

BIBLE STUDY OF ROMANS (10)

Reflections on Paul's teachings

With Ch. 3:21 the apostle began to outline the *only* means of salvation. In brief, the only way to salvation is 'by faith in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' Having proven that Jew and Gentile, Christian and non-Christian stand in need of this, Paul now presents the Gospel message of justification by faith only (Ch. 3:21-5:21).

As introduction to this second section, consider the following notes on justification. If we are unclear on this, we will continue to falter along the way to the only comfort in life and death.

I. JUSTIFICATION

- A. The Biblical word "justification" has a different meaning than the way we commonly use it today. When I am late for a meeting, I offer a "justification" in the sense of an explanation why I was late. Or when we ask, "Can you justify this decision?" we seek an explanation why such a decision was taken in the light of various circumstances.

However, in Paul's letters the word 'justification' is a purely **legal** term. Justification in Romans is referring to a legal sentence or declaration issued by God the Judge. In this sentence or declaration God pronounces a person *free from any fault or guilt and entirely acceptable in His holy sight*. This person is declared free because he or she has met all the requirements of God's holy law and found to possess a perfect righteousness.

As one stated, "The Biblical meaning of *to justify one* is to pronounce, accept and treat such a person as perfectly just. That means, in legal terms, that such a person is not liable to any punishment on the one hand and entitled to all the privileges due to those who kept the law." Again, justification is a verdict of a judge (in this case, God) who declares a person acquitted and excludes him from every possibility of condemnation.

If upon examination a person is found guilty of any sin or lacking in righteousness in the least degree, he cannot be justified. He only can receive a sentence of condemnation. If a judge would justify such a person, he would be twisting justice! Justification thus settles the legal status of the person justified.

- B. Scripture presents two methods of justifying a person. One is based on the person's WORKS and the other is by FAITH in Someone else's works!
1. JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS: THE LEGAL METHOD. This method requires that men *perfectly obey God's law*. Romans 2:13 "... but the doers of the law shall be justified." If anybody can obey the law of God perfectly, he will receive eternal life as reward. In 3:9-20 Paul has made clear that in the present condition *no one can fulfill the law's demands* for all men are under the power of sin and without any righteousness whatsoever. Therefore, he concluded that *no human being shall be justified in God's sight by works of the law*. (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10-14) The law cannot save a sinner; it can only condemn them.
 2. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH: THE GOSPEL METHOD. The second method graciously offered to men whereby they may be justified before God is through *faith* in

Jesus Christ. In this way of justification, a guilty person can be justified on the basis of Jesus Christ's obedience to the law (or Jesus Christ's good works). Jesus' obedience to the law (His active obedience) as well as His satisfaction of the broken law (His passive obedience) becomes the ground upon which God can justify. This obedience of Christ can only be received by the act of faith (trust) and His payment to God for the sins as well as His obedience of the law will be credited to the sinner upon his or her believing or receiving Christ. Paul explains, illustrates and defends the doctrine of justification by faith from Ch. 3:21 – Ch.10. It really is the heart of the letter.

II. IMPUTE

To impute or reckon (Ch. 4: 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22-24) something to a person means to put it on his account or to number it among the things belonging to him. If something is imputed to a person, it is **legally made his**. He can now consider it as his personal possession. Other words for impute are *to account, to charge, credit, attribute, reckon*. Compare it to someone "depositing money into your bank account as a gift." Once it is in your bank account, you can consider it yours.

In this matter of 'impute' it doesn't matter *who* it is that imputes. Both good and bad deeds can be imputed to us. For examples, Adam's first sin is imputed to all mankind as he was the covenant head of us all.

So when God is said to "impute sin" to anyone, the meaning is that God accounts such a sinner and as result guilty and liable to punishment. Similarly, the non-imputation of sin means simply not to lay it to one's charge as the ground of punishment. In the same manner, when God is said to "impute righteousness" to a person, the meaning is that He judicially accounts such a person to be righteous and entitled to all the rewards of a perfectly righteous person, which is eternal life.

III. GROUND OF JUSTIFICATION

The ground on which God the Judge is able to justify a sinner is based on a two-fold imputation. This is called the most blessed exchange!

(1) The sins of God's elect children were all imputed to Christ – this is why He suffered and died on the cross because personally He was sinless (see 2 Cor. 5:21). Christ became **legally** responsible for the believer's sins and underwent the believer's just punishment. By dying as the elect's substitute, He satisfied the demands of justice and forever freed the believer from any possibility of condemnation or punishment. When the believer's sins were imputed to Christ, the act of imputation in no way made Him personally sinful or polluted His nature. It only made Him *legally* responsible for those sins.

(2) Jesus Christ lived a perfect life – He completely kept God's law. This personal righteousness worked out by Christ during His life on earth is imputed to the sinner the *moment* he believes. The believer is credited with Christ's righteousness and God views him as if he had done all the good that Christ did.

Christ's obedience, His merit, His personal righteousness is imputed to the believer. This also doesn't change the believer's nature; it changes the believer's **legal** standing before God. The change of the believer's nature is God's work of sanctification accomplished through the Holy Spirit.

IV. THE MEANS OF JUSTIFICATION

The means by which the sinner receives the benefits of Christ's saving work (His sinless life and sacrificial death) is *faith in Him*. No one can be justified *apart* from faith; yet, no one is justified on the *basis* of his faith. Faith itself does not save the sinner but unites him to Christ. Therefore, faith, though a necessary *means to justification*, is not itself the *cause or ground of justification*. Faith is the outstretched hand which receives Christ but doesn't merit. If faith was the ground of justification, faith would in effect be a meritorious work and the Gospel message would, after all, be merely another version of justification by works. This faith God works in the heart of a sinner out of pure sovereign grace.

V. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN "IMPUTED" AND "PERSONAL" RIGHTEOUSNESS

We must be careful not to confuse *imputed* righteousness (which is received by faith alone and is the only ground of justification) with the *personal acts* of righteousness which are performed by believers as a result of the Holy Spirit's work in their heart. Yet these personal acts of righteousness in no way secure or add to our justification.

To quote the words of Hodge, "... the righteousness for which we are justified is neither anything done **by** us nor wrought **in** us, but something done **for** us and imputed **to** us. It is the work of Christ, what He did and suffered to satisfy the demands of the law. It is nothing that we have either wrought ourselves or that inheres in us. Hence Christ is said to be our righteousness; and we are said to be justified by His blood, His death, His obedience; we are righteous in Him and are justified by Him or in His name or for His sake. The righteousness of God, therefore, which the Gospel reveals, and by which we are constituted righteous, is the perfect righteousness of Christ which completely meets and answers all the demands of that law to which all men are subject, and which all have broken.

VI. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Eight times in the Roman letter reference is made to the righteousness of God.

Three times it has reference to God's attribute of justice: Rom. 3:5, 25, 26.

Five times it has reference to that righteousness which God gives (imputes) to all who believe in His Son: 1:17; 3:21,22; 10:3. This righteousness which He gives is separate from the works of the law (see Rom. 3:38; 4:1-8; 23-25); it is not our own (Phil. 3:9); it is the gift of God (Rom. 5:17) and it is received by faith (Rom. 1:17; 9:30-10:4; Gal. 2:15-21). In 1 Cor. 1:30 Paul speaks of Christ as being the believer's "righteousness" made by (provided by) God.

Discussion Questions related to Romans 3:21-23

1. Verse 21 begins with “But now ...” Does that refer to the moment Paul wrote this? If not, then when and where and how did this ‘now’ begin?
2. The word ‘righteousness of God’ needs clear definition. Does this refer to the attribute of God’s righteousness? If not, then what does it refer to? Compare with verse 22.
3. How can God’s righteousness be manifested without the law? Does this mean that the law is disconnected to this righteousness? Or does it mean that our law keeping has nothing to do with this righteousness of God?
4. Though the New Testament is the full blaze of the Gospel, the Gospel was already witnessed by the Old Testament. Can you find 3 Old Testament support passages for this claim?
5. Vs. 22 is the expanded version of Romans 1:16-17. What is added in this expanded version?
6. How does this ‘righteousness of God’ become mine?
7. Is this righteous of God offered unto all people? Support your answer with at least two other Scriptures.
8. Vs. 23 defines (repeats) the universal need of our human race. What does it practically mean that we ‘come short of the glory of God?’ In your answer imagine you are explaining that to a 6-year-old.

Application Questions

9. What are some of the most liberating truths in these verses?

10. What are some of the common struggles we fallen sinners experience in believing this message of the Gospel?

11. If you have come to see the glorious light of the Gospel, does that mean that you now always see it or experience its joy?

12. In which way(s) are OT and NT believers similar? In what way(s) are they different?

13. Haldane wrote, “But faith triumphs over self-unworthiness, and sin, and death and the law, shrouding the soul under the mantle of Jesus Christ, and there it is safe. All accusations fall off, having nowhere to fasten, unless some blemish could be found in that righteousness in which faith has wrapped itself. This is the very spring of solid peace and fills the soul with peace and joy.” What is helpful to you in this quote?