

***“GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED” PT. 4***  
***ROMANS 3:25-26***

It doesn’t take much for even a believer in Christ to become aware of his past sins and the shame and guilt associated with those sins. Though the sin might have been confessed both to the Lord and the one we sinned against, too often we still feel the burden of guilt. Are you one of those people? Jerry Bridges asks a series of questions to help us identify whether we are living with persistent guilt:

- ✓ Are you painfully preoccupied with a particular habitual sin?
- ✓ Are you discouraged or depressed by your failure to measure up?
- ✓ Does it appear that God can use others but not you?
- ✓ Is there something in your past that you can’t seem to get over?
- ✓ Do you fear that your past will come back to haunt you? [*Bookends of the Christian Life*, 55-6.]

So what will we do with such guilt? Martin Luther provides the answer in a letter he wrote to a friend who was fighting guilt and failure:

“When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares that we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus: ‘I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? Does this mean that I shall be sentenced to eternal damnation? By no means. For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Where he is, there I shall be also.’ [in Michael Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ*, p. 63.]

That’s the answer that not only Martin Luther provided for his young friend, but its also the answer that God provided us through Paul’s pen in Romans 3:21-26. Yes, we have been guilty in the past and yes even after trusting Christ we still sin. But that guilt is no longer our identity. Sin is not our identity. We have been given the perfect righteousness of Christ through our union with Him in His death.

In a word, the solution to our guilt is to admit we *are* guilty and embrace the completed work of Christ and trust that God will impute His righteousness to us when we have faith in Him.

So what does Paul say in these verses? He teaches that:

***WHEN MAN HAD NO MEANS TO SAVE HIMSELF, GOD JUSTLY PROVIDED A DECLARATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH CHRIST.***

Here, then, are seven statements about the nature of justification:

1. What Justification Is (v. 21)
2. How Justification is Appropriated (v. 22a)
3. Who Needs Justification (v. 22b)
4. Why Justification is Necessary (vv. 22b-23)
5. Who Accomplished Justification (v. 24)
6. When and Where Justification was Accomplished (v. 25a)
7. How Justification Really is Just (vv. 25b-26)

### 1. What Justification Is (v. 21)

- After two chapters of discussion about the sinfulness of all men (“there is none righteous, not even one,” 3:10), with the words **but now**, Paul introduces the hope for all sinners.
- All sinners justly deserve the wrath of God, but God has justly provided a means of forgiving, saving, and justifying sinners who are not righteous on their own.
- As we have talked about the term “justification,” we have said that it is the gift of God to declare sinners to be righteous through the imputed righteousness of Christ.
- So **God’s righteousness** that Paul mentions in this verse is the way He satisfies His wrath against sin (v. 18) by judging Christ for our sins and imputing Christ’s righteousness to us. And this imputed righteousness is the same now as it was in the OT in **the Law and the prophets** (vv. 25-26).

### 2. How Justification is Appropriated (v. 22a)

- How does someone come to have this righteousness of God? Paul tells us at the beginning of v. 22 — this **righteousness of God [is] through faith in Jesus Christ**. The only way to have justification is to have faith — to believe in the work of Christ on the cross.
- The importance of faith in being justified is seen throughout this passage (vv. 22 [2x], 25, 26) — and will be reiterated in the next section (cf. vv. 27-28, 30-31).
- And notice that faith itself doesn’t save — God in Christ justifies us and that justification comes through the mechanism of faith. Faith can’t save because faith says, “I can’t, but I trust you can...”

### 3. Who Needs Justification? (v. 22b)

- Notice Paul says Christ’s righteousness is **for all...who believe**. Justification is for *anyone* who believes in Christ as the means of his righteousness. And notice that Paul says it must be this way because **there is no distinction** — there’s no distinction between the sinfulness of Jews and Gentiles — no one has an adequate righteousness of his own. And there is no distinction between those to whom the salvation is offered. It is offered to all equally.
- But Paul also means it is *only* for those who believe; if one does not have faith in Christ then he is not justified and Christ’s righteousness will not be applied to him. So who needs justification? All people everywhere. There’s no distinction: all are under sin and all have been made the same offer of salvation.
- If someone does not believe he needs Christ’s justification it simply means he has not adequately considered the breath and depth of his sin.

#### 4. Why Justification is Necessary (v. 23)

- Why justification must be by grace: because there is no difference in the sinfulness of men — **ALL** (Jew/Gentile...) **have sinned**. This is a simple summary of chs. 1-3. So this refers to the extent of sin — **all** have sinned. There are no exceptions. There is a pervasiveness of sin in all men. No one has ever been as wicked as he could be but all have been tainted by sin in every aspect of their being rendering them completely incapable of being righteous.
- And the essence of that sin is that they have **fallen short of God's glory**. That is, they are deficient and have failed to meet the standard given by God — and the standard is His glory. They were created to live for Him and instead they lived for themselves. Instead of honoring God they attempted to honor themselves. And as that kind of rebel, they earned and deserved God's wrath (**1:18; 2:2, 5; 3:19; 6:23**).
- So why is justification from God through Christ necessary? Because we must be righteous to be with God and we can never be righteous on our own. So how does God accomplish our justification?

#### 5. Who Accomplished Justification? (v. 24)

- In this series I've had some questions about whether, by emphasizing the importance of faith, that I am saying that the one who exercises faith is working for and being justified on his own merit. No! As Paul would say in 6:1 — **may it never be**. And this verse makes it clear. No man is justified by any act of his own. Notice how Paul emphasizes that justification is God's act on our behalf:
- The form of the word **being justified** means that he does not justify himself but that someone else is justifying him (which will be clearly reiterated in v. 30).
- And for emphasis Paul says it is a **gift** — and that means it is received from someone else (God).
- And it is **of His grace** — that is, it is gratis — it is given freely and lavishly.
- And finally it is **through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus**. That is, justification required redemption, something that only Christ could accomplish. And He did accomplish it. We could never satisfy the wrath of God, but Christ did through His atoning work and blood on the cross.
- Justification is God's work — and His work alone on our behalf.

#### 6. When and Where Justification was Accomplished (v. 25a)

- What most Bibles translate in v. 25 as **displayed publicly** should probably be translated, "purposed" or "planned." The meaning is that God planned our justification before the foundation of the earth — this was God's eternal plan for man.
- And God purposed for us to be justified through the propitiating work of Christ's blood.
- When Christ died on the cross, and when Christ shed **His blood** on the cross, God was finally and fully satisfied. This was the final act of **propitiation**. As the writer of Hebrews says, the blood of bulls and goats could not fully atone for the sins of the people; they could only forestall God's wrath. But Christ fully satisfied God's wrath with His death (Heb. 10:10, 14). As the hymn says,

What can wash away my sin?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus;

What can make me whole again?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

- When was justification accomplished? It was accomplished when Christ died on the cross, though it was part of God's eternal purpose and plan for us. And where was it accomplished? It was accomplished in the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

## 7. How Justification Really is Just (vv. 25b-26)

- Where will you look in this world to find righteousness? Will you go to a court of law? The Supreme Court? The United Nations? The Constitution? The governing documents of any other nation in the world? Will a newborn child demonstrate perfect righteousness? How about a newly married couple? A college athletics coach (who is competing simply for the joy of the game)? An insurance company?
- Where will you go if you want to find not just an occasional act of righteousness but righteousness that is unchangingly perfect? Paul says it is found in the cross — notice that in v. 25 after he says that God displayed Christ as a propitiation (atonement) in His blood, he says ***this was to demonstrate His righteousness.***
  - ✓ God is just (righteous) and in His justice He had to pour out His wrath against sin and He did so when Christ was on the cross. He exhausted His infinite wrath against Christ — the infinite wrath came to an end and was drained when it met Christ.
  - ✓ And not only did He pour out His wrath against Christ, but because Christ was also perfectly righteous, He could atone for the sins of men and impute His righteousness to them.
  - ✓ There is no greater demonstration anywhere of God's righteousness than the cross where Christ was justly punished and God was justly satisfied with Christ's payment.
  - ✓ The prophet Isaiah anticipates that satisfaction when he says of the God and the Messiah — "But the Lord was please to crush Him, putting Him to grief, if He would render Himself as a guilt offering..." (**Is. 53:10a**). And "As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities" (**53:11**). This was the greatest demonstration and sign of God's righteousness. (This should forever keep us from pride and forever makes us grateful for His provision.)
- Now some might say, "wait a minute, God's not really just because He overlooked all the sins of all the Israelites in the OT who sacrificed bulls and goats for their sins..." Paul answers that objection.
  - ✓ In ***the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.*** Paul is not talking there about the sins you and I committed prior to salvation. He is talking about the sins committed in the OT by those who participated in the sacrifices demanded by the Law.

- ✓ He demonstrated **forbearance**. That is not the usual word for patience; it's a word that means in tolerance, God called a truce against those who had a sin debt with Him. Which simply means that God delayed His punishment of sin. He temporarily held back His wrath. Now if He had never poured out His wrath against sin, He would have been unrighteous. But because God *is* righteous, He couldn't **pass over** or "overlook" sin indefinitely. And He demonstrated that righteousness supremely when He poured out His wrath on Christ.
- ✓ [ASIDE: don't mistake a lack of immediate judgment from God for sin. Don't assume that just because God hasn't treated your sin like He did Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1ff) that God has "accepted" your sin; *your sin will be judged* — He is merely being gracious to allow you to repent before demonstrating justice.]
- ✓ The sins of all the sinners in the OT were still charged against them; but God delayed His punishment of those sins, temporarily accepting the blood of bulls and goats, anticipating the blood of the Lamb of God that would finally removed the sins of men (**Heb. 10:10-14**).
- ✓ So *now* we see particularly clearly what the OT believers could only anticipate — Paul says this work of Christ to justify men through His death **was for the demonstration at the present time...** That is, now in this era or season of God's time, we have been graced to see the completion of God's plan to justify sinners and bring them to Himself.
- ✓ That means God's **forbearance** is not a demonstration of His injustice, but it is a demonstration of His grace as well as justice. He could have immediately poured out His wrath, but He didn't, so that men might come to repentance. And friends, that character of patience is not just the way He was in the OT; it's the way He still is (Rom. 2:4; Acts 17:30; **2 Pt. 3:9**).
- And notice what Paul says is **demonstrated** (v. 26) to us —
  - ✓ God's righteous wrath poured out on Christ demonstrates that **He is Just**. God's forbearance in the OT didn't mean He forsook His justice. He *is* Just. And He has always been Just. And His justice is revealed in that He finally took action against sin. Sin is not winked at by God. It is not excused by God. Sin is not forgotten by God. Sin is *judged by God* when He poured out His wrath on sin.

Stott rightly says that for God to merely "cancel" the sin without punishing it "would 'not do justice to himself' but rather 'do himself an injustice'". In fact he would destroy both himself and us. He would cease to be God and we would cease to be fully human. He would destroy himself by contradicting his divine character as righteous Lawgiver and Judge, and he would destroy us by contradicting our human dignity as morally responsible persons created in his image. It is inconceivable that he should do either. So, although in his forbearance he temporarily left sins unpunished, now in justice he has punished them, by condemning them in Christ. He has thus demonstrated his justice by executing it. And he has done it publicly...in order not only to be just but also to be seen to be just...The cross demonstrates with equal vividness both his justice in judging sin and his mercy in justifying the sinner...He is able to bestow a righteous status on the unrighteous, without compromising his own righteousness." [Stott, *Romans*, p. 211.]

- ✓ But not only does the cross prove that God is just; it also proves that He is the **Justifier**. This is a most remarkable statement — He justly punishes sin, but at the same time produces justification (righteousness) for sinners who cannot do it themselves. Without the substitutionary atonement of Christ, that would be a contradictory statement.

*"How can God be both 'just and justifier?' The answer is in Jesus Christ. When Jesus suffered the wrath of God on the Cross for the sins of the world, He fully met the demands of God's Law, and also fully expressed the love of God's heart. The animal sacrifices in the Old Testament never took away sin; but when Jesus died, He reached all the way back to Adam and took care of those sins." [Wiersbe]*

- ✓ We always say that all of God's attributes work in harmony with one another and that no attribute is greater than any other attribute (because they are all infinite in nature) and no attribute is secondary to any another. But it's hard to understand how that is true. But here in the cross we see how God's attributes work with One another to accomplish His purposes:
  - His wrath is satisfied even while His grace is manifested and extended.
  - His patience does not invalidate His justice.
  - And His justice does not inhibit His justification of sinners.
  - People sinned. And God is just. That should have meant punishment. But God was declared a "truce" through His forbearance until just the right time.
  - And at the right time, the cross demonstrated that He is just. Sin has been fairly dealt with.
  - And at the right time, the cross demonstrated His grace towards sinners in providing a way for them to be declared just without having an inherent righteousness of their own.
- ✓ Last week I told of a time when I had to stand before a judge because I had driven excessively fast on one particular occasion. And the judge gave me a sentence that was just and appropriate for my sin. That was a just judge. And every other judge that passes out sentences in a similar way is also just. But a judge in our court of law cannot be just and at the same time justify the offender. If the judge on that day in 1983 had turned to me and say, "I absolve you of your crime and declare you to be righteous," he would have in turn been unrighteous. He couldn't do that. There was no basis in law to consider me righteous. But God's court of law is infinitely superior. And this is the magnitude of Christ's work — at the same time, God is just in pouring out His wrath against sin and is the justifier of the one who has sinned. That's amazing grace!
- And again notice that Paul says that this must be appropriated by **faith**. Justification (right standing with God) is only for **the one who has faith in Jesus**. God made a way of for sinners to escape His wrath. But to be justified one *must* believe that only Christ can absorb the wrath of God and that He did so for us who believe.

- ✓ If you believe in Jesus, friend this morning your heart should be singing with great delight in His provision. You had no right to expect anything from Him and He gave you everything you need. He removed your sin and He has imputed you with Christ's righteousness. Give praise to His name!
- ✓ If you do not believe in Jesus, you must believe. Your only hope is to believe in Jesus. Your only hope is to give up your sin, walk away from your sin, and embrace and love Christ and ask Him to forgive you and change you. If you do not repent, then one day, God will pour out His wrath on you. But it will not be for three hours like it was with Jesus. And it will not be for three years or three decades or even three millennia. It will be for eternity. Because your sin is an infinite offense against Him and you can do nothing to satisfy that offense, so His only option is to judge you for all eternity. And unless you confess your sin and trust in Christ alone for your salvation, that is your destiny. Oh friend, you do not have to suffer that judgment. If you are not a lover of Christ, I appeal to you to embrace and trust Christ today, and begin living in Him and for Him today.

## 8. Some Implications of Justification — Why Justification Matters

### • Justification clarifies our **JOY**

- ✓ I am one of those people that like to make lists. I come from a long list of list-makers. I like lists so that I can remember what I need to do. But I also really like lists so that I can scratch things off the list when I accomplish them. I have a list app on my Google calendar. The last time I looked, I had 30 different lists on my list app — and all of them had things to do. But what I really like about the app is that when I check the completed box, it puts a line through the task. Sometimes I check and uncheck the box just to watch the line appear and then re-appear! I can also “clear completed tasks” off my list. (That’s kind of disappointing.) But then I can “view completed tasks,” and everything on that list that I’ve checked off reappears. It gives me a sense of real accomplishment.
- ✓ But friends, when we consider the one thing in life that we *must* accomplish, we have no hope to do it. We must be righteous. And we cannot be righteous. But Christ was righteous on our behalf. And God has accepted His atoning work and declared us to be righteous because of Him. And that’s our greatest and singular joy.
- ✓ We must stop today thinking about how good we are and what we’ve accomplished. We might say that God’s standard of righteousness is to fly to Mars under our own power and without mechanical device. And we jump one foot off the ground and look around with pride because that’s six inches more than we’ve ever done. It’s nothing. It is no reason for joy. But Christ is reason for joy. Justification says God has provided all we need so that we might be with Him and enjoy Him for all eternity. Though we cannot please Him ourselves, He has taken pleasure in us and through justification given us delight in Him. Oh friend, love and treasure and delight in the wonder of what God has done to justify you!



- ✓ One of the greatest theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, J. Gresham Machen, wrote to his friend John Murray when he was dying and said, “I’m so thankful for the active obedience of Christ; no hope without it.” This great man of God was still aware of his guilt on his deathbed, but could be confident to face death because of the imputed righteousness of Christ. That’s our same joy.
- ✓ Every believer today is equally freed from God’s wrath. *That’s your joy.*
- ✓ Every believer in Christ today is equally clothed with the righteousness of Christ. *That’s your joy.*

- Justification clarifies our **PURPOSE**

- ✓ There has been a long debate about the nature of justification and sanctification, particularly since the Reformation. Many assume that if we assert that justification is by faith alone that it will lead people to antinomianism — to live lawlessly and unrighteously. And so they have not only made sanctification part of justification, but they have made them to be essentially synonymous terms. That is in fact where the Roman Catholic doctrine of a works justification came from — a desire to keep people from living unrighteously.
- ✓ There is a relationship between justification and sanctification, but they are not equal. In fact I am even willing to say that works are necessary in salvation. They are not necessary *for* salvation, but they are necessary *in* salvation. That is, works aren’t the ground (or basis) of our salvation, but they are the necessary fruit of our salvation. If we are genuinely justified, then the Spirit will reside within us and He will produce His fruit of righteousness through us. We won’t be perfect on this earth, but we will give evidence of His progressive transforming work in us.
- ✓ It has often been said that justification is by faith alone, but that faith is never alone — that is, there is always expression of that faith in our good works. God has justified us because of His love for us and that love compels our love for Him. And because we love Him we obey Him (Jn. 14:15).
- ✓ So justification clarifies our purpose for living: we don’t live for Christ to earn His favor, but to demonstrate our love. We didn’t and couldn’t live for God’s glory, but now because of justification, we can live for His glory. And we do. And that life is not meritorious, but it is a life of love.

- Justification clarifies our **MESSAGE**. We’re talking about the gospel and looking for opportunities to talk about the gospel to others, and these messages clarify the essence of the gospel. What shall we say to sinners who need to be redeemed? You can say the gospel in six words, and they’re all in this text (or implied by it)

- ✓ **GRACE** — there is nothing you can do to merit God’s favor in your life. Justification His gift of grace.
- ✓ **MAN** — you are a sinner that has earned and merited and deserves only God’s wrath.
- ✓ **GOD** — God is just. And because He is just He is willing to pour that wrath out on all unrepentant sinners no matter your name, heritage, or position. He is no respecter of persons.
- ✓ **CHRIST** — Christ is God and Christ is just and Christ as the infinite God-Man could stand in your place and absorb the penalty of God’s wrath against your sin. And in dying for sin, He makes it possible for you to be imputed with His righteousness and declared righteous.



- ✓ **FAITH** — The only way you can appropriate the righteousness you need is to believe that Christ did what you cannot do — Christ pleased God and atoned for your sin through His death on the cross.
- ✓ **HOPE** — justification not only frees you from the penalty and power of sin, but it unites you to God so that you can enjoy Him forever (and if you don't want to be with Him forever, then you really don't want His righteousness and you really aren't saved).
- ✓ That's our message. It's that simple. And it's in this text.

**CONCLUSION:** On his seventieth birthday, pioneer missionary William Carey wrote to one of his sons these words: "I am this day seventy years old, a monument of Divine mercy and goodness, though on a review of my life I find much, very much, for which I ought to be humbled in the dust; my direct and positive sins are innumerable, my negligence in the Lord's work has been great, I have not promoted his cause, nor sought his glory and honour as I ought, notwithstanding all this, I am spared till now, and am still retained in his Work, and I trust I am received into the divine favour through him." [quoted in Jerry Bridges, *Disciplines of Grace*, 29.]

This is a confidence that expresses trust not in any work or merit of his own. He acknowledged that he has not met the standard of God. And yet he could still rest and be content that God looked favorably on him because of the work of Christ on the cross. This is the power of justification. It doesn't ignore our guilt. It atones for our guilt and removes our guilt and declares us to be righteous in Christ. That's the power of God's justification of sinners.

Why is justification a precious word? Why should we rejoice in it?

- ✓ Because in our sin, we were fully unable to do anything to save ourselves.
- ✓ Because our infinitely costly salvation is a free (FREE!) gift of Christ and His blood.
- ✓ Because it comes from God, who maintains His justice and still justifies us.

**BENEDICTION:** Jude 24-25