

Justification

Romans 3:19-28

Let's start today with a **two question quiz**.

A Two Question Quiz:

1. If you died today, do you think you would go to heaven?
2. If you stood before God and He asked you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" What would you say?

Take a moment to think about your answer. If you have a pen, write down your answer. Imagine that moment you will stand before God - because every one of us will be there one day. God says to you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" What is your answer?

[Wait for a minute or so.]

Your answer to the first question reveals your level of ***CONFIDENCE in your salvation***. Do you have assurance? Do you KNOW that you have a reconciled relationship with God? Or are you uncertain?

A Two Question Quiz:

1. **CONFIDENCE:** If you died today, do you think you would go to heaven?
2. **CLARITY:** If you stood before God and He asked you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" What would you say?

Your answer to the second question reveals your level of ***CLARITY about your salvation***. It shows what you are trusting in to get you into heaven. People often lack confidence about their salvation BECAUSE they lack clarity about how to be saved.

- If you rated your confidence and clarity from 1-10 what would you score?
- How certain are you of going to heaven? How much confidence do you have?
- How much clarity do you have about why God would let you into heaven?
- Do you see how the two things are SO closely related? ***The more clear you are about what gets you in the more confident you will be!***

I've found that most people today answer the first question, "I hope so," which shows they do not have great confidence or assurance. And they answer the second question with some degree of ***reference to THEMSELVES*** - "I've been a pretty good person. I've gone to church my whole life. I've taken care of my family. I've given a lot to charity." Do you hear the common phrase - "I...I...I..."

If you think your salvation **depends on YOUR EFFORTS** - even a little bit - ***you will never have confidence that you are saved.*** How could you? You are human like the rest of us - and your efforts will always fluctuate and will never reach God's standard of perfection. The only way to have peace and confidence and assurance about heaven is to know the gospel with crystal clarity - that it is not about YOU at all but is all about JESUS!

Our salvation has nothing to do with OUR EFFORTS and everything to do with JESUS' EFFORTS. You could never earn forgiveness of your sins by balancing them out with good deeds. But Jesus provided a full and eternal pardon for your sins by His once for all sacrifice. ***Salvation does not depend on what you DO but on what Christ has DONE.***

[ADD SCALES AND BALANCE IMAGE]

ANSWER KEY:

How does anyone get into heaven?

.....% Jesus% Me
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"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight... for all have sinned... and are justified **by his grace** as a gift... to be received **by faith.**" Rom. 3:20,23-25

The cry of the Reformation centered on THIS PASSAGE in Romans 3 and this single word: JUSTIFICATION. How can sinners be reconciled with a holy God? What do we have to do to be saved? The clear and resounding answer of Luther, Calvin and the other reformers was: by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.

In other words - zero percent because of you and 100% because of Jesus. ***It is all about HIM and not at all about us.*** Listen to these wonderfully clarifying words of Romans 3!

ANSWER KEY:

How does anyone get into heaven?

100% Jesus	0% Me
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"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight... for all have sinned... and are justified **by his grace** as a gift... to be received **by faith.**" Rom. 3:20,23-25

It's all grace. 100% a gift of God. 0% earned by us. We add nothing. Even our faith is an undeserved gift that God must give us. He opens our eyes to see our need for Jesus. The Holy Spirit draws us to Jesus and opens our heart and mind to spiritual truth. Salvation is 100% the gift of God - so that ***He gets 100% of the credit for it.*** He gets all the glory, all the praise.

Paul makes exactly this point in v. 27 -

Salvation is entirely God's Work (100% grace) so that God gets all the Credit

“Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.” Rom. 3:27

The law of faith says that **we are saved by faith alone** – not by works. And the exercise of faith itself is not a work. That too is a gift! All boasting from us is excluded. Any attempt to take a tiny shred of credit is ruled out. Sinners are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone – for the glory of God alone. He gets all the credit!

And that is the whole point of the gospel: it reveals the RIGHTEOUSNESS of God.

Salvation is entirely God’s Work (100% grace) so that God gets all the Credit
“In [the gospel] *the righteousness of God* is revealed from faith for faith... But now *the righteousness of God* has been manifested.” Rom. 1:17; 3:21

The message of the gospel is ***the message of the righteousness, goodness, justice and glory of God***. That is what Jesus came to show the world – that God is glorious; He is holy; He is righteous and merciful; He is all-powerful and all-loving. To say God is RIGHTEOUS is to say He does everything right because He IS everything that is good and right and holy and glorious.

And isn’t it tremendously encouraging that **this is our gospel? God is GOOD**. The God of the universe is not some fickle tyrant. He is not some arbitrary deity like the Greek gods or the Marvel superheroes or, heaven forbid, the DC superheroes. No. God is Good. The gospel reveals the fullness of His goodness and ***all of that righteousness and mercy is summed up in one word: JUSTIFICATION***.

Today we will learn ***how to SEE the perfection of God and how to RECEIVE the perfection of God***. Because that is what the gospel of Jesus Christ has revealed!

First – **how to see the truth of God’s perfection**.

We can see the Perfection of God

“But now *the righteousness of God* has been manifested apart from the law... *the righteousness of God* through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” Rom. 3:21-22

Throughout all of history **God has been revealing His righteousness**.

- Creation showed the glory and creativity of God.
- Kicking Adam and Eve out of the garden after they sinned showed the justice of God.
- Saving Noah and his family from the flood showed God’s justice to condemn sinners and his mercy to save a few believers.
- Calling Abraham and forming Israel from one old and infertile couple showed the power of God and His faithfulness to keep His promises.

- Saving Israel from slavery in Egypt showed God's power over the mightiest nation on earth and His saving grace to protect His people using the blood of a lamb in the Passover event.
- King David, Elijah, Daniel, all the prophets, all the Old Testament stories – all of it was a revelation of the righteousness of God.

"BUT NOW" Paul writes in Romans 3:20. But now there is a NEW and final, a complete revelation of this righteousness. The 10 commandments outlined the goodness and justice of God. But the gospel reveals the HEART and SOUL of the righteous character of our God. "BUT NOW" we can finally see how great and glorious God really is!

And this righteousness was revealed ***APART FROM THE LAW***. Yes," the law and the prophets bear witness to it." As we've seen this whole year, the whole Bible points to Jesus. ***Everything in the Old Testament was leading up to the arrival of Jesus and the unveiling of the gospel.***

But in the end that unveiling was not accomplished through the Law – instead it was revealed ***through the Cross***. What was the full and final revelation of the perfection of God's love and justice? The cross of Jesus Christ. "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested." In Christ, we see it – the light has come on!

The gospel Jesus announced and accomplished was the revelation of the character of God. Jesus is the WORD OF GOD in the flesh. ***In Christ we see the righteousness of God in human form.***

We can see the Perfection of God in Jesus

"But now the PERFECTION of God has been manifested apart from the law... the PERFECTION of God through faith IN JESUS CHRIST for all who believe." Rom. 3:21-22

It is the PERFECTION of God – embodied in Jesus. That's what the ***"But now" refers to***. NOW that we have Jesus, we can really see and understand and appreciate the full perfection and goodness and glory of God. Before Jesus – even with the Law and the prophets – God's people only had a shadowy outline of the nature of God. In Christ, the fullness of God's perfection burst into view.

Jesus obeyed the law perfectly, without a single sin or oversight. He did everything he was supposed to do, he left nothing undone, he did not deviate from the Father's will even a single degree one time.

"But now the PERFECTION OF GOD has been manifested!" **We see His glory!** We see His righteousness! Paul added his voice and testimony to that of the 11 apostles who spent three years with Jesus and witnessed all of his miracles, saw the fullness of his love, saw him go to the cross and then ate with him after he rose from the dead. Just as those 11 apostles witnessed the

glory of the Risen Christ, so Paul too met Jesus personally on the road to Damascus. So Paul could personally say, "***But now the perfection of God has been manifested" directly to him.***

- For Saul the Pharisee that revelation of God's glory in Jesus was a blinding flash of light.
- For Peter it was a miraculous catch of fish.
- For Matthew it was a banquet at his house – a rabbi eating with a tax collector!
- For James and John it was up on a mountain when Jesus' briefly unveiled His divine majesty in the transfiguration.
- For Thomas it was placing his fingers in Jesus' scars.

This is what the whole New Testament is: the presentation of this revelation. ***But it is not just that we can SEE the perfection of God in Christ – but that we can RECEIVE His perfection for ourselves!*** That righteousness can be applied to you and to me!

We can Receive the Perfection of God from Jesus

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested... For all have sinned... and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Rom. 3:21,23-24

- ***Justified = declared righteous by God***

The perfection of God has been manifested in Christ so that very perfection could be applied to sinners like you and me. That is **what JUSTIFICATION means** - to be DECLARED RIGHTEOUS by God. It is a judicial term - from the courtroom.

Everyone will stand before God in **judgment one day** and ***books will be opened*** that detail everything you've ever done or said or thought. In that final evaluation, apart from Jesus, every verdict will be the same: "***Guilty. Guilty. Guilty. Guilty.***" One after another sinners will stand before God and have all of their proud, selfish, idolatrous choices exposed for all to see.

But then, imagine that courtroom - **with Jesus sitting high above as the judge** - when a Christian comes in. The angelic secretary goes to present the evidence from the books that would condemn the Christian but Jesus gestures to the angel not to even open them. Instead Jesus steps down from his judgment seat, walks over to the Christian, puts his arm around him and looks up to the Father with love and joy in his eyes and says, "Father, this one's mine."

In that moment a different book will be opened called "***The Lamb's Book of Life,***" and because the believer's name is in that book, the other books won't even be opened. The only names in that book are those who have called on Jesus to save them - and because they have they will be declared righteous.

Brothers and sisters - the wonder of the gospel is that we don't have to wait for that verdict until judgment day. In Christ, we have that verdict now. Jesus gives it to us in advance, as a gift of His infinite grace. Listen to how Paul explains it in chapter 4:

We can Receive the Perfection of God from Jesus

*“Abraham believed God, and it was **counted to him as righteousness.**” Rom. 4:3*

- Justified = declared righteous by God

To be justified is to be **given credit** for the righteousness of another. Abraham was 75 years old when God promised that he would be the father of a great nation. It was an impossible promise. But Abraham BELIEVED that promise and “it was counted to him as righteousness.” 2,000 years before Jesus was born, **Abraham was JUSTIFIED**. He was declared righteous. God gave Abraham credit for the future perfection of JESUS. And He does the same thing for us!

We can Receive the Perfection of God from Jesus

*“The words ‘It was counted,’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. **It will be counted to us who believe in him.**” Rom. 4:23-24*

- Justified = declared righteous by Go

This promise applies directly to us! In the same way that God gave Abraham credit for righteousness simply because of his faith, so God will give YOU credit for righteousness!

Brother, sister - if you belong to Jesus by faith, consider what this means for you.

- You should not have any fear of judgment day. You already have the verdict! God has made His pronouncement!
- Not only are you “not guilty,” but I’m God’s eyes you are RIGHTEOUS. God looks at you and sees PERFECTION!
- Believer, you should never doubt your VALUE. You are as precious and valuable to God the Father as Jesus Himself was.
- God says to you exactly what He said to Jesus: “This is my beloved child. With you I am well pleased.”
- So you should not fret and worry about doing enough. Stop all thoughts of performing to earn God’s approval. You HAVE His complete approval already!
- You have been DECLARED PERFECT!

How is that possible? How does a person receive this infinitely amazing gift?

We can Receive the Perfection of God from Jesus

*“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law... the righteousness of God **through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.**” Rom. 3:21-22*

How can the righteousness of Jesus be applied to you? How can His perfection become yours? The answer is right here in this verse: **“through faith.”** Paul adds “for all who believe” not to be redundant but to be clear that there are no restrictions on this offer. It is available to EVERYONE, without distinction, without classification or qualification.

In other words, ***this is not just a Jewish thing.*** You don’t have to be descended from Abraham. You don’t have to be circumcised. You don’t have to be a man. You don’t have to be educated. Your skin color and background don’t matter.

If the ministry of Jesus made anything clear it was that He came to serve the least and the lost. He went to the tax collectors and sinners. He touched the untouchable. No one was beyond the reach of his love. And that remains true today.

The perfection of Jesus is available to you – no matter what you’ve done. You can receive the gift of His righteousness not because you have done such a great job and have been so faithful and have prayed so much and memorized so many verses. If you think that is how to earn God’s favor and get to heaven you will be exhausted and frustrated and you will never feel like you’ve done enough because you haven’t. You never can.

The point of the gospel is that only Jesus has done enough. Only Jesus lived a perfect life. Only Jesus satisfied the righteous requirements of the law. Only Jesus was tempted in every way but was without sin. Only Jesus has perfection in Himself to offer. You don’t. And neither do I.

But Jesus offers HIS perfection to you and to me – as a gift of His pure grace. It’s all about Him. It’s not about you or me. All we do is say “Ok.” All we do is say “Yes.” All we do is look to Jesus and say, “Help,” or “Please.”

The sinner’s prayer saves you not because the words are magic – they aren’t. ***It saves you because it is the expression of FAITH.*** Faith is how a sinner receives the gift of Jesus’ righteousness. Faith alone. Nothing more. Nothing else. Faith.

Paul mentions faith twice in verse 22 that we’ve been looking at. He says it again 4 times in the next five verses.

We can Receive the Perfection of God from Jesus

“Are justified by his grace as a gift... to be received **by faith**... the justifier of the one who **has faith** in Jesus... By the law **of faith**... One is justified **by faith** apart from works of the law.” Rom. 3:25-28

Could the point be any clearer? How does a sinner get saved? How can you be JUSTIFIED? ***How can God declare you PERFECT?*** Obviously not just by looking at you! No more could he look at me and say, "PERFECT!"

No! When God looks at any of us **apart from Christ He sees "sinner."** That's what Romans 1, 2 and 3 make abundantly clear. "No one is righteous. No not one." Sin confuses, controls and consumes people.

But at the moment you called on Jesus in faith His view of you changed completely. Instead of looking at you and seeing all of your sins and failings, ***suddenly God sees in you all of Jesus' righteousness and glory.***

This is the doctrine of **JUSTIFICATION**. Sinners can be JUSTIFIED or RIGHTEOUS-i-fied or declared PERFECT. Feel the force of that truth. If you have called on Jesus in faith – if you have said to Jesus, "save me! Forgive me! I believe in you!" ***Then God looks at you and says, "PERFECT."***

When God thinks of you He does not see your sins and flaws, your blemishes and mistakes. ***When God looks at you – believer – He sees Jesus.*** He sees PERFECTION. He sees righteousness. He sees love. He sees goodness, patience, self-control, boldness, power and grace.

And that change took place when you prayed **"the sinner's prayer."** The sinner's prayer goes like this:

- Lord Jesus, forgive me.
- I know I'm a sinner.
- But I believe you died for me.
- And I believe you rose again.
- So forgive my sins. Take them from me. And I will follow you for the rest of my life.

We didn't print or post those words because the words don't matter. You can say the sinner's prayer using any of 1,000 different words. There isn't a formula or set of magic words. The words are just a way of EXPRESSING FAITH. And faith is the only way to receive the perfection of Jesus. We didn't print the words of the sinner's prayer – but we did print this phrase, nice and big:

We can Receive the Perfection of God from Jesus

● **BY FAITH ALONE**

"For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." Rom. 3:28

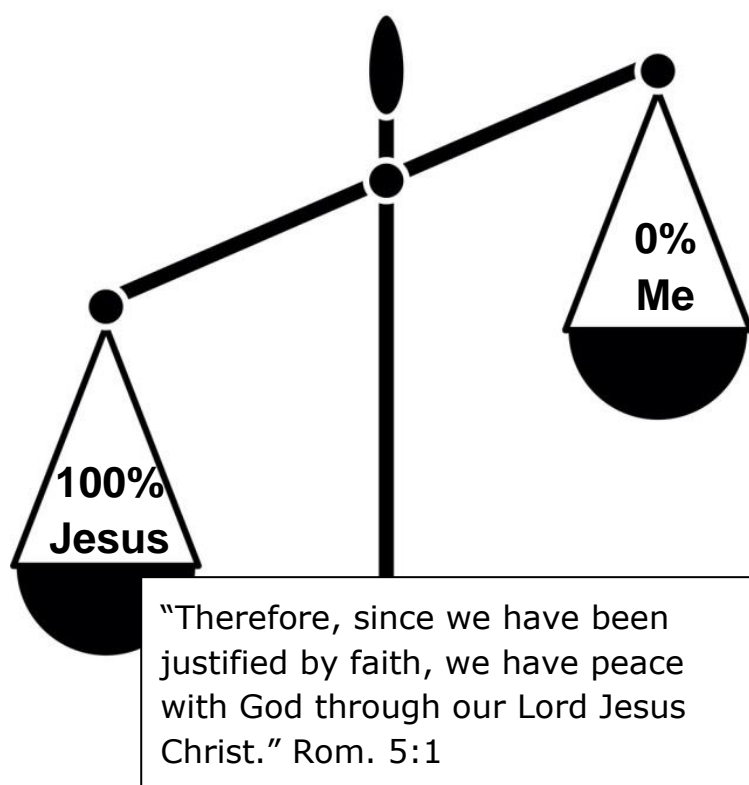
Here is how Paul concludes chapter 3. And if you want some homework this week go on to study **chapter 4** which uses **Abraham** to prove this point. Even Abraham was saved by FAITH ALONE. He didn't have the Law – which would come through Moses 500 years later. All Abraham had was a PROMISE from God to bless him. So Abraham “believed that promise” and God gave him CREDIT for righteousness based on his FAITH ALONE.

It is faith alone that saves, not works. If you think – even a tiny bit once in a while – that your works can save you – you will never have assurance of your salvation. You will never have peace. But once you realize that salvation is 100% based on Jesus and His finished work you will have peace and joy and life and everything else.

John Bunyan, who later wrote the Pilgrim's Progress, was raised going to church. But as a young man he did not have assurance of salvation. He did not have confidence about his salvation. He did not have peace.

Until one day he heard a preacher explain the words of Jesus on the cross when he said, ***“It is finished.”*** Suddenly the light came on for Bunyan. Jesus finished the work. When he died on the cross, that was the work. That FINISHED IT. “Jesus paid it all! All to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow.”

If you think – as Bunyan did – that your salvation depends, even a little bit, on your effort, you will never have peace. But once you realize that salvation is 100% based on Jesus and His work, that clarity about the gospel will give you confidence in your salvation.



It is not about your efforts at all – those will never be finished. **It is all about His efforts** – which were finished – once and for all, on the cross. That is where to find peace and confidence – “Blessed assurance – Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God; born of His Spirit, washed in his blood!”

Here is Paul's conclusion in Romans 5:1 *“Since we have been justified by faith we HAVE PEACE with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:1*

WE HAVE BEEN. ***Finished. Completed. Done.*** JUSTIFIED - declared righteous.

We have RECEIVED the perfection of Jesus as a credit to our account. Because of this, we have PEACE. ***All fear is removed; all worry and uncertainty.***

No longer are we in conflict with the God of heaven - knowing we are sinners deserving His wrath. No. In Christ we have PEACE. And we have this peace BY FAITH ALONE.

Do you see the point? ***We can see the perfection of God in Jesus.*** This is why Jesus came - as the full and final revelation of the PERFECT character of God. We see the righteousness of God in Christ - the light of His glory illumines our hearts and minds and moves us to worship Him alone.

But praise be to God we can not only see God's perfection in Jesus - ***we can RECEIVE that very perfection by faith alone.*** We could never earn it. We could never deserve it. But God gives us credit for the perfection of Jesus simply because we call on Jesus in faith.