Abraham...justified by works...?” (*James 2:21*), James was talking about justification before men, not God. How will men know that we belong to Jesus Christ and are born again if there is no transformation in our lives?

## **VI. Personal Application**

It is so important that my heart is established by grace, relying completely on the work that God has done for me and not relying at all on what I can do for God. Satan at times has whispered in my ear, questioning my salvation or value in the eyes of God because of a sin that I have committed. The scriptures of Romans remind me repeatedly that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (8:1) and that I am God’s elect. It is God who justifies me, thus no one can condemn me. When Satan tempts me to focus on my past sin instead of on the grace of God, the result is a robbing of peace. The cure is to be reminded again of the incredible promise of God of justification by faith alone in Christ alone, apart from my works, my good deeds, my avoidance of sins.

The plain facts are that I carry around this body of death. I’ve been given power over the penalty of sin through justification and the power of sin through regeneration and one day will be absent from the very presence of sin. These bedrock truths anchor my soul in the

midst of the growing pains of this child of God. It is good for me to meditate on justification, to picture what the scriptures say, that I've been clothed with Christ's righteousness. He has taken away my filthy rags, washed me through regeneration and clothed me in righteousness. These righteous clothes never soil. They have been permanently washed in the blood of Christ.

The doctrine of justification has been crucial for me in evangelism. As I've shared the gospel it is so evident that this doctrine is at the core of addressing all those who proclaim through their own works their righteousness. The Law of God exposes a man's self-righteousness as filthy rags, leaving man with the desperate need of justification that can only come about by forgiveness through Christ. Man thinks that God can wave the wand and forgive all of their offenses, without understanding the need to be justified, declared righteous and pardoned before a holy God, who will not compromise His holiness. If He did, He would be a corrupt Judge. I've been amazed at the power of the Spirit of God using the Law to bring about conviction of sin in unbelievers and then the wonderful message of justification by faith as the only righteousness that will inherit eternal life. I've rejoiced in seeing people understand the beauty of justification against the dark backdrop of the utter depravity of their sin and reach out and embrace salvation by faith in Christ.

Mike Porter

## **Acknowledgements & Further Reading**

1. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance
2. MacArthur, John, "MacArthur Study Bible", NKJV, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1997
3. Catholicism vs. Christianity, Moxi, David, Lectures on Catholicism at Horizon Christian Fellowship, Indianapolis, 2002.
4. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994.
5. Vatican Council II Documents, No. 6, Indulgentiarum Doctrina, 1 Jan. 1967, Volume 1
6. Broaderson, Brian, Course Lectures on Romans, Calvary Chapel Bible College, Spring 2005