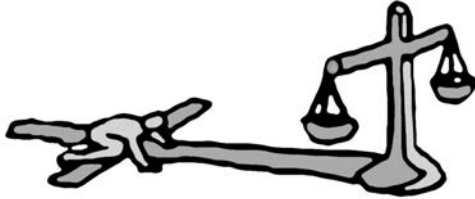


Justification *by* Faith



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 great truth that, more than any other truth, brought about the Protestant Reformation. And, despite all the claims to the contrary, Rome has no more changed regarding this belief now than it did in 1520, when Pope Leo issued a papal bull condemning Luther and his teachings. Luther burned a copy of the bull because if there were one teaching that could never be compromised, justification by faith was and is it.

The phrase itself 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. By accepting the substitute, the criminal now stands before the judge, not only cleared of his guilt but also 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.

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

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 28.

The Deeds of the Law

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

Paul is using the term *law* in its broad sense, as the Jew in his day understood it. By the term *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, when 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.

Whichever 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 us than the symptoms of a disease can 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?

The Righteousness of God

“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?

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.**

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.

By His Grace

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?

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 *dikaiosune*, “righteousness,” and the word *dikaioma*, “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, accepted, and righteous.

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?

The Righteousness of Christ

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 as “mercy seat.” As used in Romans 3:25 to describe 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 meaning “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 Christ has paid the penalty for all people’s sins by His death. Anyone, therefore, who has “faith in His blood” can have his or her sins remitted, for Christ has already died for him or her (*1 Cor. 15:3*).

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

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, likely, expected God to destroy the world after it sinned; instead, God 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?

Without the Deeds of the Law

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

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, that person could not be justified if he or she failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Romans 3:28 is Paul’s conclusion to his claim that the law of faith excludes boasting. If a man is justified by his own actions, he can 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 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 up 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?

Further Thought: 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*.

“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.

“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.

“When the Apostle says that we are justified ‘without the deeds of the law,’ he does not speak of the works of faith and grace; for he who does such works, does not believe that he is justified by doing these works. (*While doing such works of faith*), the believer seeks to be justified (*by faith*). What the Apostle means by ‘deeds of the law’ are works in which the self-righteous trust as if, by doing them, they were justified and so were righteous on account of their works. In other words, while doing good, they do not seek after righteousness, but they merely wish to boast that they have already obtained righteousness through their works.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 80.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 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.
- 2 Read Luther’s quote above. Why would such a truth like this have spurred him on as it did? Why is what he said such a crucial point to understand even for us today?
- 3 “Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as heirs of and builders upon the Reformation insights into biblical teaching on justification by grace through faith alone, and restorers and exponents of the fullness, clarity, and balance of the apostolic gospel.”—Ivan T. Blazen, “Salvation,” *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 307. What reasons do we have to believe about ourselves based on what is written here?

One Year in Mission: Part 3

“Here we have done even more than we could in New York,” Leonid said.

One hundred fifty missionaries came to Kiev—all were specially chosen by their unions or conferences. In addition, a youth team was formed, with 18 members from across the Euro-Asia Division. During the nearly six-month training program, the missionaries worked alongside Bible workers and medical missionaries and helped in the health stores. Additionally, 400 pastors came during two-week rotations to prepare for similar programs to be held in other cities throughout the division.

Anna, who led the youth group, was involved in several facets of the program. “We went prayer walking and walked close to the doors of the houses where we would be returning. At each house we prayed, ‘Please God, give us this house. Give us these people. Prepare them for us.’”

The next day team members went two by two, with one speaking while the other prayed. “First, we talk with the person about events happening in the world,” Anna describes. “Then we ask if they have ever read the Bible and if they think there is a connection between spiritual life and health. We try to continue the conversation and become acquainted with them.”

“What works in this method,” adds Leonid, “is not our faces or our questions. It’s that God prepares a special person for us, to hear what we have to share. This is very important.”

After just two weeks of going door-to-door, the team rejoiced that 26 new people came to church. Additionally, the health program participants were delighted to learn how to live longer and better and were enjoying being with the missionaries. “You have such a wonderful team,” they told Leonid and Anna. “We want to be with you. We like what you are doing.”

Anna is especially pleased with the effect the project is having on the youth. “I’m so happy when I hear them say, ‘You know, we feel like we’re in heaven. We feel like we’re really living here.’ At home, they have other worries, but here they feel the love of Jesus. When we work with Jesus and for Him, it’s real life.”

“Our youth program is part of the larger Mission to the Cities project,” Leonid said. “Here we’re all involved in one project—one mind, one spirit, and it’s really great!”

“This project is the result of a lot of prayers,” adds Anna. “Our entire world church has been thinking about how to reach people in the cities. If we’re all together, we can do wonderful things—and Jesus will come!”

ANNA GAVEL0, 23, represented the Euro-Asia Division (ESD) in the pilot program of One Year in Mission (OYIM). She, along with 13 other young adults, worked in New York City as part of the church’s Mission to the Cities outreach.