

**Subject: *Justified by Faith***  
**Scripture: *Romans 3:19-31***

Perhaps the oldest and hardest question in the Bible is found in the Book of Job.

**Job 9:2** *How should man be just with God?*

How can we be right with God since He is perfectly righteous and we are not?

**Romans 3:10** *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.*

Righteousness means “rightness, the state of being right.”

People make two mistakes about being right with God:

- 1) They don't see their sin for what it really is and therefore they don't think of it as bad as it really is.
- 2) They assume that they are capable of doing something that will lessen their guilt and please God enough that He will not declare them guilty and punish them for their sin.

In Romans Paul tells us about the God who is righteous, about the righteous judgment of God, and the righteous wrath of God against sin. He tells us about the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel, and how the righteousness of God is credited to unrighteous sinners by faith in His Son.

There is only one answer to the question, “How can sinners be right with a perfect God?” God provided the way through the death and resurrection of Jesus His Son. God's way is described in this word “justified,” which means that God declares sinners to be righteous when they place their faith in His Son Jesus. The verb “justify” and noun “justification” are found 30 times in Romans to describe God's gracious gift of salvation. Earlier this summer a horse won the Triple Crown of racing. The horse's name was “Justify.” I wonder how many people knew the spiritual significance of that name.

In this message we are going to explore why we need to be justified and how we can be justified by faith in Christ. This is a key doctrine of the Christian faith and the very heart of the gospel.

### **1. Our Need of Justification (3:19-20)**

“We know” (vs. 19) is Paul's way of stating a truth that is obvious to him and his readers.

- A. **Universal condemnation** (under the law) – The scriptures that Paul just quoted (vs. 10-18) are not intended just for the Gentiles, but for the Jews also. Gentiles have the law written on their hearts (2:15) and the Jews have God's Law written as Scripture, so all are accountable to God and are condemned for breaking God's law. The opposite of justification is condemnation.
- B. **Universal silence** (no excuse, no defense, no self-justification) - People are quick to justify themselves and make excuses, but when they stand before God on judgment day they won't be able to say a word.

- C. Universal guilt (This is the fact of guilt before God, not the feeling of guilt.) – All people are guilty of sin as charged and subject to God’s punishment. Perfect obedience to God’s law is impossible and every person is under its curse and penalty.

***Galatians 3:10*** *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*

- D. Universal need (the law cannot justify; the law can only reveal sin, not remove it) – Verse 20 should end the argument that somehow people can be right with God by keeping the Ten Commandments or obeying the Golden Rule. The law can only reveal sin and condemn it. The mirror shows us that we are dirty, but only soap and water can clean us up.

***Galatians 2:16*** *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

***John 16:8*** *And when he (the Holy Spirit) is come, he will reprove (convict) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.*

## **2. God’s Gift of Justification (3:21-31)**

Beginning in Romans 1:18, the Bible presents a courtroom scene. Paul is the prosecuting attorney building his case and showing that all men are guilty sinners and condemned. First, Paul proved the Gentiles to be sinners who stand guilty and condemned (1:18-32). Next, Paul proved that moral hypocrites and Jews are sinners who stand guilty and condemned (2:1-3:9). Finally, Paul proved that all people in the world are sinners who stand guilty and condemned (3:10-20). The groundwork has been laid and now Paul will develop his main theme that the gospel is able to save everyone because it reveals righteousness as a gift received by faith.

In verses 21-26 we have the heart of the gospel and the book of Romans.

- A. The definition of justification: It is the judicial act by which God declares a sinner righteous in His sight.

To be justified is more than being pardoned. When a man is pardoned the judge treats him as if he had not committed the crime. But when a man is justified the judge treats him as if he is positively righteous in every way. Justification is the opposite of condemnation. Justification is final and irreversible. Justification does not take place in stages or by degrees. Justification is different than sanctification. In justification God declares that the believer is completely righteous. In sanctification God makes the believer more and more righteous. Every person who has been justified will be sanctified.

- B. The source of justification is the righteousness of God

This is God’s plan. Christ’s death fulfills the righteous penalty for those who could not keep the law and Christ’s righteous life fulfills the obedience the law required. God’s plan was apart from the law (sinners are not made righteous by the Law) but His plan was witnessed or

revealed by the Old Testament scriptures (the law and the prophets). The most powerful picture is the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22).

C. The recipients of justification are all who believe in Christ

The righteousness of Christ is imputed (credited) to us when we place our faith in Christ. Whoever believes in Christ is justified and stands before God in the righteousness of Christ.

**Romans 1:16-17**<sup>16</sup> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*<sup>17</sup> *For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*

D. The cause of justification is God's grace, not our merit

E. The basis of justification is Christ's work of redemption and propitiation

God set forth Christ in public for all to see. Jesus redeemed sinners (delivered, set us free from sin's bondage) through His death. Propitiation has the idea of appeasement or satisfaction. It is related to the word used for the mercy seat, the lid on the Ark of the Covenant, where the high priest sprinkled the blood of an innocent animal to make atonement for the sins of the people (Lev. 16). Christ satisfied the righteous wrath of God through His death. In false religions the worshipers are responsible for appeasing the wrath of their gods, but in our salvation God did the work of satisfying His own wrath through His Son's death.

**1 John 2:1-2** *My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

By Christ's sacrifice the sinner is justified (vs. 24, 26) and God is justified. In the ages before Christ died God covered the sins of men with animal sacrifices and did not execute judgment on them. Was God unrighteous in passing over those sins and not judging them? No, because those sins were finally dealt with and taken away by the death of Jesus on the cross. All the sins of all the ages were punished in Christ's death. This is why God can justify sinners and remain just in doing so. Christ died to justify sinners, but first and foremost to justify God.

David Platt: "Before the cross is for anyone else's sake, the cross is for God's sake."

F. The excellence of justification – God's faith method of justifying sinners is excellent for three reasons (vs. 27-31).

- 1) Justification by faith eliminates boasting (vs. 27-28) – No man can say he is right with God because of anything he has or has not done.
- 2) Justification by faith exalts God (vs. 29-30) – He is the God of all people, Jews and Gentiles. If men could be justified by the law, then God would be known as God of the Jews only because only they had the law. Men are justified by faith and God is not a national God but a universal God for all men, Jews and Gentiles.

- 3) Justification by faith establishes the law (vs. 31) – The Old Testament law is God’s standard of righteousness and reveals our need of righteousness. Salvation by grace through faith does not destroy the law or diminish the law, but underscores the true importance of the law in three ways: by providing a payment that the law required for those who could not keep it; and by fulfilling the purpose of the law to show man that he could not keep it and drive people to Christ (the law is our schoolmaster or tutor to bring us to Christ, Gal. 3:24); and by giving believers the ability and desire to keep the law (Rom. 8:3-4).

Here is what we have learned so far in Romans. We all need righteousness, but we have none. Even the law of God can’t give us the righteousness we need. The law reveals our sin, but cannot remove it. So at the end of Paul’s indictment of sin and condemnation of all men the trial is finished. We look for God to pronounce the sentence and carry out the penalty, but instead there is a surprise...God’s grace and mercy. God tells us that His Son Jesus has already paid our penalty and has died in our place. Christ has satisfied the righteous demands of the Law and has turned away God’s wrath from us. God is now willing to forgive us and declare that we are righteous when repent and believe in His Son. We are justified by faith.