

## Romans, Part 16 9-11-22

### Saving Words

Romans 3:**19-24** *Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; <sup>20</sup>because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. <sup>21</sup>But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup>even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*

Have you ever read something for which you needed a dictionary to be handy because every other sentence contained an unfamiliar word? This section of Romans can be like that for the Scriptural novice. We read about being justified, about righteousness, about redemption. What are these things? And, we haven't even gotten to *propitiation* which is in the next verse. The temptation of laziness is just to move on and not pursue understanding- but oh that would be a critical error. Behind these words, like *redemption*, there is so very much glory, and beauty and food for the soul. So, we are going to work on growing our understanding, which will also grow our assurance, our joy and our love.

Last time we started into this passage, which begins the good news portion of Romans. Having painted a dark, foreboding picture of our condition outside of Christ, the apostle is beginning to teach us of what our Savior has done to secure our salvation, our eternal happiness and peace. The key words last time began with the little word, *now*. Paul said in verse 21, *but now*, which sets out a stark and happy contrast with what was. What was it that God had manifested, revealed, His wrath upon sin. What is now is that God has manifested this thing called His righteousness. Romans 1 said the wrath of God has been revealed. Romans 3 says the righteousness of God, the righteousness that comes from God to sinners, is now being revealed. And we looked last time at what this righteousness is. We learned it to be an *alien* righteousness. *Alien* means it comes from somewhere else – it is not natural to us. It doesn't come from ourselves. Indeed, it is *imputed*. Well, there is another word. To *impute* means to credit, to transfer. It seems that Jesus has a righteousness which He merited, but now offers to sinners who have no righteousness of their own which makes them exceedingly desperate in the face of

coming judgment. This alien righteousness is imputed to us who believe. And the other word for *belief* is *faith*. The righteousness of God is accessed by faith apart from any work, apart from a legal obedience. So, verse 22 speak of *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ*. There you have eight mighty words. When Martin Luther discovered their meaning they shook the world and the gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone was restored to the church and we are living and worshiping in that sweet gospel light this very morning.

I have been pleased to serve up these wonderful words and wonderful truths, which are wonderful enough to set our hearts ablaze but I am happy today to announce that there is more. Oh yes. His mercy is more. His gospel goes on. There are many angles at which to look at this gospel diamond and marvel. So, we will do so again today through the lens of three more words – *gift, justification, and redemption*.

We left off last time looking at the *all* of verse 23 23-24a *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>being justified as a gift by His grace*. The word translated “gift” is “doran.” The name *Theodore*, comes from that and means “God’s gift.” Then “grace” is “charis.” Two different words with meanings that are very close to one another. Gift of grace. Grace-gift. The essential idea is that we are talking about something that is not earned, but bestowed. It flows to us from our Savior and his love. And that gift could be called “justification” or simply “righteousness.” Romans 5:17 provides a commentary **5:17** (NLT) *The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ. So, we sing Oh, the love that drew salvation’s plan. Oh, the grace that brought it down to man. And the “oh” becomes more intense for us when we grasp that this gift of grace, which is justification or righteousness could only become ours when the Savior sheds His blood, gives His life on our behalf. One might be grateful if Bill Gates gives you \$10,000, but if your neighbor risks or loses His life to save you from a fire, that gratitude goes through the roof. And that is where the Christian is. Salvation is free for us, but it was costly for Jesus who paid our debt with His life-blood. But, once that debt is paid, and the righteousness abundantly supplied, the response from us is to live in it, rejoice in it, trust in it and live out our lives in grateful service to our Savior.*

As a young man I was taught to share my faith via the Evangelism Explosion method popularized by James Kennedy. That presentation of the gospel focused on communicating to works-oriented people who thought they had to earn their acceptance with God. A simple transition question I have asked many times is, *have you ever heard the idea the eternal life is a gift?* For many the answer is *no*. Then I say, but this is what the New Testament plainly says. Romans 6:**23** *The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Then I would ask, *now how does one receive a gift? If someone gives you a gift, say a new watch, how would you respond? Would you pull out your wallet to start paying them for it?* The answer would come back, “no.” *Why not?* I would ask. Then they would say, *because it is a gift.* Right. And when you are given a gift you reach out a hand to accept it and you express gratitude. You don’t pay for it. You can’t pay for it. Charles Spurgeon tells the story of a preacher in old England who went to call on a woman whom he knew needed financial help. On a Friday he took money from the church and made his way through to poor section of the city to where she lived. He climbed four flights of stairs to where she lived in a tiny apartment. He knocked on her door but there was no answer. He knocked again. Still no answer, so he left. On Sunday she appeared in church where the pastor told her he wanted to help and had called at her home. She asked him at what time and he said “around noon.” *Oh dear,* she replied, *I was home and heard you knock but I did not answer because I thought it was the man coming for the rent.* Hm. Think about that. So many make that tragic mistake. They know that God is a just judge and so they assume that his only interest in them is to make them pay up. That is the woman in the story. But you can imagine someone refusing to open for the charitable pastor too. Why would that be? Oh, we don’t want anyone’s charity. We insist on making our own way, even when we really can’t. Our pride will not let us.

What we must grasp is that any interest God has in helping us must be received. Don’t let fear and don’t let pride keep you from the gift he is coming to offer. You cannot live, you will not live without it. He offers to sinners, eternal life, righteousness, pardon, as a gift. For God’s sake, for your sake, take it with a humble, grateful, trusting heart. That, my friend, is the way to life.

So, our first key word for today is the simple one – “gift.” Our second word is a little more difficult. It is *justification*. We got into this some last time as we looked at the Shorter Catechism definition which I repeat - Question 33 asks, *what is justification?* The answer (say it with me): *Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight,*

*only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us and received by faith alone.*

Let's learn from this. So much there – First, justification is an act of grace. “Act” means it is an event, not a process. It is a done deal for believers. It is done by God, out of his grace. And it is a legal act. The opposite of justification is what?

Condemnation. Instead of condemnation we get justification from God, from his grace. That is the source of justification – God's grace. That is the fount of everything. It has to be that way because gospel justification is entirely undeserved. Romans 4 makes this remarkable declaration 4:5 *To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.* So, we have a God who justifies, declares as righteous, men and women who are ungodly and that has to be completely of grace.

The next phrase from the catechism gives the meaning of justification – we are pardoned and accepted. Pardoned and accepted. But here is something we need to see that some miss. Justification is more than just an erasure of our guilt. It is that, but it is also a positive bestowal of righteousness. Our debt is paid – yes, but also our account is also supplied with an overabundance of credit. We are accepted as positively righteous because the righteousness of Jesus has become ours by means of imputation. Some teach that *justification* means “just as if we never sinned.” But it is far better than that. It is just as if we kept the law and achieved the glory of God.

So, grace is the source – a declaration of righteousness is the meaning. The ground of justification would be the cross of Christ. Jesus is the one who wins this blessing for us by His obedience and sacrifice. He followed the Father's will all the way to Calvary. He took our sin on Him. He paid the debt that was ours. He did it all. Our contribution is nil, nada, non-existent. But, you say, what about our faith? Okay – faith is the next point. That is, the means by which this blessing comes to us. The means, not the ground or the power. There is no inherent power in the faith. It is just the connector. Copper wire may connect your toaster to the power grid, but that is all it does. It does not generate anything. But faith, like the copper wire, is important as a conductor. So, verse 22 mentions belief and faith as an important element of salvation. It is the means of justification. We are justified when we plug into Jesus by faith, when we put our trust in him.

Next, we look at the result of justification, which is first of all - peace with God. Romans 5:1 makes this plain. 5:1 *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* As guilty sinners, we are expelled from the presence of a holy God. That is what happened to Adam and

Eve. But, as justified believers in Jesus, we are admitted into His presence, we sit at His table, we are, in fact, adopted into His family. Have you made your peace with God? No, you haven't. I haven't. But Jesus has made it for me. He is our peace because He is the Savior who justifies.

Then we note that a second result of justification is a life of obedience, of love for the Lord and for His word and for His work. Works don't result in justification – they result from justification. This is critical to avoid a lot of confusion. Francis Turretin in his book, *Justification*, writes that works are connected to faith in the person of the justified, but not in the matter of justification. That is, we are justified by faith apart from works, but the one justified then brings forth good works.

So, did you follow all of that? The source of justification is grace, the meaning of justification is acceptance as righteous, the ground of it is the cross of Christ, the means of justification is faith, the results of justification include peace with God and good works. The person who grasps this fantastic gospel doctrine, has an immense advantage in every way. I urge you to make it a point to pursue the fullest possible grasp and appreciation of these things. Martin Luther said the doctrine of justification by faith is the article upon which the church stands or falls. John Calvin wrote; *Justification is the main hinge on which religion turns, so that we devote the greater attention and care to it. For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of His judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.*

As important as justification is, when we turn from that doctrine to our next key word, we hardly move to something lesser. Oh no! Our next word is *redemption* and it must be understood along with justification as we plumb the depths of gospel glory. *Redemption* refers to the payment of a ransom that results in freedom. The payment of a ransom, resulting in freedom. Verse 24 says there is redemption in Christ Jesus. The New Testament is full of this language. Galatians 3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us.* I Peter 1:18-19 *You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, <sup>19</sup>but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.* You can see there the language of commerce. The Lord purchases us out of our spiritual bondage and debt. In Acts 20 Paul speaks of **28** *The church of God which He purchased with His own blood.* In Revelation we find that the song sung in praise of Jesus says this -

Revelation 5:**9** *Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.* In I Corinthians Paul pulls out some implications of the doctrine of redemption. I Corinthians 7:**23** *You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.* 6:**20** *For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.* This gospel reality, identity is critical. When you awaken each morning, you do so as a redeemed person. You are free from those things that destroy you and now you live for Jesus. Redeemed how I love to proclaim it! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.

Justification is a way of looking at salvation in the courtroom. The categories are guilt, righteousness, punishment. Redemption is looking at salvation in the marketplace. The categories are debt, bondage, freedom. But it is all the same salvation. Christ is our redemption. Christ is our righteousness. We are pardoned, accepted, liberated and now forever the glad servants of our good Master who has imputed to us his goodness and ransomed us to be his.

We conclude by looking at all these wonderful truths in the form of a diagram that may help provide some clarity. I heard it from James Boice in Atlanta in 1977, but the gospel is the same now as then. It still works. Here is the salvation triangle. The top point of the triangle represents God the Father. The bottom left point represents Jesus, with ourselves on the bottom right. Each of the three sides of the triangle represent one of the three salvation doctrines that we have been studying. The line at bottom stands for redemption. It links Jesus with human sinners and describes what he does for us. He redeems us. He purchases us with His blood. We show that with an arrow pointing from Jesus to us. It is what He does for us. The line on the left, connecting the Lord Jesus with God the Fathers stands for *propitiation*. It is there because this is what Jesus did for us in relation to God the Father. That is in verse 25 and we aren't there yet. We have a whole sermon ahead on that theme- but suffice it to say that Jesus does not propitiate us. He propitiates the Father, or, the wrath of God. This is entirely necessary for our salvation as we will learn next time.

The final line of the salvation triangle connects God the Father with us and this represents justification. God justifies us because of what Christ has done with regard to Him. So, this diagram speaks to how God saves sinners. You will see that we contribute nothing. We are "saved." That is a passive verb. We are the recipients, the beneficiaries of justification and redemption – both of which flow to us from the work of Jesus on our behalf. As Hebrews 12:2 says **2** (Good News) *Let*

us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. Or, as Paul will conclude in Romans 11:36 **For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.**

I could end there, but let's add this thought – these gospel truths are truly revolutionary. They provide enormous comfort. They provide a grounds for great joy. They link us to our Lord in grateful, loving devotion. They fuel the everyday walk of the believer. They completely undermine the accusations of the devil. And they propel us forth to bear witness to others. You grasp the meaning of justification and redemption and you are on your way to a life that is eternal and abundant. That is why we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ- it is the power of God unto salvation. Let us believe it. Celebrate it. Live it. Share it. We should sing of it too – but let's pray as the musicians come forward

