

Romans 1:16-24; 3:9-31

¹⁶I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

¹⁷For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,^[a] just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."^[b]

God's Wrath Against Mankind

¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Footnotes:

- a. [Romans 1:17](#) Or is from faith to faith
- b. [Romans 1:17](#) Hab. 2:4

No One is Righteous

⁹What shall we conclude then? Are we any better^[a]? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. ¹⁰As it is written:

*"There is no one righteous, not even one;
¹¹there is no one who understands,
no one who seeks God.*

*¹²All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one."^[b]*

*¹³"Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit."^[c]*

"The poison of vipers is on their lips."^[d]

¹⁴"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."^[e]

¹⁵"Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ruin and misery mark their ways,

¹⁷and the way of peace they do not know."^[f]

¹⁸"There is no fear of God before their eyes."^[g]

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Righteousness Through Faith

²¹But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,^[h] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

²⁷Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. ²⁸For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. ²⁹Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ³¹Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

Footnotes:

- a. [Romans 3:9](#) Or worse
- b. [Romans 3:12](#) Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20
- c. [Romans 3:13](#) Psalm 5:9
- d. [Romans 3:13](#) Psalm 140:3
- e. [Romans 3:14](#) Psalm 10:7
- f. [Romans 3:17](#) Isaiah 59:7,8
- g. [Romans 3:18](#) Psalm 36:1
- h. [Romans 3:25](#) Or as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin

Isaiah 53:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

Justification by Faith¹

Romans 1:16-24; 3:9-31

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

As mentioned last week, today's message builds on that glimpse of the prospect for the Jews and Gentiles that was foreshadowed in Mark chapter 11. The Jewish Nation, but not certain individual Jews, being likened to the fig tree that did not bear fruit, loses its unique 'people of God' purpose. The new Nation of God, to comprise some Jews first, and then the grafted believers from the whole (Gentile) world would become the people and temple of the one living, true God.

This new Covenant, being introduced by Jesus as an integral part of God's Kingdom on Earth was the 'good news' about Christ. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul said, that he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ and very vigorously and effectively set about proclaiming it. In the letter to the separated house churches in Rome² he described this Gospel as the announcement of the special, miraculous power³ of God, which was saving everyone who believes. The Jew first and then the Gentiles. He went on to explain: *¹⁷For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."* (Hab 2:4)

Paul says that Justification by Faith is the substance of the Gospel. It's that important! Martin Luther came to the same conclusion, observing that Justification is the article (the measure) of a standing or falling Church and applied it unfavourably to the established Church of His day. Today's Churches similarly often fall under the same condemnation.

Justification by Faith, being the essence of the Gospel, answers the question that arises in the mind of all and any who seriously and conscientiously seek to understand the way to become reconciled to God. "How can a guilty sinner like me be found righteous before a Holy, perfectly-righteous, absolutely-just God?" How can I be put right with God?

Consider the important answer to this in three particulars:

- Justification is a declaration. Something I might be said to be. Not

1 Based generally on a transcription of a sermon by Stuart Olyott from the Back to Basics (1992) series.
http://www.knowyourbible recordings.org/sermons_locked/BAS12.mp3

2 Perhaps no other part of Scripture has had as profound an influence on the history of the Christian church as Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Luther said of Romans: 'It can never be read or considered too much or too well, and the more it is handled, the more delightful it becomes and the better it tastes.'

3 The word translated as 'power' in Greek is δυνάμις (donamis – dynamis – the miraculous power of God, in particular used in connection with the power of the Holy Spirit – especially when describing the activity of the Holy Spirit as believers receive Him).

something done to me. In Deuteronomy 25:1 a judge is given the right to assess a defendant as righteous or guilty. If the person is innocent of the charge, then a perfect judge would justify that righteousness. The judge would not cause the state of innocence (righteousness) only declare its recognition. This is straight forward in a court as described.

Our problem is that in all our cases we are actually guilty. (Rm 3:23) [F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.⁴

God is Holy, just and pure (He hates sin, and He has decreed the just penalty for it). How can a righteous Lord, declare a sinner innocent?⁵ How can a Holy God declare a sinner as righteous? That IS the problem!

- We have no answer. It's beyond us. But while it is impossible for us anything is possible for God. He reveals the answer. It is the 'good news' of Jesus Christ. The answer rests on 'imputation'. God has reckoned, credited (or imputed) to one person what originally belonged to another person. For example, Adam's sin has been put to the account of every natural born human since creation. Original sin. This is the origin of all sin and our death and separation from God as the penalty. A sin that we affirm and compound by our own actions in every generation. Conversely, God's love and mercy, His grace, retaining His perfect justice, effects a mysterious exchange. A double imputation, as it were, to solve and resolve the greatest question of our existence.

My sin, my guilt is transferred to Jesus Christ's account. He is treated as if my sin is His sin. (2 Cor 5:21) *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* All my lies; my impure thoughts; the things I should have done, and didn't; and the things I did and do; in short my disobedience of God's Holy law. The things by which I justly deserve the strictest punishment, He was punished for.⁶ How can anyone claim there can be a Gospel without 'the cross'. Or without a resurrection – which confirms and vindicates Christ's ultimate purpose, decreed by the Holy Trinity before time began.

If we stop here, however, only part of the Gospel has been included.⁷

If this were the whole story, where would I be? My sins are put to Christ's account and He was punished fully for them once and for all,

4 Or read again Rm 3:10-18, which quotes eight passages from the Old Testament.

5 Even by our human sense of justice, we are incensed if the guilty escape punishment. Take for example the feelings and actions (comments) of the 'victim' families when a person guilty of a serious crime seems to escape full and adequate punishment.

6 What a punishment He suffered! For all those saved and yet to be saved. The perfect Holy Son of God, One in fact with God Himself in the glorious Trinity, suffered separation from God, during the time when even the 'sky turned black' and then it was finished.

7 Sadly, a majority of Churches that claim the Name of Christ, which includes evangelical Churches, only preach half the Gospel.

yes. But I would remain neutral in God's sight. He would not be impelled to punish as before, but He would have no reason to accept me! Where would this leave me and any reconciliation with God? The mysterious exchange has yet a further step. Jesus who lived without sin, His perfect life is put (imputed) to my account: All His purity; all His beauty; His truthful words; His Holy thoughts; and Godly actions. Everything that God is and was 'fleshed out' in a (perfect) human life is put to my account. The righteousness of the incarnate God is imputed to the believing sinner. The wheel has turned full circle: the first Adam's sin was imputed to all natural humans; the second Adam – Christ the 'proper man' – His righteousness has been imputed to God's new chosen people. Here we see that just as Christ's death was efficacious in saving us from our sins, His righteous life has healed the rift between God and fallen mankind. As the returning prodigal's filth and degeneration was covered by the father's cloak, so believers appear before God seeming like Jesus. This is why we are accepted, embraced, adopted and considered to be dear by God. The righteousness of Christ has been credited to us. I am declared to be righteous, declared to be just.

- Above all we must remember: It is God, alone, who Justifies. God declares the sinner to be justified. This is done freely – it is a gift. By His grace!
And it is not my faith that makes me righteous.⁸
It is the person and work of Christ which is the ground of my Justification. Only that! So where does faith come in? Firstly the faith can only be faith in Jesus.⁹ The belief and trust that He is the complete source of my salvation. Faith is the means by which God bestows this gift. The instrument by which this gift is applied to my experience. Justification is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, which we receive by the means of faith. By coming to Jesus Christ; relying on Him and following Him. Faith does not save. Jesus Christ does!
Don't fret, looking to yourself to see if your faith is strong or weak. Look at Jesus and see and trust and put your weight on Him. That's faith. Stop looking at yourself. Look at Him. That's the way Justification is applied to us!

Finally we should consider three features of Justification:

- By being an act (a declaration), Justification is complete in a moment. It

⁸ Some would say that 'faith is a good work' 'a good work which pleases God'. Something God accepts instead of obedience. Or something God considers just as good as keeping His Holy Law. The impression can be given that one can be saved by one's faith. But this is false! Faith is not the grounds on which I am accepted by God. God accepts me because Jesus died in my place and He embraces me because Jesus Christ's perfect life has been put to my account.

⁹ Faith itself has no life! Faith depends on the One who is 'believed in'. Faith is thus a property of Christ. Both Faith and the turning away from the old life in sin (repentance) are things we have by the grace of God. Things we 'have'. Things we are 'given'. Neither depend on us. Neither is 'made' by us. We do not, can not, by any power of our own will, create faith or bring about repentance. Both are given, in God's good pleasure, to those He loves. Nor are God's chosen, possessors of any special merit or attributes (then, now or in the future) that cause God to love us. We are all intrinsically unlovable. But while we were still sinners (unlovable aliens of God) He sent His Son, in His love, to save us from our unlovable state.

is not a process that proceeds over time. When you come to the Saviour, the moment you recognise your need, repent and believe in what Jesus has done and that you can put your unqualified trust in Him, the double imputation takes place.

At that moment your sins are cancelled. At that moment His righteousness is put to your account. Nothing more is to be done. You are now 'right with' God.

- While the source of Justification, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus has been accomplished, once for all, the means of appropriating this gracious gift of God to yourself is your repentance – your recognition and disdain of your offences to God – and belief in the saving work of Jesus. The saving faith in Christ.¹⁰ (Gal 2:16) *know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*¹¹
- No Law keeping is necessary. Justification is not conditional on keeping the 10 Commandments – no one has ever kept them, except Jesus Himself. (This is why only He can be the Saviour). Justification is by faith alone, your performance doesn't come into it.¹² It is Jesus Christ's perfection that saves us. Keep looking at Him! But while Justification is through faith alone, it is never found alone! Faith is always accompanied by good works. The good works of Christ whose Spirit works within the justified. (Jam 2:26) *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.* Such good works are the 'fruit' of faith that is thus confirmed as real and not fake by the changes brought about in our lives that come when we believe. Changes that are sown and nurtured by the Spirit dwelling in us. The process of Sanctification that matures in us to the end of our earthy days.

Are you Justified? Do you know the Gospel? Do you know the power of the Gospel in your experience and personal life, whereby you have been put right with God, whom you have offended, but now put right forever because of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pray this will be so for all the saints present today. Amen.[1643]

10 It is certainly true that God has decreed, before time began, that His loved ones have always been known; God's Son died to save these loved ones that were 'given to Him' for this very purpose and covered them with His righteousness. In addition the power of the Holy Spirit works to bring God's chosen people to faith. But until the Holy Spirit finally calls each one, by the Gospel and brings each to Christ, until that moment, each of these elect is as lost as anyone else!

11 This is a joint witness from Paul and Peter – two great apostles. A famous preacher Charles Spurgeon, (1834-92) a Particular Baptist – that is a Calvinist, who preached to thousands from his Metropolitan Tabernacle for many years is reported to have described a dream. He approached the 'gates of heaven'. When asked who he was he described his considerable good works as a Preacher of the Word. "Don't know you", was the reply. He returned later, and to the same question replied, "a vile sinner who rests in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Lord." "Come in to your rest," was the response.

12 Luckily, since none of us can ever reach the standard required of the perfectly righteous God.