

Sermon 29: Romans 5:1: Justified

OUTLINE

Justified by faith

Been justified

INTRODUCTION

You get two types of fun parks where you get to go on different rides: you get the type where you buy one ticket at the entrance and every other ride is free after that, and then you get others where you have to pay for every ride individually. Justification is the ticket that you get when you go in that makes all the other rides and benefits of God's salvation free. Jesus has bought our entrance with the price of His own death and righteousness and now that we are justified and given entrance all the other benefits are free and guaranteed. This is what Paul is wanting to expand on as we begin a new section in the book of Romans as we start 5:1.

Paul is taking us on a journey as he moves through the letter to the Romans, it is a very systematic treatment of the Gospel. We have seen Paul giving us a summary of the Gospel in 1:16-17, there he boiled the Gospel down into its basic parts of being justified by an alien gift righteousness for whoever will believe. He then set about showing us why the whole world needs this good news of a gift of righteousness from God in 1:18-3:20. There he proved that every human being is a sinner and in need of the righteousness that only God can provide through Christ to make us holy in His sight. That was the bad news, we are all sinners and are accountable to a holy God with no hope of making ourselves holy, not even through the law. But Paul does not leave us to stew in our sin and plunge us into a hopeless state of depression speaking to us only about our sins. He begins a new section in 3:21-4:25 on justification by faith. We have looked at Paul explaining how it is through the offering of Christ as our propitiation that a just God is able to legitimately forgive sin without compromising His own holiness, and that it is only by faith alone that we receive the benefits of Christ's life and death for us. In Chapter 4 Paul has shown us by Abraham's example how it can only ever have been by faith and never by works, law or ceremonies that a sinner is justified in the sight of a holy God. This brings us now to chapter 5.

The new section that we are entering we are calling *The Benefits of the Gospel*. It begins in 5:1 and ends at the end of chapter 8. Some have wrongly approached this next section thinking that Paul just lists a few benefits in 5:1-11, then goes on a strange and detached transition to sanctification from 5:12-21 launching into chapter 6 and 7 and then ends on the issue of assurance of salvation. In fact the whole of 5-8 is Paul's attempt to try and show us how much the ticket of justification by faith has opened up for us. Paul is wanting us to feel that our cup runneth over and we are living in the undefeatable super abundant grace of God, wanting us to feel the joy and assurance of our position in Christ. Lloyd-Jones thinks that the whole of 5-8 is about assurance with some detours on issues relating to sin and the law thrown in but Paul never losing sight of his overall emphasis on the topic of

assurance. I agree with this overall approach. So then as we dive into chapter 5 you will notice that it begins with the word, 'therefore.' Paul often uses this word when he is making a major shift in his thought, and the shift is this. Now that you have been justified, these are the blessings that you have come into, now that you have received the ticket which Jesus has purchased for you, these are the many rides and benefits that are yours. These chapters are one of the richest feasts in the Bible on the many benefits we have in Christ with some detours in 6 and 7 to deal with questions relating to sin and the law.

The transition into a new section is evident in four ways. Firstly, in 5:1, Paul says, "Therefore since we have been justified by faith...." This indicates that he is moving onto the implications of what it means to be justified. In fact there is not one imperative in 1-11, it is all indicatives indicating that Paul is not making the shift to sanctification. Secondly, Paul's way of speaking changes very dramatically especially in the opening verses of this section. Whereas the former sections have been characterised by Paul speaking about 'I', 'you' and 'they', he now speaks about the new state the church as Jews find themselves in, and repeatedly speaks of 'we'; 'we have been justified'; 'we have peace with God'; 'we also have obtained access by faith'; 'we rejoice in our sufferings,' etc. Thirdly, there are some indicators of a change in emphasis in the words that are used. Whereas, 'faith' and 'believe' were used 33 times in 1:18-4:25, they are used 3 times in 5-8; also, 'life' and 'live' are used 2 times in 1:18-4:25, but 24 times in 5-8. This change in emphasis in words indicates that Paul has moved from getting saved to being saved. Fourthly, there seems to be a type of chiasmic structure which unites 5-8. Moo maps it out as follows:

5:1-11: assurance of future glory

5:12-21: basis for this assurance in the work of Christ

6:1-23: the problem of sin

7:1-25: the problem of the law

8:1-17: ground of assurance in the work of Christ, mediated by the Spirit

8:18-39: assurance of future glory¹

In our message today we are going to spend some time exploring what Paul means when he says, 'since we have been justified by faith.'

Justified by faith

Paul's wording indicates that justification is the ticket at the gate upon which the rest of the benefits of our salvation hinge upon. 'Since we have been justified.' It is because justification is a reality that the rest of what he wants to speak about is possible. He lists various benefits: Peace with God, the grace in which we now stand, joy in the certainty of glorification, the ability to rejoice in our sufferings, the Holy Spirit, delighting in God, union with Christ, etc. We only have these things if we have been justified. If this is the case then it is crucial that we understand what it means that we have been justified.

¹ Moo, *Romans*, p294.

Biblical justification is very different to the secular versions of justification that are going around today. Biblical justification consists in God declaring us righteous by the crediting to us the life and death of Jesus Christ. Jesus life and death is sufficient to pay all of my sin debt with no part left for me to pay and to make me perfectly righteous having attained to every strict requirement of the law. Biblical justification includes accepting that we are guilty sinners who can do nothing to make themselves righteous and casting ourselves on Christ as our only hope for salvation. It includes accepting the truth of what God says about ourselves and the salvation that He has supplied. When we are justified in this fashion, only then are the many benefits we have mentioned ours.

Bishop C. Fitzsimmons Allison a Reformed Anglican Bishop who is best known for being against same sex union also has some deep insights in the area of justification and has isolated three ways in which justification has been secularised in our day.² He shows that even in a culture that no longer believes in God there is a trend towards self-justification. However, given that people are for the most part no longer seeking to be righteous in God's eyes they are seeking to make themselves righteous in their own eyes. This has resulted in justification by self-esteem; justification by victimization and justification by self-acceptance.

A high self-esteem is seen to be one of the high roads to good mental health and high productivity. In order for us to have a high self-esteem we will have to do away with many ingredients of the Gospel. The Gospel informs that we are born failures and that we will inevitably disappoint God. That we are not basically good at our core and needing affirmation to find our potential but rather that we are bad through and through. Today we are told to see ourselves as basically good with all the potential in the world within us just waiting to be released, and this is usually sold as a seminar you need to attend where you are given various steps to success to do. This amounts to a works mentality that points you to your own resources and not what God has done for you in Christ to make you truly righteous and holy. Dr Robert Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral in the States has developed a gospel of self-esteem where he has taken this sinless idea of man from psychology and sought to make a gospel out of it, one that is broadcast all over the world and is infecting Christians with unbiblical thoughts about justification. Here are just a few of the things that he says about sin.

"The unsaved person cannot perceive himself as worthy of divine grace and hence rejects it."³ Notice in this statement that the words 'worthy' and 'grace' are in the same sentence. Schuller claims that all the sinner needs to do is realize that they are worthy of God's love and they will find their lost self-esteem and accomplish great things.

"Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem. "⁴ If sin is any act or thought that robs a person of self-esteem, by this definition the biblical truth of our depraved state is from hell not from God. This is just one way in

² These points are taken from an article in *Modern Reformation*,
<http://www.modernreformation.org/default.php?page=articledisplay&var1=ArtRead&var2=58&var3=main>

³<http://web.archive.org/web/20010617002918/www.alliancenet.org/pub/mr/mr92/1992.06.NovDec/mr9206.int.schuller.html>

⁴ <http://www.mtio.com/articles/aissar19.htm>

which we are seeing the secularization of justification. We are justifying ourselves in our own eyes by denying the biblical truth and setting up some other criteria to define sin, in this instance anything that makes me feel unworthy of God's love or salvation.

The next attempt to declare ourselves righteous is justification by victimization. If you are the victim you can't be the guilty party. The trouble with this one is that we live in a fallen world surrounded by sinners and every single one of us can claim that we are the victims of another's crimes. We might want to blame our parents for our bad tempers, indulgent behaviour, lack of amounting to anything, not using our potential. We will want to blame our governments for not providing all that we need to reach our own potential claiming that we have been held back through a lack of opportunity. We will want to blame all bankers for the present financial climate and the lack of material things that drives us to certain behaviour. We might want to start a revolution against the values of the generation that has come before us blaming the present state of the world on them. However, this is the oldest trick in the book, when Adam was called up for his sin the first thing he did is he passed the buck to the Eve, and when she was confronted she blamed the devil, he was the only one left without a leg to stand on. We need to resist the perennial tide of blame that comes with every generation and realise our own accountability before God. This is the mercy that is extended in true Gospel preaching we show the world that they are individually accountable for their own sins before God and need Christ for forgiveness.

The third false gospel is justification by self-acceptance. Modern psychology tells us that our bad behaviour stems from our not being accepted by those around us and our not accepting ourselves. We demand tolerance in order to declare ourselves righteous. So we need to accept and approve of ourselves unconditionally, and get others to do the same, and in that find the peace out of which will flow good behaviour. This is just another way to redefine sin and declare ourselves righteous in our own eyes.

Paul tells us that we are justified by faith. We are not justified by lying to ourselves about ourselves, that we are not sinners. This sort of self-deception is like the child who holds their hands over their eyes and thinks they are hiding. You may lie to yourself about your sins but God can still see them and He will still judge them, this is not the solution you need to be made truly righteous before a holy God. We are not justified by blaming others either. Diverting attention away from our own sins to the sins of others, even if they are worse does not finally excuse us from standing before God for judgement. Demanding tolerance and acceptance from others will not finally remove your guilt either. The only way to be truly justified is to be justified by faith. What does this mean? Faith is the act of looking away from your goodness to the worthiness of Christ to be your saviour. Faith is the act of accepting the truth of your sinfulness and total inability to make yourself clean before God and cling to the saviour who God has provided in the person of Jesus Christ, trusting that only by His life and death your sins can be fully paid for and you be declared righteous before a holy God.

Been Justified

Many people would rush over the first few words of this verse to get to the list of benefits that follow but there is great treasure here and it is found in the tense of the word, 'justified.' When you wander into the shallow waters of theology you will find various reductionisms, one of them goes something like this. We are sanctified, are being sanctified and will be sanctified. We are adopted, are being adopted and will be adopted. Now this certainly is true for the doctrine of sanctification but is a dire mistake to say regarding justification that we are justified, we are being justified and will be justified. In fact this is what Roman Catholicism teaches and we need to stress the past tense, already accomplished nature of justification as we find it here in Paul's words, 'been justified.'

What is the significance of this past tense of justification? The truth is immeasurably assuring. It means that the one day judgment day verdict of God, the verdict that determines your eternal destiny in heaven or in hell has already been given. Your eternal destiny has already been decided, heaven is your future, God has passed His sentence and He will not reverse it. There is no new information that will come in for consideration, your legal status is now fixed as righteous and you look ahead with joy and peace and assurance to the certainty of glory. This is what Paul is getting at in 5:2, 'we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' This statement of justification as a past tense already accomplished fact is no grammatical mistake Paul reinforces the idea again in 8:1, 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.' All of our sins past, future and present are covered by this declaration.

Friends this is something you really need to grasp. Do you realise that the verdict you will be given on judgement day is already decided, there is no terror, no uncertainty, no need to try and break our health and bank accounts in attempting to earn our way into heaven by good works. When we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as our saviour, God who passed a righteous verdict over Christ in raising Him from the dead speaks that verdict over us. It is not a verdict that God passes after He has inspected our lives, but the verdict spoken over Christ's righteousness is the verdict we receive. The resurrection was proof of the righteousness of Christ passing through the judgement and coming out the other end. Christ's resurrection is our certainty, for the same righteousness that He had which made sure that death had no right to have Him is the same righteousness that has freely been given to us to justify us before God, the outcome is certain. The question is not can a Christian go to heaven?, they most certainly will, the question is are you justified by faith, are you a Christian?

This was one of the great teachings that was rediscovered at the Reformation that the Roman Catholic Church rejected. They deny that a Christian is finally justified when they receive Christ as saviour. Instead they believe that only the guilt of original sin is forgiven not all sin in baptism. And then when the Catholic goes on to live and inevitably commit more sins, those sins have to be washed away by the various sacraments of the church. And since our sins are so many we cannot finally wash all of them away by using the

sacraments, we then to go to purgatory to be cleaned by fire for heaven. And since it is possible for someone who has had their original sin washed away in baptism to finally fall away and go to hell, since the final judgement day verdict is not already settled, the Catholic cannot have an assurance or joy of their hope of glory. They believe that you are partly justified by your baptism, and then as you receive a gift of grace in your baptism with which you cooperate with in producing works of love in obedience, it is these works of your own that will finally determine your judgement day verdict. Judgement for the Catholic does not depend on Christ having born the judgement for every sin and being justified by His righteousness, rather your justification finally depends on your own obedience not Christ's. in the final analysis you are justified by your own works instead of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

There is a new attack on the gospel on this very front known as the New Perspective on Paul. What N. T. Wright, one of their main teachers say in a nutshell is: Paul did not condemn justification by every sort of work, only those who tried to define who was a Christian by external ceremonies and rights. Wright teaches that Paul taught a double justification. Our first justification is by faith and involves our becoming part of the church. Then, we receive the Holy Spirit, and as we live lives by the Spirit producing good works, those good works will justify us on judgement day. Wright teaches that we are justified by Spirit wrought works but not by the works of circumcision and food laws. However, this as well as RCC teaching is justification by works not by the imputed righteousness of Christ. It is justification by a righteousness that I work up by my cooperation with the Spirit and this too is a heresy that puts ourselves and not Christ as the final source of our salvation. Paul teaches that justification is a settled affair. So one day when we stand before God for judgement, we will not stand before Him not knowing the final verdict hoping that our last confession before our death will tip the scales and we can just make it in. No the verdict given on that day will merely be a repetition of an already existing legal state, an affirmation not a new investigation.

There are many other benefits to describe in the portion ahead of us, but this is the ticket that gets you all the rest, so let me ask you, are you justified by faith?

Let me make one pastoral application and then close.

Let me put it to you in the form of a problem. If all my sins past, present and future have been forgiven do I still need to confess my sins? If I am justified and this means that I am fully declared righteous, and this is a righteousness that cannot be added to, do I still need to confess my sins and ask for forgiveness?

The once for all act of justification is effective for all the lifetime of God's children. You do not need to be re-justified after every time you sin. God grants full forgiveness of the basis of the justification already given. When you were saved, you were legally adopted, and when you sin that is never reversed. Paragraph 5 of chapter 8 of the 1689 says it like this: "God continues to forgive the sins of all the justified. They can never lose their justification; but they may, by reason of sin, fall under God's fatherly displeasure; in which case, until

they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg God's pardon, and renew their faith and repentance, God will not usually restore them 'the light of His countenance.'" We confess our sins not to renew our justification which is once for all, but rather to renew the relationship with our Father which sin disturbs. When we come to God in forgiveness we do not come with the fear that He might not receive us, or that if we die on the way to the prayer closet that we are lost, but rather with the confidence knowing that our sins, even the ones that we have just been committed are covered by the one act of justification in Christ. 1 John 1:7-9, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." So then, any anger of God towards our sin is the anger of a Father not a judge, and any act of judgement against our sins is God acting as a Father towards His children in discipline, not as a judge in condemnation towards a guilty sinner.

Here are two further illustrations. Firstly, think of justification as the marriage between a husband and a wife is a legal status that they are in. Sin is like a marital squabble that does not deny that they are husband and wife. When the husband says sorry, and he should always be the first to say sorry, he does not have to propose for marriage again, but merely has to heal the relationship. Secondly, think of your justification as millions put into your bank account. You have inherited the millions, they are your s and in your name. Technically you are a millionaire. However, your fortune is held in trust since you are under age and with every expense you incur you go to your guardian for a withdrawal upon that forgiveness which is technically yours anyway. These illustrations are imperefect but they do remind us that our eternity is secure. This is the blessing of having *been justified*.