

Justification by Faith

Romans 3:22-31

INTRODUCTION

- A. Maria Feordormena, wife of Alexander III of Russia, saw a note signed by her husband, condemning a man.
 - 1. The note read: “Pardon impossible, to be sent to Siberia.”
 - 2. Maria transposed the comma so that it read: “Pardon, impossible to be sent to Siberia.” That man was set free.
- B. In short, that’s what it means that we have been justified — God has taken us who are guilty and he has pardoned us.
 - 1. “Justify” in the Greek means “to treat as righteous” or “to vindicate.” Thus, justification means that even with my sin God considers me as just and righteous.
 - 2. “Justify” is often in the passive in biblical literature.
 - a. When a verb is passive, the subject has the action done to him; the subject doesn’t do the action.
 - b. Thus, God justifies me; I cannot justify myself.
- C. In the text we have chosen for this morning, Paul speaks a good deal about justification. He tells us two important concepts concerning justification: We Need Justification & We Receive Justification.

WE NEED JUSTIFICATION, vv. 22b-23

- A. “For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- B. Social tensions were a problem in the Roman church.
 - 1. Most all the first Christians in Rome were Jews; yet, in the 40’s, Claudius, the Roman emperor, expelled the Jews from Rome — Acts 18:2 — “And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.”
 - 2. The church was composed almost entirely, then, of Gentiles. But, when Claudius died, and his edict was revoked, many Jews returned to Rome.
 - a. So, you had Jews and Gentiles in the same congregation.
 - b. The Jews wanted to keep the Mosaic Law, and the Gentiles wanted nothing to do with it. So, you had a problem with these two groups.
- C. These two groups seem to have been claiming superiority over one another because of the way they observed or did not observe the Law.
 - 1. The Jews were saying that they were more holy than the Gentiles because they kept the Law; the Gentiles were saying they were more holy because they understood their freedom in Christ.
 - 2. In these verses, Paul — with a stroke of genius — says, “I don’t care who you are — Jew or Gentile — there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
 - a. Paul here refers both to the past and to the present.
 - b. “Sinned” is past tense — we sinned in the past.
 - c. “Fall short,” however, is a present verb. and it denotes action in the present. Paul says that we fall in the present; even though we are children of God, we sin.
- D. We have all sinned and are coming short of what God intends for us.
 - 1. Notice what Paul says in vv. 9-18.
 - 2. At a church where D. L. Moody, the famous denominational preacher, was invited to preach, he was warned that some of the congregation usually left before the end of the sermon.
 - a. When Mr. Moody rose to begin his sermon, he announced, “I am going to speak to two classes of people this morning: first to the sinners, and then to the saints.”
 - b. He proceeded to address the “sinners” for awhile, and then said they could leave. For once every member of the congregation stayed to the end of the sermon.
 - 3. But, isn’t the truth that we are all sinners? Isn’t that precisely why we need justification?

WE HAVE JUSTIFICATION, vv. 24-30

- A. In these verses, Paul tells us two ways that we have justification: we have justification through Jesus; we have justification through faith.
- B. We have justification through Jesus, vv. 24-26.
 - 1. They — both Jews and Gentiles — are justified by his grace as a gift.
 - a. Justification comes through God’s grace.

- 1) The word “grace” itself means kindness or goodwill - we’re saved then through God’s goodwill.
- 2) God, because he has goodwill, because he is kind, has chosen to save those who will accept his salvation.
- b. This grace and justification come as a gift — God doesn’t have to give us justification or salvation, but he has chosen to do so.
2. This justification comes through redemption in Christ Jesus.
 - a. “Redemption” means to release on payment of a ransom.
 - 1) The idea is that we were held in bondage to sin, and Jesus freed us from sin.
 - 2) Paul had already said that all individuals were in bondage to sin — “I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin” (v. 9).
 - b. Redemption is in Christ Jesus — as we have a relationship with Christ Jesus, we have redemption.
3. God put Jesus forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith.
 - a. “Expiation” in Greek refers to the appeasement of a deity.
 - 1) An expiation was something man put forward to keep the gods happy, or at least, not angry with man.
 - 2) Interestingly, in pagan religions, mankind had to attempt to find some expiation to appease the gods. However, in Christianity, man doesn’t bring forth an expiation — God is the one who puts forward the expiation.
 - b. This expiation comes through Jesus’ blood.
 - 1) Jesus’ blood has the power to remove sin.
 - a) God chose by Jesus “to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20).
 - b) Those who came out of the great tribulation “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14).
 - 2) M. R. DeHann once wrote, “The Bible is a book of blood . . . wholly distinct from all other books for just one reason, namely, that it contains blood circulating through every page and every verse. From Genesis to Revelation we see the stream of blood.”
4. God’s putting forward Jesus showed his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.
 - a. Although the sins of Old Testament saints were not forgiven until Jesus’ death, God overlooked those sins.
 - 1) Old Testament sacrifices were insufficient to remove the sins of Old Testament saints - “It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins” (Heb. 10:4).
 - 2) Thus God “passed over” those sins until Jesus could come and die.
 - b. The RSV says that God’s sending Jesus showed his “righteousness.”
 - 1) However, the term translated “righteousness,” although it can refer to being right, can refer to justice. One definition given in Greek lexicons for this word is “the business of a judge.”
 - 2) I wonder if that’s not how we should see the term here — God, because he is just, cannot just overlook sin, and he demands justice. That justice is seen in Jesus.
- C. Man is justified by Jesus, but we also receive justification through faith.
 1. “Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith,” v. 27.
 - a. Paul seems to have envisioned someone boasting, “I’m justified. I’m right with God.”
 - b. Paul says, “Wait just a minute. That justification you have doesn’t come through the works you do: it comes through faith. You don’t have any right to boast.”
 2. Paul goes a step further, “We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law,” v. 28.
 - a. Justification does not come through keeping the law.
 - 1) Interestingly, the article “the” does not appear in Greek, nor does it appear in the RSV.
 - a) When an author wanted to refer to a specific object, he would use the article; if Paul had wanted to say, “Man is not justified based on the OT law” he would have used the article the Greek would read “the law.”
 - b) When an author wanted to stress quality or character of a thing, he did not use the article, like here. Thus, Paul wanted to stress the quality and/or character of the law.
 - 2) What Paul seems to be saying is this: “Look, man doesn’t become right before God by keeping a bunch of regulations, whether we are talking about the Old Testament law or some law like it.
 - b. Justification, says Paul, comes through faith.
 - 1) In speaking of Abraham, Paul quotes Gen. 15:6 — “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (4:3).
 - 2) Thus, even Abraham, the father of Israel, was not justified based upon his works, but based upon his faith.
 - 3) We today are not justified based upon our works, but based upon our faith.
 3. “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith,”

vv. 29-30.

1. Apparently, the Jews in Rome wanted to take the qualities of the Old Testament law and bind them upon the Gentile Christians. Paul says, “You can’t do that, because God is the God of the Gentiles just as much as he’s the God of the Jews.
2. But, God will justify both the Jew and the Gentile on the basis of their faith.
 - a. Throughout the New Testament, we are taught that man is justified by faith, not by works.
 - 1) “Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).
 - 2) “So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24).
 - b. Thus, our faith makes us right before God, regardless of who we are.

CONCLUSION

- A. I know what you might be thinking: “Justin has preached unscripturally this morning, because he’s preached about being saved by faith, and he’s not mentioned any obedience.
 1. I’ve chosen to preach only this text this morning, and this passage only mentions faith, no other response by man.
 2. I think one appropriate question to ask is; “Did Paul believe one just had to believe God and had to do nothing else?”
 - a. You know quite well that’s not the truth.
 - b. The Book of Romans — from which we have studied this morning — makes quite clear there are requirements for man other than faith.
 - 1) 6:3-4.
 - 2) “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” (6:15) — Paul says here that we have moral obligations.
 - 3) “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved” (10:9-10).
 - 4) Thus, Paul talks about baptism, abandoning sin (repentance), and confessing faith.
 - B. Why, then, would Paul talk about justification by faith and not mention, in that passage, any other requirements? It’s because faith is fundamental.
 - a. “Without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6).
 - b. Without faith there will be no obedience, there will be no salvation. Unless one comes to faith, he will never turn from sin or be baptized into Christ—he won’t believe he has a need to be.
 - C. Do you this morning need to be justified by faith? Do you desire to put your faith into action?