

Aug. 15, 2021

The God who Justifies

Part 1

Romans 3:21-26

LTS: Rom. 8:22-39

BI: The God of the gospel is not only holy, he is also faithful, righteous, glorious, Sacrificial, Patient, and just.

Many of you know that in the Kirk family we love the outdoors. When Chris and I were dating, we would walk the trails in the Tennessee hills near Chattanooga. When we started having children, we brought them along (as best we could) on whatever trails we could find.

When the kids became teenagers, I revived my previous love for rock climbing and taught the older kids how to use the equipment. After that, it was back-packing. Over the years we found ourselves trekking through the backwoods of Yosemite, Sequoia, Zion, and other national parks.

Most recently (just a month ago, in fact) I joined five of my adult children as they back-packed three days through a narrow sliver of Glacier Ntl, Park.

The first leg of that trip was only 6 miles long. The second leg was a little less than that. The third Trek, however, called for a grueling 12 mile excursion ascending vertically more than 2,000 feet above our base camp, on a narrow winding trail that I thought would NEVER end.

I can tell you that while my kids completed the hike with moderate difficulty, I made it to the top by Grace Alone.

Frankly, I find it quite impossible to adequately describe the trail we hiked that day. To say it was long, narrow, steep and sometimes dangerous doesn't seem to do it justice. On occasion, we had to stop to rest and refuel. It took hours to make it to the Summit. But as every backpacker can testify, the view from the summit is worth all the effort.

This morning I realize that for the past several weeks, we have been trekking together through the foothills and up the steep and sometimes grueling slopes of the "bad news" of the gospel.

The first part of the climb leaves a lot to be desired. Its dark and foreboding. Its dangerous and difficult. We don't like hearing week after week about the depravity of man- his inherent godlessness and wickedness. The trail is cluttered with warning signs about death and condemnation. It's not a sunny saunter through the park. We would prefer to stroll through the gentle hills of Philippians, or splash around in the cool waters of the Psalms. But if we want to encounter the breath-taking panorama of God's great salvation; if we want to discover the rich treasures of God's eternal life, we simply must endure the dark and difficult climb. And that's what you and I have done for the past several weeks.

It is my joy this morning, however, to inform you that the long trek through the dark doctrine of divine judgment and condemnation has finally come to an end. This morning we get to lay our Packs down, as it were, and begin taking in the glory of the majestic beauty that lies before us in the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone. Paul's transition from condemnation to justification is evident right here in our text. Look with me at v.21. Paul says, "But now..."

- A. Back then (in the previous 2 ½ chapters) , God warned us of his certain and impending wrath...
- B. Back then, He revealed man's propensity to suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness.
- C. Back then, He unmasked the idolatry of our hearts.
- D. Back then He exposed our hatred of God's law.
- E. Back then he demonstrated our inability to keep His law.
- F. Back then, we found ourselves condemned by the demands of God's law... But now

Now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law... for all who believe.

Now sinners are justified by His grace as a gift.

Now our sins are paid for through the propitiation of His Son.

Now we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Over the next few weeks my ambition is to lead you into a rich study of Justification by faith alone.

If you are new to Christianity or to Calvary Bible Church, you may be asking, "What do you mean when you speak about Justification. That's a great question.

The term Justification Simply means to declare righteous. More specifically, Justification is an act of God (the Judge of all the earth) by which He pronounces a condemned sinner righteous by faith in Jesus Christ.

As one author put it, "the man who believes in Christ, sinful though he may be, is viewed as being righteous, because in Christ he has come into a righteous relationship with God"¹

R.C. Sproul said, "The doctrine of justification by faith alone (sola fide) is the central affirmation of historic evangelicalism."⁸

And Martin Luther said, the doctrine of Justification by faith is the pillar upon which the church stands or falls. Elsewhere he referred to it as "The principle article of all Christian doctrine."

¹ Ladd, G. E., *A Theology of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1974), 437

Beloved, this is one of the most precious jewels one can discover in the Bible. So, we will do well to study it, believe it, and own it for ourselves. But before we dive into the doctrine of Justification, it seems to me that the text before also reveals some things we should know about the God who justifies.

The doctrine of justification is wonderful. But it is only wonderful because it is an expression of the very heart of God. What kind of God would love a world of rebellious sinners by saving them – not by works, but by faith in the substitutionary death of His Son. What kind of God is this? Well, as we wade into the text before us this morning, we will discover that the God of our salvation us is:

1. A Holy God
2. A Faithful God
3. A Righteous God
4. A Glorious God
5. A Gracious God
6. A Forbearing God
7. A Just God

Let's begin our study by reading the text before us this morning. Please take your Bible and stand with me as we read Rom. 3:21-26

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

He who has ears to hear, let Him hear.

You may be seated

In his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer famously wrote the following:

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us... Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason, the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. ...”

As a pastor who also counsels, let me assure you that that Tozer is right. Many people who apply for a seat in our counseling center have a wrong view of God. And I suspect that in a crowd this size this morning, there are probably dear friends among us who have unbiblical, and therefore, incorrect ideas about God. And if you have incorrect ideas about God, it will be impossible to fully grasp the glory of a gospel grounded in Justification by faith.

So, before we begin studying the rich doctrine of Justification, I think it would be wonderful and necessary to take some time to study the God who Justifies.

I will tell you up front that this will be more of a devotional study than a verse-by-verse exposition. In a couple weeks we will come back to the verse-by-verse, but for now, let’s just bask in the glory of the God who justifies.

The first thing we need to know is that the God who justifies is...

I. A Holy God:

1. This first attribute of God is not explicitly stated here as it is in other texts, but it is powerfully implied in chapters 1-3. The Hebrew word for “holy” means “to separate,” or “to cut.”² When we think of God’s holiness we should not immediately think of moral or religious qualities. Rather, it speaks of God’s position or relationship to other beings in the Cosmos. God is absolutely distinct from everyone and everything.³ He is the Creator who is above all His creatures in infinite majesty.
2. Theologians speak of God’s holiness as His central and supreme perfection. It is out of His holiness that all His infinite perfections are derived and against which the quality of everything and everyone is judged. Therefore, we must speak of all God’s attributes as holy.
 - a. His wrath is a Holy wrath
 - b. His justice is a Holy justice.

² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition*, (Michigan, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerfmans Publishing Company, 1996), 73

³ Ibid, 73

- c. His righteousness is a holy righteousness
- d. His grace is a holy grace
- e. His forgiveness is a holy forgiveness
- f. And his love is a holy love.
- g. Therefore, it is proper to say that God is infinite in all his holy perfections.

3. No unholy thing can exist in God's presence indefinitely. Before the throne of God, it must either be cast away from God or reconciled to God. There is no 3rd option.

4. Do you remember the scene in Isaiah 6 where God's prophet was brought into the very temple of the Lord, and when he stepped into the Temple Proper, He came face to face with a scene that absolutely terrified him. In the temple God sat on his holy throne as King of the Cosmos. Seraphim hovered over the throne with wings that covered their feet, their bodies, and their faces. And the Seraphim cried out Holy! Holy! Holy is the Lord of Hosts! The whole earth is full of His glory.

5. And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

Now pay attention to what happens next.

6. Isaiah the prophet – arguably the most godly man in Israel at the time - looked at the scene before him for half a second and instantly fell on his face crying out (5), “Woe is me! I am undone! for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

7. The term “Woe” is the vocabulary of a curse. Isaiah knew he was in serious trouble and began piling curses upon Himself. Why? Because he - a sinful man - dared to look upon The Holy.

8. Isaiah thought he was about to be cast from the presence of God in holy judgment. But no! The next verses read, (Isa. 6:6-7)

9. I think it is noteworthy to observe that to this point God has said nothing. It wasn't the words of God that terrified him. It was merely the presence of God that caused him to feel “undone.” And just as Isaiah thought his life was lost, we read...

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

9. What happened here? The unholy prophet thought he was going to be judged by the Holy God, but instead he was graciously reconciled to him by grace.

10. So what we see in Rom 1-3 is God's messenger – the Apostle Paul – warning unholy Gentiles and Jews of the danger they are in by virtue of the fact that they will soon find themselves standing for judgement before a Holy God.

11. John Calvin once said, “Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God.”⁴

10. Who is the God who Justifies? He is a Holy God? And if we knew nothing more about Him, it should cause us to both tremble and worship.

11. Who is this God? He is a Holy God. Second, he is

I. A Faithful God

1. This is where we take our first step into the text for this morning. Look with me at v.21 where Paul writes: “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, though the Law and the prophets bear witness to it...” Observe with me now that Paul is teaching us that God’s righteousness for salvation is not built upon the O.T. Law but that the O.T. has always borne witness to it. I say “the O.T. bears witness” because in Paul’s day the phrase “Law and prophets” meant the O.T.

2. So Paul is saying, the Gospel I preach; namely, that’s inners are declared righteous apart from the law, is not a Novel teaching. It is all over the O.T. because it has always been what God had promised.

3. The law and the prophets frequently declared the promise of the coming Messiah who would provide the righteousness that sinners need to be made right with God.

4. Let’s take a moment to remember what Paul wrote at the very beginning of this letter (Rom. 1:1-2). There Paul begins with,

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures...

5. You see, beloved, Paul wants us (and especially the Jews) to know that this Gospel did not suddenly appear sometime after Paul says he had a vision of Jesus on the Damascus Road. No, gospel was introduced, hinted at, explained and described in many ways throughout the O.T. beginning in Genesis.

6. It was there in Genesis 3 where, after the man and his wife sinned and were about to be cast out of the garden, God promised that a son of Eve would one day come and crush the serpent’s head in a manner that would injure the Son as well.

7. Again, in Rom. 1:17 Paul writes,

For in it (i.e. the Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” Now, whenever we see the phrase “For it is written”

⁴ (R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, (p. 68)

we know he is speaking quoting from the O.T. Scriptures. In this case, Paul is quoting Habakkuk 2:4.

8. More specifically, the doctrine of Justification by faith finds its origin NOT in the N.T. Not in the Major prophets, not in Deuteronomy – the second giving of the Law, or even Exodus 20 where we find the first giving of the law. Rather, we find it in Genesis, long before God gave Israel His law.

9. In Genesis 15:6 is where God was making a promise to Abraham that God would give him a son – even in his old age -and the text says, “Then he believed in the Lord; and He (the Lord) reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

9. The main point here, is that throughout the O.T. God promised that he would provide the righteousness sinners desperately need apart from the Law and by faith alone.

10. My dear friend, let it be known today that God is always faithful to His promises.

Arthur Pink in his magnificent little book, *The Attributes of God*, quotes Psa. 36:5 which says,

Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

He (Pink) then writes,

Far above all finite comprehension is the unchanging faithfulness of God. Everything about God is great, vast, incomparable.

He never forgets,

never fails,

never falters, never forfeits his word. To every declaration of promise or prophecy the Lord has exactly adhered. Every engagement of covenant or threatening he will make good, for God is not a man that he should lie; Neither the son of man, that he should repent.⁵

Has he said, and shall he not do it? Or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good? (Num. 23:19).⁶

11. Who is this God who justifies sinners by faith?

- He is A Holy God.
- And he is a Faithful God.
- Thirdly... He is...

⁵ Pink, *Ibid*

⁶ Arthur Pink, *The Attributes of God*, (Michigan, Grand Rapids, 1989), 52

II. A Righteous God

1. When we speak of the righteousness of God, we mean that God always acts in accordance with what is right.⁷ Right-ness, is not arbitrary.⁸ There is an objective standard to measure what is right and what is right wrong. When God declares something to be right and another thing wrong, he is not testing those things against something outside of Himself. Rather, righteousness is measured against God's own nature.
2. Anything that is contrary to God's nature is wrong, and everything that is consistent with His nature is right. This is probably the paradigm that Paul was thinking of when he said to Timothy, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself."
4. This means that everything God does is right and good. When I became sick with Covid-19 over Christmas it was a great comfort to me to remember that everything God does is right – even if it hurts; even if its frightening; even if it results in death. The good shepherd always leads us down the "paths of righteousness," that is, "the RIGHT Path" (Psa 23:3).
5. How do we know what is right or wrong? We look to His word. It alone is the inspired, infallible, sufficient word for all things pertaining to live and godliness.
6. How do we know what is right? God Himself is the measure of what is right, and is in himself the final standard of what is right. As a result of God's righteousness, it is necessary that he treat people according to what they deserve. Thus it is necessary that God punished sin, for it does not deserve reward; Sin is wrong, it is cpntrary to the Person of God and therefore deserves punishment.
7. Speaking of God, Moses says: all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without inequity, just and right is he."
8. When God was preparing to bring down judgment on the land of Sodom, Abraham (who was just getting to know God) was concerned that innocent people would be killed with the wicked. To he appeals to God's own character of righteousness when he says, shall not the judge of all the earth do right? (Gen. 18:25).
9. The Holiness of God, The faithfulness of God, and the righteousness of God. These are some of the attributes of God that serve as the foundation of the Gospel of Justification by faith alone. Next week we will consider four more.

Gospel Invitation

A Holy God

A Faithful God

A Righteous God

⁷ Wayne Grudem; *Systematic Theology: An Itro to Biblical Doctrine*, (Zondervan, 1994), 204

⁸ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Michigan, Grand Rapids, 1985), 287.

Next Week:

- III. A Glorious God
- IV. A Gracious God
- V. A Forbearing God
- VI. A Just God