

Justified by Grace

By Keith Surface

Being **JUSTIFIED** freely **BY HIS GRACE** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: **Romans 3:24**

In the sixteenth century the protestant reformation charged forward carrying with it Martin Luther's revelation of "Justification by Faith." What a wonderful and needed revelation it was. By it, generations of believers were liberated from the crushing weight of a works based theology. Yet, what was missed in all this was that "Justification by Faith," though true, was not the message Paul was presenting in his letter to the Roman church. Rather, it was an underlying foundation for "the gospel he had received by revelation of Jesus Christ." This revelation, presented in his letter to the Romans, is actually the message of "**Justification by Grace.**"

"**Justification by Grace,**" is in fact, the prevailing theme of the book of Romans. Paul begins this thought of "**Justification by Grace**" in **Romans, chapter 3**, when, after first proving that "*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,*" he writes, "*Being **justified** freely **by His grace** through the **redemption** that is in Christ Jesus*" (**Romans 3:24**). It is very important to see, know, and understand that "**Justification by Grace**" is accomplished through the **redemption** that is **in Christ**, whereas, "Justification by Faith" which he will speak of later in his letter, claims no such connection to redemption and is most definitely pre-atonement ([pre-reconciliation]; that is, how men were justified before Christ made atonement [reconciliation] for sin). It is in the middle of his writing on "**justification through the redemption (grace)**" that Paul takes up the issue of "Justification by Faith." In a correct understanding of the gospel, the two issues are inseparable, but each has its own identity and purpose distinct from the other. It is important that we take a fresh look at the one, so we can rightly understand the other.

Justification by Faith

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, **HIS FAITH IS COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.** **Romans 4:5**

Paul's teaching on "Justification by Faith" is primarily set forth to serve as spiritual precedent, in order to establish the theme of receiving the promise of God by faith alone. Some would have us believe, that anyone in any condition can receive the promises of God; but Paul is very clear that the promises are received only through the righteousness of faith. Let's consider his words concerning Abraham, "*For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but **through the righteousness of faith***" (**Romans 4:13**). Again, we are often taught that grace is freely given to all, but the apostle Peter makes it clear that "*God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble*" (**I Peter 5:5**). Just as the **proud cannot receive grace**, the **promises of God** cannot be received without the **righteousness of faith**.

The **works** of fallen man are in essence fallen also. Because of this, obedience to the commandments and rituals of religious law are no more righteous than the works of the atheist who seeks to be a doer of good. Even before Christ, the only works acceptable to God were those born out of faith. This is the reason Abel's sacrifice was received and Cain's sacrifice was rejected. The entrance of sin had set God and man at enmity, and none of man's fallen works could bring peace with God. To offer the works of man's righteousness, was in fact, an offence to God, because all of man's righteousness-es ([plural] "*all our **righteousnesses are as filthy rags***;" **Isaiah 64:6**; and,) are a product of the forbidden fruit. These works are the "*good*" that issue out of "*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*" The offence in Eden occurred when God's word was disbelieved and rejected. Notice the Serpent's words; "*And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil*" (**Genesis 3:4-5**). Eve believed the serpent, rather than God, Adam transgressed, and humanity fell into **sin**. Because of this, no man would ever have peace with God without first "**believing God.**" *All the patriarchs of old were justified by faith.* Neither did **the law** justify anyone. Faith became the only basis for any man's relationship with the Creator. Hence faith is the **one** (and only) **virtue** that God would accept as righteous. Abraham is set forth as the example of a man whose faith justified him; "*...he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness*" (**Genesis 15:6**). It is an error to read anything more into this statement than what is written. Some set forth that this means God viewed Abraham as entirely righteous because of faith; which is not so. Others read into it that Abraham was credited with Christ's righteousness. Again, not so! Rather, this statement deals not with Christ's righteousness or with how God viewed the whole of Abraham; instead, it deals with the singular **virtue** of his faith. "*He counted **IT** to him for righteousness.*" Faith was the only righteous **virtue** that God acknowledged from fallen man. And though Abraham's faith affected every action

and aspect of his life, it was his faith alone that God credited as righteous. Paul writes in **Ephesians 2:8-9** that this faith does not begin with man, but it is a gift from God. This “*gift*” begins when God speaks to a person. It is only after, a person hears the voice of the Lord, that they are able to respond in faith. As Paul would write, “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (**Romans 10:17**). The faith that God accounts for righteousness is always a person’s response to the voice of God. When God spoke, Abraham responded with faith. This righteousness of faith brought peace between God and Abraham; and based upon (because of) his faith (because he believed God), Abraham received access to the promises of God.

Righteousness Without Works

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart. Psalm 32

Paul says that David was describing “*the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works*” (**Romans 4:6**). In the Psalm above, David is speaking first of himself and his sin. He had sought to hide his sin but found the enmity that it brought between himself and God unbearable. He said, “*When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.*” It is safe to assume that David made prayer and sacrifice to God during this period, however it was **not in faith**, but in hypocrisy and guile. Not until he honestly and openly put himself in the hands of God did David rediscover the blessings of the

man who trusts in the Lord. God forgave him and put his sins away (“*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*”). God no longer dealt with David on the basis of his past sin (*Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity.*), but on the basis of faith by which David now approached God. Although David came as a sinner, guilty of grievous sin and iniquity, when he put himself in God’s hands (*he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about*”), God accounted this to him as righteousness, even though there had been no works of righteousness. David could now describe “*the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.*” Through the righteousness of faith, David found peace with God and access to His promises. Jesus confirms this in His parable of the two men in the temple.

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. Luke 18:10-14

It was not the man who approached God with works that was justified; but the sinner, who in faith cast himself upon the mercy of God. When a sinner humbles himself before God in true repentance, he is entrusting his very life, future, and eternal destiny into the hands of God. Whatever God does in judgment, recompense, or redemption, the sinner openly accepts because he has entrusted himself into God’s hands. I have often expressed the fallacy of the one who claims to trust Jesus for their eternal soul, but cannot put their life in His hands today. That is exactly what the sinner in the Temple did. In sincere repentance, he surrendered himself to God. In this manner he was approaching God with faith. It is always foolish to approach God with merit. Faith **alone** brings access to the promises.

Heirs of Promise

These accounts of Abraham and David establish that faith alone is the basis for peace with God. Paul takes this a step further by pointing out that the “*righteousness of faith*” which Abraham had, was prior to his circumcision. He uses this to establish that a man can receive the promises of God, without the law; but, he will never receive them without the **righteousness of faith**. He writes, “*For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs,*

faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect” (Romans 4:13-14). The promises of God will never be given to those whose only merit is works. If those of the circumcision would not believe, they would not receive the promises of God. Finally Paul concludes that all men, whether Jew or Gentile, can have the righteousness of faith if they believe God. He says it this way: “*Now it was **not** written for his (Abraham’s) sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, **if we believe on him...** (God, the Father, who) raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Romans 4:23-24).* In his letter to the Galatians, Paul reveals that it is those who **believe God** that are the true children of Abraham. Again he writes, “*Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7).* This is what qualified them to be heirs of the promise of Christ, that had been given to Abraham. And again he writes, “*...if ye be Christ’s, **then** are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).*

Peace and Restoration

As the cold war ended and the Berlin wall was taken down, East Germany and West Germany were two nations at peace. Having been divided one from another at the conclusion of the Second World War, they had been enemies for decades, but now, peace was a welcomed state of existence. What was yet missing was reconciliation and restoration. This was accomplished when the two were once again united to be one nation. In like manner, peace with God, which was brought to the saints of old through the righteousness of faith, was a welcome state of existence. Abraham and David had this peace with God; yet they longed for the promise of reconciliation and restoration (which Adam had before sin entered) that would only be accomplished through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Access into Grace

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:1

Having established in **chapter four**, the precedent of “*Justification by Faith*”, Paul now returns to his original subject of “*Justification by Grace*”. “*Being justified by faith*” is presented as something that happens before a person enters into grace. This is not to say that these are separate in relation to time, but in divine order. The righteousness of faith, which is now through faith in Jesus Christ, gives man **peace**

with God so that he may be brought into the **grace of God**. Paul explains this to the church at Ephesus saying, “*For **by grace** are ye saved **through faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*” (**Ephesians 2:8**). Access to the promise of God by faith is the overriding theme of Paul’s teaching on “Justification by Faith.” He writes in **Romans 4:16**, “*Therefore it is of faith, that it might be **by grace**; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed.*” Paul repeats this theme to the Galatians saying, “*That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles **through Jesus Christ**; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit **through faith**” (**Galatians 3:14**). Justification BY FAITH is NOT the redemption. It brings us INTO the redemption!*

Through the Redemption

It is important to remember that “Justification BY Faith” is a **pre-atonement, pre-reconciliation term** [which simply means, **before** Christ came and suffered for us]). On the other hand, “**Justification BY Grace**” is *only* available **through the “redemption”** (i.e., **post-**, or **after-atonement**). **Romans 3:24** confirms this: “*Being JUSTIFIED freely BY His GRACE through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*” Whereas “**justification by Faith**” speaks of the virtue of faith itself (i.e., simply believing). On the other hand, “Justification **by Grace**” speaks of the **grace** we have received **in the “redemption,”** and the righteousness it works in us. Paul identifies this as **the work of the shed blood of Jesus (the Christ)**, saying, “*Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath **through him***” (**Romans 5:9**). The phrase “*much more then*” takes us beyond the “righteousness of faith” into the “righteousness of **redemption** (which is **grace**).” **Grace** is “*much more*” than the justification Abraham received. In **verse 18**, Paul describes new covenant justification as a life giving work, calling it the “*justification of life,*” and explicitly tells us in **verse 19**, what it accomplishes:

Restoration

For as by one man’s (Adam’s) disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one (the man, Jesus, the Christ) shall many be made righteous. Romans 5:19

This verse sums up the result of “**Justification by Grace.**” Through Adam’s disobedience, all of humanity was brought under the dominion of sin. All were (and are, born) sinners; all came short of the glory of God, and all possessed nothing that God considered righteous; with the exception of those who had received the

“righteousness of faith.” But now, because of the “redemption” accomplished on the cross, the “*grace*” of God overcomes sin’s dominion and restores the believer to true righteousness. Many contend that this verse speaks of Christ’s righteousness being accounted to us in a “*positional*” sense. It is important, however, to note that **nowhere do the scriptures state that either Adam’s sin or Christ’s righteousness was ever accounted to anyone else**. Original sin was not accounted to all humanity, but rather, original sin polluted all humanity with sin. Likewise, Jesus’ obedience to the cross is not accounted to the believer **as** righteousness, but in fact, redeems the believer **unto** righteousness; thus, “*made righteous*” in **verse 19** is the work of “*grace*.” It is the **restoration** of what man lost through Adam’s transgression. The following **verses (20 & 21)** explain how “**Justification by Grace**” is accomplished.

Justified by the Cross

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Romans 6:6-7

The cross of Christ accomplished the new covenant justification of the believer. There the “*old man*” of sin was put to death and its power nullified. The **believer** no longer lives under the dominion of sin because its power and presence have been destroyed. It is as stated in **Romans 6:14**, “*For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*” The word translated as “*freed*” in this phrase, “*he that is dead is freed from sin,*” is the Greek word *dikaioo* (*dik-ah-yo'-o*); which, with the exception of this one instance, is always translated, “*justified.*” Paul was saying that the one who is “*crucified with Christ*” is “*justified from sin.*” The **believer** who is “justified by grace” is not (as many teach) righteous in “*position only*” or in “*one virtue only*” (as God accounted to Abraham), but is indeed righteous. They not only have **peace** with God, but they also have **reconciliation** and **restoration** (they are reconciled and restored).

Although “**Justification by Faith**” and “**Justification by Grace**” are distinctly different in identity and purpose, it is important to understand that they are so connected in the gospel that neither can be possessed without the other. The case was not so with those who were justified by faith before Christ (i.e., before Calvary). By faith they received the promise that was set before them, but could only look forward to the promise of redemption to come. Now, after that “redemption” has come, the righteousness of faith brings us into this “redemption.” There is no such place as “*being (now) justified by faith,*” without having entered into “**justifying grace.**” If your “faith” does not bring you into “grace,” then it is “**not** justifying

faith.” Again, if your faith has not brought you **into** the liberating power of the cross, neither has it brought you **into** peace with God. And if a man has not been “*made righteous*,” which is the “work of grace,” he has also not been “justified by faith.”

How This Affects the Church

In the centuries since the reformation, Martin Luther’s revelation of “justification by faith” has been one of the foundational doctrines of most protestant churches. As stated in the introduction, it was a wonderful and greatly needed revelation, which served to free generations of believers from the bondage of a works based theology. But Luther and many others who came after him, failed to clearly see the difference between “Justification by Faith” and “Justifying Grace.” For all time men have been “**justified by faith**” alone, but only since, and through, the redemption was “**Justifying Grace**” made available. If this difference is not understood, and the two are viewed as one, the glorious work of grace is often lost sight of in an attempt to make “full justification” fit the experience of Abraham. Many revivals (real moves of God) have been birthed through the ministry of those who looked further into the grace of God; only to have the movements which were established out of those revivals degenerate into something that has no resemblance of a true work of grace, by others who have no comprehension of the true work of grace. The real righteousness that the father’s possessed, has become only an accounted righteousness for the children. The salvation that transforms lives, degrades into something that only transforms how God views the life. It is as though the generations that follow are dragged out of “justifying grace” and end up with only a profession of a “*right standing*” with God. The truth is, they are simply following a doctrinal mistake to its logical conclusion. Consider this! **If you believe “Justification by Faith” to be salvation, and Abraham’s experience to be the explanation of this justification, then you have established a “pre-atonement (pre-reconciliation) salvation.”** To you, redemption has become a promise that is yet in the future (as it was for Abraham). The “*old man*” is not “*crucified with Christ*,” sin still has “*dominion*” over you, and you are **not** “*made righteous*.” You, even as Abraham, do not receive the **true** promise, but rather, as the scripture says of all the great men and women of faith (**Hebrews 11**); “*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off...*” (**Hebrews 11:13**), and again, “*...these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received NOT the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us, should not be made perfect*” (**Hebrews 11:39-40**). If, on the other hand, you believe that “what the believer receives in salvation goes beyond that which Abraham possessed,” then you have caught a glimpse of “**Justifying Grace**.” “**Justification**

by Grace” is the **true** blessing of Abraham, although He died **in faith** without ever receiving it; but God has provided something better for you and me. Peter says the prophets inquired and searched diligently, and even the angels desire to look into the grace that has come unto us. If, then, this grace has come unto us, how can it be that we would not enter into it?