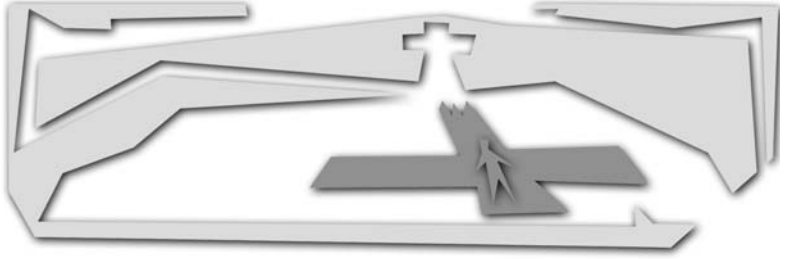


# Justified *by* Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Rom. 3:19–28.*

**Memory Text:** “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (*Romans 3:28*).

In this lesson we come to the basic theme of Romans: justification by faith. The phrase is a figure based on law. The transgressor of the law comes before a judge and is condemned to death for his transgressions. But a substitute appears and takes the transgressor’s crimes upon himself, thus clearing the criminal, who—by accepting the substitute—stands before the judge not only cleared of his guilt but regarded as never having committed the crimes for which he was first brought into court. And that’s because the substitute—who has a perfect record—offers the pardoned criminal his own perfect law-keeping. Thus, the guilty one stands before the judge as having never transgressed.

No one is saying that the person was innocent. On the contrary, his guilt is presumed. The good news is that, despite the guilt, he is pardoned.

In the plan of salvation, each of us is the criminal. The substitute, Jesus, has a perfect record, and He stands in the court in our stead, His righteousness accepted in place of our unrighteousness. Hence, we are justified before God, not because of our works but because of Jesus, whose righteousness becomes ours when we accept it “by faith.” Hence the term “justification by faith.” No matter our past, when we accept Jesus we stand before God in His righteousness, the only righteousness that can save us.

Talk about good news! In fact, the news can’t get any better than that.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 24.*

## The Deeds of the Law

**Read** Romans 3:19, 20. What is Paul saying here about the law, about what it does and what it does not or cannot do? Why is this point so important for all Christians to understand?

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Paul is using the word *law* in its broad sense as the Jew in his day understood it. By the word *Torah* (the Hebrew word for “law”), a Jew even today thinks particularly of God’s instruction in the first five books of Moses but also more generally in the entire Old Testament. The moral law, plus the amplification of this in the statutes and judgments, as well as the ceremonial precepts, was a part of this instruction. Because of this, we may think of the law here as the system of Judaism.

To be under the law means to be under its jurisdiction. The law, however, reveals a person’s shortcomings and guilt before God. The law cannot remove that guilt; what it can do is lead the sinner to seek a remedy for it.

As we apply the book of Romans in our day, in which Jewish law is no longer a factor, we think of law particularly in terms of the moral law. This law can’t save us any more than the system of Judaism could save the Jews. To save a sinner is not the moral law’s function. Its function is to reveal God’s character and to show people wherein they fall short of reflecting that character.

Whatever law it is—moral, ceremonial, civil, or all combined—the keeping of any or all in and of itself will not make a person just in God’s sight. In fact, the law never was intended to do that. On the contrary, the law was to point out our shortcomings and lead us to Christ.

The law can no more save than can the symptoms of a disease cure the disease. The symptoms don’t cure; they point out the need for the cure. That’s how the law functions.

**How successful have your efforts in law-keeping been? What should that answer tell you about the futility of trying to be saved by keeping the law?**

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## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Romans 3:28*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Contrast the role of the law and the role of faith in justification.

**Feel:** Acknowledge the depths to which God went in order to take upon Himself the consequences for our sin.

**Do:** Accept Christ's death on our behalf, which makes us righteous before God.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Law and Love**

**A** How does the law create for us a picture of God's perfection? Why is that perfection attainable only through faith in Christ?

**B** Explain how Christ's death is an acknowledgment of the great expectations of the law as something we owe but cannot pay and how God offers to accept Christ's life and death for that debt.

**C** How should we relate to God's law and God's love as illustrated by the Cross?

**II. Feel: Foundations of Law and Love**

**A** How is the King of the universe able to uphold the lawful foundations of the universe and at the same time extend love, hope, and mercy to those who have been in variance with those critical principles?

**B** In what ways does your heart stretch when you attempt to absorb the heights and depths of God's reach?

**III. Do: Our Response**

**A** What should our daily response be as we grasp the picture of the righteous requirements of the law of God and our dependence on Christ to be our righteousness?

► **Summary:** The law of God is perfect, and humans never can reach this standard; but when we accept Christ's righteousness, offered in place of our imperfections, God counts us as righteous.

## Faith and Righteousness

**“Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (Rom. 3:21). How are we to understand what this text means?**

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This new righteousness is contrasted with the righteousness of the law, which was the righteousness with which the Jew was familiar. The new righteousness is called “the righteousness of God”; that is, a righteousness that comes from God, a righteousness that God provides, and the only one that He accepts as true righteousness.

This is, of course, the righteousness that Jesus wrought out in His life while here in human flesh, a righteousness that He offers to all who will accept it by faith, who will claim it for themselves, not because they deserve it but because they need it.

**“Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account. Christ’s righteousness is accepted in place of man’s failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son.”**  
—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 367. **How can you learn to accept this wonderful truth for yourself?** (See also Rom. 3:22.)

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The faith of Jesus Christ is here, doubtless, faith *in* Jesus Christ. As it operates in the Christian life, faith is much more than intellectual assent; it is more than just an acknowledgment of certain facts about Christ’s life and His death. Instead, true faith in Jesus Christ is accepting Him as Savior, Substitute, Surety, and Lord. It is choosing His way of life. It is trusting Him and seeking by faith to live according to His commandments.

## *Learning Cycle*

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God will use any and all means in His power to bring us back into His family.

**Just for Teachers:** In this week’s lesson we discuss and explore faith as our only means for reconciliation with God.

We are all recidivist criminals. We can’t even remember when we started committing crimes. It just came naturally. After all, we grew up with other criminals, some of whom taught us—intentionally or not—how to commit more and better crimes.

We know the difference between right and wrong, so we can’t plead insanity. All our crimes are known to the judge, and there is no question of being innocent until proven guilty, because everyone knows we’re guilty. Being sorry doesn’t help. We face consecutive life sentences exceeded only by the consecutive death sentences.

There’s no hope. No lawyer is good enough to exonerate you, or even mitigate your punishment. But wait! Here comes that man that you’ve heard about. How can you describe him? Well, he’s something like a combination of the best points of Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Mozart, and Stephen Hawking, only better. He’s on his way to accept multiple Nobel prizes; but instead, he decides to come to your trial. To make a long story short, he accepts the penalties that are rightfully yours and gives you the honor that is rightfully his. Where is this in any law book? Suddenly you are on your way to Stockholm, and He is on the way to the penitentiary. How does this make you feel?

**Consider This:** As humans we have a difficult time forgiving others. How should we respond to God’s incredible act of forgiveness?

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

## **Bible Commentary**

**I. Sin: Covered or Blotted Out?** (Review with your class *Genesis 3, Proverbs 28:13, Romans 3:25, Hebrews 9:5, Exodus 25:18–21.*)

However good or righteous we think we are, our lives are full of sin. We know this truth, and our natural response is to cover our sins up. This

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## Grace and Justification

**Keeping** in mind what we have studied so far about the law and what the law cannot do, read Romans 3:24. What is Paul saying here? What does it mean that redemption is in Jesus?

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What is this idea of “justifying,” as found in the text? The Greek word *dikaioo*, translated “justify,” may mean “make righteous,” “declare righteous,” or “consider righteous.” The word is built on the same root as *dikaosune*, “righteousness,” and the word *dikaioima*, “righteous requirement.” Hence, there is a close connection between “justification” and “righteousness,” a connection that doesn’t always come through in various translations. We are justified when we are “declared righteous” by God.

Before this justification, a person is unrighteous, and thus unacceptable to God; after justification, he or she is regarded as righteous, and thus acceptable to Him.

And this happens only through God’s grace. *Grace* means “favor.” When a sinner turns to God for salvation, it is an act of grace to consider or declare that person to be righteous. It is unmerited favor, and the believer is justified without any merit of his or her own, without any claim to present to God in his or her own behalf except his or her utter helplessness. The person is justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, the redemption that Jesus offers as the sinner’s substitute and surety.

Justification is presented in Romans as a punctiliar act; that is, it happens at a point in time. One moment the sinner is outside, unrighteous, and unaccepted; the next moment, following justification, the person is inside, righteous, and accepted.

The person who is in Christ looks upon justification as a past act, one that took place when he or she surrendered himself or herself fully to Christ. “Being justified” (*Rom. 5:1*) is, literally, “having been justified.”

Of course, if the justified sinner should fall away and then return to Christ, justification would occur again. Also, if reconversion is considered a daily experience, there is a sense in which justification might be considered a repeating experience.

**With the good news of salvation being so good, what holds people back from accepting it? In your own life, what kinds of things cause you to hold back from all that the Lord promises and offers you?**

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Learning Cycle CONTINUED

reaction dates back to the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve realized that they were naked and made garments out of leaves (*Gen. 3:7*). In a way, this response is perfectly rational. Our sins separate us from both God and the better parts of ourselves. They need to be covered, so that we can relate to a holy God and discover the people God intended for us to be. But can we do this ourselves?

Proverbs 28:13 says simply that “he who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion” (*NASB*). In other words, we cannot cover up our own sins and expect them to stay covered. What happens when we try to conceal our own sinful nature? First, our motives are not pure; when we hide our sins, we are motivated most often by the desire to appear to be good in the eyes of other people. God isn’t fooled, and deep down we know this.


Second, our concealment isn’t any good. Sooner or later, the real sinful self peeks around the corners of our mask. Consider the garments of leaves made by Adam and Eve. What happens to leaves once you pluck them off the tree? They wither, and there you are, still naked under your garments.

God wants to put your sin out of sight as much as you do—even more. He does not want just to hide it; He wants to blot it out. Only He can do it effectively. Refer again to Genesis 3. When God finds Adam and Eve and establishes what has happened, He makes garments out of skin to cover their nakedness. What’s the difference between their covering and God’s? Only the difference between leaves and leather. And that is the difference between failure and forgiveness.

In this context it is important to note that the term rendered “atonement” or “propitiation” in most English translations of Hebrews 9:5 is actually a reference to the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant. This seat was not truly a *chair* as we would think of it, but rather the lid that covered the ark of the covenant. On top of this plate were the two cherubim with outspread wings. At the mercy seat our sins are blotted out and banished from God’s sight. The words in the original Hebrew refer to covering more than to legal notions of atonement.

We want our sins out of sight. Only God, through the work of His Son Jesus Christ, can make them disappear for good.

**Consider This:** Do you trust God to cover up and blot out your sins, or are you still trying to do it yourself? If the latter, what is stopping you from seeking God’s forgiveness and compassion?

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## “His Righteousness”

In Romans 3:25, Paul expounds further on the great news of salvation. He uses a fancy word, *propitiation*. The Greek word for it, *hilasterion*, occurs in the New Testament only here and in Hebrews 9:5, where it is translated “mercy-seat.” As used in Romans 3:25, describing the offer of justification and redemption through Christ, *propitiation* seems to represent the fulfillment of all that was typified by the mercy-seat in the Old Testament sanctuary. What this means, then, is that by His sacrificial death, Jesus has been set forth as the means of salvation and is represented as the One providing the propitiation. In short, it means that God did what was needed to save us.

The text also talks about the “remission of sins.” It is our sins that make us unacceptable to God. We can do nothing of ourselves to cancel our sins. But in the plan of redemption, God has provided a way for these sins to be remitted through faith in Christ’s blood.

The word for remission is the Greek *pareisis*, literally “passing over” or “passing by.” The “passing over” is in no sense an ignoring of sins. God can pass over the sins of the past because, by His death, Christ has paid the penalty for all people’s sins. Anyone, therefore, who has “faith in His blood” can have his or her sins remitted, for Christ has already died for them (*1 Cor. 15:3*).

**Read** Romans 3:26, 27. What point is Paul making here?

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The good news that Paul was eager to share with all who would listen was that there was available to humanity “his [that is, God’s] righteousness,” and that it comes to us, not by works, not by our merit, but by faith in Jesus and what He has done for us.

Because of the cross of Calvary, God can declare sinners righteous and still be considered just and fair in the eyes of the universe. Satan can point no accusing finger at God, for Heaven has made the supreme sacrifice. Satan had accused God of asking of the human race more than He was willing to give. The Cross refutes this claim.

**Satan expected God to destroy the world after it sinned; instead, He sent Jesus to save it. What does that tell us about the character of God? How should our knowledge of His character impact how we live? What will you do differently in the next 24 hours directly as a result of knowing what God is like?**

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Learning Cycle CONTINUED**II. Justified by Faith** (Review with your class Romans 3:28.)

God wants to forgive, conceal, and abolish our sins, and we want them forgiven, concealed, and abolished. How can we, unholy and unclean as we are, approach a God who is the polar opposite of all these things?

Once again, we run into the idea of faith. In our present state we cannot perceive accurately God if left to our own devices. So God freely gives us the means to communicate with Him. This means is called faith. Faith is not merely belief. In the Christian context, faith involves trust. Trust in God as a person. Trust that God is real and that He is working on our behalf.

Faith is not necessarily an emotion. We don't always feel God's presence, nor do we always feel *faithful*, or full of faith. Every human is going to have moments of doubt, moments during which he or she is walking down the street and suddenly wonders, "Is this for real? Or am I fooling myself?" Nor is faith something we arrive at through logic. It exists beyond logic, emotion, and all other human categories, because it is of divine origin.

When God gives us this faith, we can recognize and move past our human weaknesses. We can trust God to remove our sins and know that He has done it in a way that is beyond our usual ways of knowing and perceiving. In turn, we receive the power to become the people God meant us to be and to do the things that such people do.

**Consider This:** How does our faith change the way we live our lives in concrete, observable ways?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** **Emphasize to your students that we are saved not on the basis of our goodness but by the saving grace and goodness of God.**

**Thought Questions:**

- 1 What, if any, parallels to Christ's substitution for us are found in human law or justice? What does this tell us about how God's law is incomprehensibly higher than human law? What does it tell us about the purpose of God's law as compared to human law, which is concerned primarily with discipline and punishment?
- 2 In what ways are the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of God identical or complementary?

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## Faith and Works

**“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28). Does this mean that we are not required to obey the law, even if it doesn’t save us? Explain your answer.**

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In the historical context, Paul was speaking in Romans 3:28 of law in its broad sense of the system of Judaism. No matter how conscientiously a Jew tried to live under this system, if he or she failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah, that person could not be justified.

This verse is Paul’s conclusion from his claim that the law of faith excludes boasting. If a man were justified by his own actions, he could boast about it. But when he is justified because Jesus is the object of his faith, then the credit clearly belongs to God, who justified the sinner.

Ellen G. White gives an interesting answer to the question “What is justification by faith?” She wrote, “It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 456.

Works of law cannot atone for past sins. Justification cannot be earned. It can be received only by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, in this sense, works of law have nothing to do with justification. To be justified without works means to be justified without there being anything in ourselves to merit justification.

But many Christians have misunderstood and misapplied this text. They say that all one has to do is to believe, while downplaying works or obedience, even obedience to the moral law. In so doing, they completely misread Paul. In the book of Romans, and elsewhere, Paul attaches great importance to the keeping of the moral law. Jesus certainly did, as well, as did James and John (*Matt. 19:17; Rom. 2:13; James 2:10, 11; Rev. 14:12*). Paul’s point is that, although obedience to the law is not the means of justification, the person who is justified by faith still keeps the law of God and, in fact, is the only one who can keep the law. An unregenerate person who has not been justified can never fulfill the requirements of the law.

**Why is it so easy to get caught in the trap of thinking that because the law doesn’t save us, we need not worry about keeping it? Have you ever rationalized away sin by claiming justification by faith? Why is that a very dangerous position? At the same time, where would we be without the promise of salvation, even when tempted to abuse it?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

3 How were people saved before Jesus Christ appeared on earth and lived and died? If they were saved in the same way, do you think they understood the concept of salvation the same as we do? Why or why not? In the same vein, what things might there be that we don't understand about salvation at present but will understand more fully later?

**Application Questions:**

1 In the abstract, most of us can accept that sin is sin and that no one sinner is better than any other. On the other hand, most of us would rather live next to a hypocrite or a gossip than a mass murderer. Society also disdains or condemns some sins more than other sins. So, in what sense are all sins equal?

2 Christ's sacrifice takes away the legal guilt of our sins, but we often may face present circumstances stemming from past actions. How can we make our acceptance by God seem real to us?

3 Only through Christ's sacrifice and substitution for us can we keep the law. How, and why? Is it because we have more motivation? Do we have access to supernatural power that we didn't before? Explain.

**►STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** This week we have learned that although we are not worthy of salvation, God has provided it for us anyway. Why would we ever want to go on with business as usual?

A key concept in this lesson is the idea of substitution. Christ's record of perfect obedience to the law substitutes for our record of disobedience, haphazard obedience, or obedience for the wrong motives. Conversely, we may attempt to substitute our inferior righteousness for the righteousness that comes only from God.

To illustrate, emphasize the idea of substitution. In our world, there are all sorts of substitutes for things, some beneficial, others inferior to the original. Some examples of the beneficial kind: honey for sugar, soy for meat. Others are harmful: the milk scandal in Asia, for example, in which the manufacturers substituted melamine for added protein in dairy products, leading to illness and death. Ask for examples from the class. Be prepared to draw the spiritual analogies.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Righteousness of Christ in the Law,” pp. 236–239; “Come and Seek and Find,” pp. 331–335; “Perfect Obedience Through Christ,” pp. 373, 374, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “Things New and Old,” pp. 128, 129, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

“Grace is unmerited favor. The angels, who know nothing of sin, do not understand what it is to have grace exercised toward them; but our sinfulness calls for the exercise of grace from a merciful God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 331, 332.

“Faith is the condition upon which God has seen fit to promise pardon to sinners; not that there is any virtue in faith whereby salvation is merited, but because faith can lay hold of the merits of Christ, the remedy provided for sin. Faith can present Christ’s perfect obedience instead of the sinner’s transgression and defection. When the sinner believes that Christ is his personal Savior, then, according to His unfailing promises, God pardons his sin, and justifies him freely. The repentant soul realizes that his justification comes because Christ, as his substitute and surety, has died for him, is his atonement and righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 366, 367.

“Though the law cannot remit the penalty for sin, but charges the sinner with all his debt, Christ has promised abundant pardon to all who repent, and believe in His mercy. The love of God is extended in abundance to the repenting, believing soul. The brand of sin upon the soul can be effaced only through the blood of the atoning Sacrifice . . . of Him who was equal with the Father. The work of Christ—His life, humiliation, death, and intercession for lost man—magnifies the law, and makes it honorable.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 371.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read over the texts for this week and then, in your own words, write a paragraph summarizing what they are saying. Share your paragraphs with each other in class.
- ❷ Think about what it cost to save us: the death of the Son of God. What should that tell us about just how bad sin is? After all, if we stopped sinning and never did it again, why would that still not be enough to make us righteous before God? How can these facts help motivate us to resist the temptation to sin?
- ❸ What are ways one could be tempted to abuse this wonderful news about salvation by faith alone? What trap is someone falling into who gets caught up in that kind of thinking? (*See 2 Pet. 3:16, 1 John 3:7.*)