

Justified by Faith

by Brian Brodersen

The sermon emphasizes that justification by faith is the only way to be declared righteous before God, apart from works of the law.

Duration: 54:49

Scripture: Genesis 15:6, Psalm 32:1, Matthew 6:33, Romans 3:24, Romans 4:5-6, Galatians 2:16

Topics: "Justification"

Description

In this sermon on Romans, the preacher delves into the doctrine of justification by faith. He emphasizes that through God's grace and the redemption found in Christ Jesus, believers are justified freely. The preacher reflects on his past approach of focusing on the failures and shortcomings of Christians, but now understands the importance of being secure in God's grace and love. He highlights the need to always turn to Scripture as the final authority in matters of faith and morality.

Transcript

Alright, so, we're picking up in our study in Romans here, and we're moving tonight into the fourth chapter of this great epistle to the Romans. As Paul concluded the third chapter, he, as I pointed out, he began to lay down and expound this glorious doctrine of justification by faith. And there he stated in verse 24 of chapter 3, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

So he's beginning to explain to us in depth what it means to be justified before God, what it means to be justified by faith. And one of the things that it results in is that no one's able to boast. And he goes on to talk about that as he wraps up the third chapter.

Where is boasting then, he says. And boasting's eliminated. Now, of course, Paul's background was in an intensely religious culture, and with the Jews, and particularly the Pharisees, there was a ton of self-righteousness, and that lent itself to a lot of boasting.

People boasting about their own goodness, their own good works, and things like that. But this is something that God will not tolerate. He doesn't tolerate pride.

He doesn't tolerate boasting. And so Paul says through the gospel, through the way God has saved us, he's eliminated the possibility of human boasting. And if anyone is going to boast, all we can do is boast in the Lord, because he's the one who's done everything in regard to our salvation.

So Paul, having laid down the principles of justification by faith, he's now going to show that this has been God's way of justifying men all along. The Jews had completely misunderstood the message of the Old Testament. That's why they were boasting in their own perceived righteousness, because they didn't really understand their own scriptures.

They didn't really understand the law. They really didn't understand how the patriarchs had a right relationship with God. They misunderstood and misinterpreted that whole thing, and because of this misunderstanding, they felt that the gospel was contradicting what God had previously said in His Word.

So to them, the gospel was a contradiction to what was stated in the Old Testament, and specifically their misinterpretation of the Old Testament that people are saved by good work. So Paul is seeking to clear up these Jewish misunderstandings. Remember, Paul's writing to the church in Rome.

It's a church that's probably predominantly a Gentile church, but there are obviously a fair number of Jews, and probably a number of influential Jews that are there in the church or in that region. So Paul takes this epistle to the Romans, and he explains the doctrine of salvation to the Gentiles who knew nothing about salvation, and he clarifies salvation to the Jews who had misinterpreted and misunderstood their own scriptures. So he's already shown that although this righteousness he preaches through faith in Christ is apart from the law, it's separated from the law.

In other words, we don't get this righteousness by adherence to the law, but he shows us that it's witnessed to by the law and the prophets. So the law and the prophets were talking about this salvation that would ultimately come. He's also shown that the gospel does not nullify the law, or it doesn't make void the law, it really establishes the law, he says.

And what he means by that is that the gospel reveals the true purpose of the law. See, the true purpose of the law was, as Paul said in Galatians 3.24, the law was a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. The law was not given to justify people.

The law was actually given to show man that he could not save himself by his own good works. So the law was intended to really condemn somebody in order to drive them to the Savior, who then, of course, would give them salvation freely. So Paul is clarifying that.

Now, to prove his point, and this is where we see Paul, he was brilliant in his argumentation. Of course, he was inspired by the Spirit. But in order to prove his point that a man is justified by faith alone apart from works, rather than just, you know, insisting himself that this is true, he is going to use two of the greatest men in the history of the Jewish nation to prove his point.

He's going to go back to Abraham and to David. So he's going to illustrate from their own lives how what he's saying about the law is correct, as opposed to what they thought about the law. He's going to show through both Abraham and David that, in a sense, they were saved by the gospel.

Even though the gospel had not yet come, they were saved by the exact same principle that would be manifested when the Let me say, this idea that man is saved by doing some sort of work is not an exclusively Jewish idea. All religions except biblical Christianity teach that salvation is obtained by works. This is one of the common denominators with all of the religious systems of the world.

There's only one exception. And notice I said biblical Christianity. There is a manifestation of Christianity, a very large manifestation of Christianity, that is not biblical.

It's not rooted in the scriptures. And in that type of Christianity, you find a similar kind of a thing. You find that there is a mentality that salvation comes through works.

Real quickly, let me just give you some examples. In Hinduism, there are three possible methods that one can utilize to obtain the Hindu version of salvation. There is the way of works.

That's one possibility. The way of knowledge is another possibility. The way of devotion.

So, works, knowledge, or devotion. Obviously, works implies works. But knowledge and devotion imply works as well.

So, you're working hard to grow in your knowledge. You're working hard to be more devoted. So, the principle of works is they're firmly rooted in Hinduism.

The same is true in Buddhism. For Buddhism, there are ethical rules. For example, kill no living thing.

Do not steal. Do not commit adultery. Do not lie.

Do not drink alcohol or take drugs. Eat moderately. Avoid what excites the senses.

Do not wear adornments. Do not sleep in a luxurious bed. Accept no silver or gold.

And if you do these things, then you will hopefully attain whatever it is in Buddhism. That, you know, state of blissfulness. Islam.

Islam has its five pillars. The creed, the daily prayers, the almsgiving, the fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. With Judaism, it's the adherence to the 613 commandments of the Torah.

So, you see, in each one of these, there's this common thread. This is why people say, well, you know, don't all religions kind of teach the same thing? Yes, they do, with one exception. Biblical Christianity.

But as I said, there are many who identify themselves as Christians who believe in a similar fashion to the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Muslims, the Jews. They believe that it's through certain types of works that they're going to gain salvation. Whether it be by being baptized, or attending church faithfully, or tithing regularly, or keeping the Ten Commandments perhaps, or doing to others as they would have done to themselves, or by just putting forth their best effort to be a good person.

Many people who would refer to themselves as Christians would tell you that those are the kinds of things that will get you to heaven. So, we see that this thing of a works righteousness is and has been from the earliest days of human history. It's ingrained in the thinking process of man.

And if we were to go out tomorrow into our local community and just start asking people the simple question, well, how do you suppose one gets to heaven? Guaranteed, most people would give you answers that pointed to some sort of works that they would do to ultimately obtain salvation. But there's absolutely no excuse when it comes to Christianity. There's no excuse for any manifestation of the Christian faith to hold to any kind of a works righteousness because the Bible is very clear on this issue.

But what does that tell us? It tells us that a large segment of what's known as the Christian church doesn't pay attention to the Bible, doesn't take the Bible seriously. Sadly, that's the case. Now, with all of that as a rather lengthy introduction, picking up in chapter four, verse one, Paul says, What then shall we say that

Abraham, our father, according to the flesh, has found? He's our father according to the flesh.

What is Abraham found? See, because the Jews are insisting that Paul is wrong. A man cannot be saved apart from the deeds of the law. So Paul says, in a sense, Really? Well, let's talk about Abraham.

You respect Abraham, right? You know who I'm talking about, right? The father of the nation. How was Abraham saved? Was Abraham saved by adherence to the law? Of course, this would present an immediate problem because the law was not given until 400 years after Abraham's time. So what then shall we say that Abraham, our father, according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

Abraham had nothing to boast about before God because Abraham didn't attempt to justify himself by works. And look what Paul says in verse three. For what does the Scripture say? What does the Scripture say? Let me take just a little diversion there for a second.

This is the question that we always need to ask. Whenever we're uncertain about something, whenever we're wanting to know what the truth is about a matter that pertains to spiritual life or moral life and things of that nature, we've always got to come back to this. What does the Scripture say? That's the question.

We always want to take it back to the Bible. Scripture is, for the Christian, the final court of appeal. Now, I think probably mostly everybody listening to me understands that and agrees with that.

But, you know, sadly, that's not the case. For many in the Christian world, Scripture is not the final court of appeal. They would appeal, in some cases, to tradition.

In other cases, they would appeal to church dogma. Some would appeal to catechisms or the Declaration of Councils. And I'm not dismissing catechisms or the Declaration of Councils out of hand.

All I'm saying is that that's not the final place of authority. Sometimes when I'm reading different, maybe, systematic theologies or something like that, they will be appealing to different catechisms or confessions. They will be appealing, maybe, to the Westminster Confession that was a document that came out of the Reformation or the Heidelberg Catechism or something like that.

And these documents have value and they contain some good things in as much as they're in harmony with the Scripture. But, you know, at the end of the day, we don't appeal to that. We don't appeal to the writings of the church fathers.

We don't appeal, ultimately, to the writings of the Reformers. We go back to the Scripture. That is where we ultimately look to for the truth.

And that's what Paul does here. What does the Scripture say? The Pharisees had their opinions. The rabbis had their traditions and their ideas.

But Paul is asking this all-important question, what do the Scriptures say? What did they say? Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. That's what the Scripture said. See, they had developed a theory, like I said, that Abraham was saved through the law.

The Jews became so obsessive over the Torah that they actually surmised and went beyond surmising, they were very dogmatic about it, that Abraham kept the Torah himself, even though it didn't exist at his time. But they would insist that it did exist in some form, even though Moses would not come for 400

years. They would become so fanatical about it that they would say that God spent eternity past in the study of the Torah.

Now, that was convenient to help support their position because that's what they did. So, in their view, God was just an eternal rabbi. He just spent all of eternity studying the Torah.

So, one of the things that would be at issue here would be the authority of Scripture over the authority of oral tradition. The Jews were hugely into oral tradition, the traditions of the fathers. But you see, Paul dismisses that just as Jesus did.

Jesus just dismissed the traditions of the fathers. You remember they would come to Jesus on occasion and they would criticize him or they would criticize his disciples because they were not keeping the tradition of the elders. And Jesus just dismissed those traditions.

He referred to them as the doctrines and the commandments of men. And he did not see them binding in the least. And you would have thought that the church would have learned the lesson not to enshrine the opinions of men and elevate the opinions of men to a place of equality with the word of God.

But sadly, you can find numerous cases throughout church history where they've done exactly what the Jews did. They put tradition on the same level as the Scriptures. Paul sees the Scripture as the ultimate authority.

What does the Scripture say? The Scripture says that Abraham believed God. That's the key word. He believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

How was Abraham declared to be a righteous man before God? By the works of the law? No. By simple faith. He believed God.

Genesis 15.6. Paul is quoting from Genesis 15.6. And there we have God declaring to Abraham what he's going to do. And the text simply tells us that Abraham believed God. God said, this is what I'm going to do.

Look up at the sky. Look at the stars. I'm going to make your descendants like the stars in multitude, like the sand on the seashore.

And God is giving to Abraham this messianic promise. And Abraham says, I believe you, Lord. And the Scripture declares Abraham was righteous.

That's how he gained his righteous standing before God. Now, he says in verse four, to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace or as a gift, but as a debt. So we all know this by common experience.

If you work, then you receive a wage that is indebted to you because of the work you've done. It's not a gift to you. You've earned it.

So to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. The idea that you could mingle faith and works together is something that the Bible completely rejects. These two things in regard to justification, in regard to how a man is made right before God, they're mutually exclusive.

They cancel one another out. Paul will say later in this epistle, essentially he will either say it's all of grace or it's nothing. It's got to be one or the other.

It's got to be all grace or it's got to be all works. But you can't blend the two together. Now, of course, Paul was insisting on grace.

Some of the Jews themselves would be insisting on works. But there would be those in the middle that would be trying to bring them together. And there's still confusion even in the church today amongst some people.

There seems to even be contradictory statements in the New Testament about this whole thing of whether a man's saved by grace alone, through faith alone, or whether works has a part of it. And we'll get to that in our next study. One of the big questions that people so often ask is, well, what about what James said? We know Paul is saying here that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

But what about James who comes right out and says, so we see that a man is justified by works and not just by faith. I mean, wow, doesn't that sound like a contradiction? It sounds like a contradiction, but I promise you it's not. And we'll see why, but we won't see that tonight.

We'll see that next week. But I got all excited thinking about it today. Because there is just a clear and a beautiful explanation.

And it's kind of sad, really, that there's been such a controversy over it. And some people have just flat out felt that, well, here is a contradiction in the Bible. But it's easily resolved when you really look closely at it and see what's going on.

But let's carry on in the reading here. So, coming to verse 5. If you haven't underlined anything yet in chapter 4, underline verse 5. But to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.

So, first it's Abraham, the father of the nation. Now Paul is referring to David, the great king of Israel. The sweet psalmist of Israel.

The man after God's own heart. How was David justified? Was David justified by this keeping of the law? No, David describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works. And he's referring here to the 32nd Psalm.

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. So, in Abraham's case, there was no law for him to be justified by.

In David's case, there was a law, but he broke it. In David's case, he couldn't be justified by the law because he violated it. He violated it severely.

So, was there any other alternative? Was there any other possibility of salvation for David because he had violated the law? Yes, there was. What was it? Blessed is the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.

Now, there are four things that I want to look at concerning the justified man. And they are declared right here in verses 5 and 6. Four things concerning the justified man. And remember, the justified man is the man or the woman who is declared righteous before God.

Remember that. We talked about that previously. Declared righteous before God.

God acting in the role of a judge. These are legal terms, remember. And God is declaring us righteous.

It doesn't mean we are righteous. It is a declaration from the judgment seat by the judge himself that we are righteous. But here we are told four things about the person who is justified by faith.

Number one, notice this. But to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly. The ungodly.

The word could be translated the wicked as well. So, the first thing that we need to understand is that God justifies the wicked. He justifies the ungodly.

This is the point that we need to understand. Jesus Christ came to save sinners. He came to save sinners.

As long as a man persists in thinking that he is basically good or that he can somehow do something to earn God's favor, he will remain condemned. This is vital stuff. Justification is for the ungodly.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Jesus said, I did not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners. You see, in order for a person to be saved, we have to come to the end of our own attempts to save ourselves.

We've got to come to the place of full realization that I am lost with no possible means of restoring myself to favor with God. And until a person comes to that place, they'll never be justified. Because until I come to that place, there's always somewhere in me some belief that I can do it myself.

And lest you think that that's a minor sort of an infraction, it's a denial of everything God has clearly said. So when we refuse to accept our own ungodliness, we're essentially saying, God, you're wrong about me. I am better than you think.

I'm actually good. And your word concerning me is false. That's what we're ultimately declaring.

And we're also, even beyond that, declaring that the sacrifice of Christ was unnecessary because I could save myself. So you see, these are serious offenses with God. This isn't stuff that's just, you know, sort of a minor misunderstanding.

This is the type of thing that keeps a person outside of that position of being justified. So if we have not come to Christ as hopeless sinners, seeing our absolute inability to do anything to merit our salvation, we have yet to be justified. There are lots of people that are devoutly religious people, that are faithful churchgoers, that are faithful tithers, that are full of good works that are not justified.

They're still in their sins. Why? Because they see themselves as basically good. And therefore, if anything at all, Jesus might help them get to heaven, but he certainly isn't totally necessary.

He might contribute a little bit, but it's just a little bit because they've got quite a bit of their own goodness. So the justified person is a person who recognizes their ungodliness. The second thing that we see concerning the justified person is that they do not work for their justification.

And I love this right here. I mean, this to me, Romans 4, 5 is the irrefutable argument against any kind of a works righteousness. You know, you can't say it any more forcefully than Paul says it right here.

But to him who does not work, that's it. Him who does not work. Now, William Newell said this, and I wholeheartedly agree.

He said, what is written here, every believer should commit to memory, for it states what no mind of fallen man ever imagined. No fallen man ever imagined that salvation would be given to him who does not work. As we've already pointed out, all of the religious systems of the world have salvation going to him who does work.

But you see, this is where biblical Christianity, I'm emphasizing that again, biblical, right out of the pages of the Bible. This is what the Bible says. Justification is for those who do not work.

Let me remind you of how many times this is stated in the scriptures. Ephesians 2, 8 and 9, familiar passage to many of us. Let me read it again.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Again, could there be a clearer statement than that? By grace you have been saved through faith, that not of yourselves.

It's a gift of God, not of works. Again, but then Paul writing to Titus in the third chapter, the fourth and fifth verses. He said, but when the kindness and the love of God, our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us.

So it's not by works of righteousness that we have done. So you see, these are the clear statements of scripture. How could it be possible that the church for so many centuries even could have completely missed this message? This is the primary message of the New Testament.

How could it have been missed so radically? Well, it was missed because they just turned away from the Bible itself. Tradition took precedence over the scriptures. Church dogma took precedence over the scripture.

The catechisms and the councils, all of that took precedence over the scriptures. And so for centuries, nobody knew the simple truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Now, like I said before, it doesn't mean that people weren't saved at that time.

There were those that had just, you know, enough information and trust in the Lord. But to understand these doctrines and to be blessed and benefited by them. To live free from the guilt of sin.

To live free from condemnation. To live with the joy of the Lord because God has saved you. Because he's good.

So many people, sadly, for so many centuries were deprived of that because they did not have access to the scriptures. The scriptures had been taken from them and basically hidden away. So, justified man is ungodly.

The justified man does not work. The justified man believes on him. So this is how it happens.

How does it happen? It happens by belief. I think one of the, you know, let me say this. I shared this with you before and it's still true to this day.

There are people that say today that Paul is the one who invented all of this stuff and he completely got it wrong. Jesus didn't teach this. They say Jesus taught that we're saved by works.

And Paul came along and confused everybody. And that's why we don't want to listen to Paul. So they say that Jesus never said anything like justification by faith.

Jesus made it clear that you had to do good works, keep the law and so forth if you were going to be saved. This is what they insist. Well, let me just remind you that we're told in John chapter 6 verses 27 through 29.

As the people are listening to Jesus and as they're coming to him, they ask him this question. They say, what shall we do that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said to them, this is the work of God that you believe in the one, believe in him whom he sent. They were asking basically, what do I have to do to please God? What do I have to do to merit God's favor? What do I have to do to be saved? What do I have to do to go to heaven? This is the question they were asking him.

What did he answer them? He said, this is it. Believe in the one whom he has sent. You see, Jesus did teach salvation by grace through faith.

He absolutely taught it. This is what the apostles preached when they went out into the world. You remember the story recorded in Acts chapter 16 where Paul and Silas are in Philippi.

And they're put in jail and they're worshiping the Lord. And at midnight, there's the earthquake. And you remember the jailer, he's afraid that they've escaped.

So he's about to, he draws his sword. He's about to kill himself. Paul says, do yourself no harm.

We're here. And the man then responds and he says, what must I do to be saved? Here's this Roman centurion. What must I do to be saved? And what is Paul's response? It is, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your house shall be saved.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. It was that simple. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your house shall be saved.

Later on in this epistle, Paul puts it like this. If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. But then probably the classic text of all time is the one that we're most familiar with, John 3.16. What does John 3.16 say? For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

How do we, how do we get everlasting life? The answer's right there. Whoever believes in him. So the justified man is a man or a woman who recognizes their own inability to save themselves.

They do not work for their salvation. They simply believe. They believe the testimony of God.

That Christ died for our sin. Now, there's one other thing that I want to point out to you. And it's another important word.

We looked previously at the word justification. We looked at the word redemption. We looked at the word propitiation.

Here's another word and it's the word impute. And notice here if you have a similar translation to what I have. Verse 6, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.

And then verse 8, blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. So the justified person is a person whose sins are not being imputed to themselves. That's the negative side of it.

The positive side is the justified person is a person that Christ's righteousness is being imputed to. To impute sin is to lay sin to the charge of someone and to treat them accordingly. Similarly, to impute righteousness is to set righteousness to one's account and to treat them accordingly.

Thus Paul speaks both of God not imputing sin to sinners, although it actually belongs to them. And of his imputing righteousness to us, although it doesn't belong to us. See that's what imputation is.

God doesn't impute sin to us. He doesn't put it on our account. Again, these are financial terms or economic terms.

God's not putting sin on our account. Instead, he's putting righteousness on our account. Now, of course, sin is what's really in our account, isn't it? We've all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

So I've got a bank full of sin, but God's not looking at it that way. Instead, God is putting into my account the righteousness of Christ. He's disregarding the sin in the account.

He's overlooking it. He's emptied it out. Whatever he's done with it, he's disregarding it.

And instead, he's putting the righteousness of Christ on my account. And then that's how he's looking at me. He's looking at me as righteous.

But it's not my own righteousness that he's seeing. It's the righteousness of Christ. That's what imputed righteousness means.

So justification involves a double counting. Counting, crediting, or reckoning. On the one hand, negatively.

God will never count our sins against us. Isn't that amazing to think of that? God will never count our sins against us. How is it that we are always fearful that that's what he's doing? Isn't it true that even as his children, even as believers, even as those who have trusted in Christ, we still so often go about feeling as though God is counting our sins against us.

But he's not doing that. He's not doing that. He will never count our sins against us.

On the other hand, positively, God credits our account with righteousness. As a free gift, by faith, altogether apart from works. You see, this is the gospel.

And as I said earlier, weeks back, this is the good news that we need to immerse ourselves in. This is the good news that we need to just bask in, to soak in. It's stated all over the New Testament, but somehow we miss it.

It's so easy, even just in reading our Bibles, isn't it sometimes easy to find those verses that are sort of condemning or those verses that are making you feel like you're just such a lousy Christian? And we completely pass right over those passages that would tell us otherwise. I remember as a young pastor,

because I didn't know enough about the grace of God in my own experience, and I certainly knew a lot about my own failure, I preached so often on how we all are always coming short, how we're all always failing God, and all of the messages were sort of crack the whip, and come on, we've got to do better, and we've got to pray harder, and we've got to witness more, and we've got to be more righteous and more spiritual. And boy, everybody went home just beat.

Beat up. It was a time of beating the sheep so often. And I remember a season, this was a really bad season, where if I didn't beat the sheep, I felt guilty.

Because surely everybody deserved a beating. But then as time went on, I began to see some of these other things, and began to understand God's grace and love, and that to me has become the focus and the passion. And of course we need sometimes to be exhorted.

Sometimes we need a rebuke. Sometimes we need those things. But I think more often than not, we need to just be secured in the grace of God.

And the love of God. And that's what this doctrine, this justification by faith, that we are accepted in Christ. That's what my acceptance with God is based on.

This is the picture. To quote Lloyd-Jones, There is a man standing in his rags, in his filth. There is the condemned guilty sinner before God.

What happens? Well, God puts on him this robe of righteousness. He puts on him the white robe of his perfection, and now sees that and nothing else. He is accepted in the beloved.

He has accepted us in the beloved. That's another way that Paul put it in writing to the Ephesians. We've been made accepted in the beloved.

You're in Christ. God's not imputing our trespasses to us. He's imputed to us the righteousness of Christ.

When he looks at us, he sees us clothed in that righteousness. And as I've said before, and I'd love to just repeat it, you can never be more righteous than the day you believed in Jesus, from God's point of view. Now, from our own human perspective, of course, we grow in righteousness, we grow in holiness.

Sanctification is a process that we're going to talk about as we move on. But know this, the moment you believed in Jesus, God declared you righteous, and you can't improve on that. Because you've got the perfect righteousness.

It's the righteousness of Christ. And that's what he does. And he does it for the ungodly.

He does it for the wicked. This is not to put a premium on ungodliness or wickedness, but it's the reality. Until we realize we're ungodly, until we confess that we're wicked, until we finally give up trying to save ourselves because we're convinced that there's some spark of good in us, we will never be justified.

It's the moment that I give up on all of that. That's when that declaration of righteousness comes. And so God declares us to be righteous, and he then begins to indwell us simultaneously by his spirit.

We're regenerated. We're born again. We're given a new life.

We enter into the sanctification process, and God's going to be working out sin in our lives and working in his character and his love. But all the while, all the time he's doing that, we're still in this other area. We're safe over here.

We're already perfected in one sense. As Paul would say to the Ephesians, he actually says we're seated already presently in heavenly places in Christ. We're already there.

But then on the practical side, God's working it out. But since he's already got us there in one sense, we can be sure he's going to get us there in the practical sense. God's not going to stop.

He's going to keep that process going, and he's going to bring you to that place where you're more and more like the Lord Jesus as time goes on, because that's where we're already at, from where he sits and how he sees us. And that, again, is what it means to be justified by faith. That's how Abraham was justified, who lived 400 years before the law was given, and that's how David was justified, who lived 400 years after the law was given and broke it, but was still a blessed man, a man to whom God did not impute sin, but imputed righteousness.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this great and glorious truth of justification by faith. And, Lord, would you just burn this into our hearts? Oh, Lord, how we thank you that your love for us is so grand and glorious.

And, Lord, you look at us and you see us in Christ. You don't look at our failures. You don't deal with us according to our iniquities.

Lord, and you've removed them from us as far as the east is from the west. And as a father pities his children, Lord, so you pity those who fear you. You remember our frame.

You know we're dust. Thank you, Lord, for your patience as you work this sanctification process out in each of our lives. Lord, we thank you that it's not of him who works.

Lord, some of us tried to work. We tried hard to work our way into your favor, and we just found ourselves miserably condemned. And then your grace came along and showed us that you'd already done all the work, and we just needed to enter into it.

How we thank you for that. Lord, thank you that there's not a person that's too bad. There's not a person that's good enough.

Everybody needs grace, and you've got a supply for everyone. How we rejoice in that. Lord, pour out your grace upon us tonight.

Thank you, Lord, that you've saved us by your grace. We praise you for your glorious grace in and through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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