

GOSPEL FREEDOM – Justification

The Gospel's message for grace – that sinners are forgiven and restored by God through the work of Jesus Christ – is not only that which brings us into relationship with God, but also that which grows us to maturity. Grace frees us from the dual temptations of despair in failure and self-centered pride in success. As Tim Keller states, “The Gospel is that you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, yet you can be more accepted and loved than you ever dared hope at the same time because Jesus Christ lived and died in your place. Salvation is of the Lord.” In other words, the engine of the Christian life is the “Gospel of Grace,” transforming all whom it touches. The Gospel Freedom is our central message, and the driving force behind our evangelism, growth, and service.

Romans 3.23-24 – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Read Romans 3.9-26

Context & Meaning

All, without distinction, are guilty before the one, true, holy God. All are under sin (v.9), all under the law (v. 19), all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (v.23). In this way, all are without defense. The only thing left to do is put your hand over your mouth, for in light of the evidence it would be ludicrous to try and make a defense (v. 19). The law of God has proven all to be guilty; it has given all a knowledge that they are indeed faithless sinners, sinners who on their own have no hope of ever being in the right with God.

But this couldn't be the end of the story, not when the God who has been sinned against is the faithful God who made heaven and earth and promised to undo the mess created by his human creatures. ‘But now,’ says Paul in verse 21, ‘the righteousness of God has been made manifest apart from the law.’ In other words, as Paul goes on to explain in the rest of the passage, through the death of Jesus, through Jesus having undergone on the cross the divine wrath that humanity deserved, sinners can be brought into a right relationship with God. Because of God's grace, that is, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (v.24), sinners are declared to be in the right with God. This is his gift to humanity, a gift that can only be received through faith, through one's receiving, taking, grasping, and embracing Jesus and all that Jesus has done on behalf of his people.

Apply Justification that is accomplished through Jesus and that is received by faith is the only thing that can free us from despair and the incessant need to try and justify ourselves through our own moral effort. If you belong to Jesus by faith then you have been accepted by God and have been declared to be in the right before him. This is a reality that cannot change no matter our circumstances or emotions. In short, being justified means having God's smile upon you, not because of anything you've done or haven't done, but because of what Jesus alone has done.

For Reflection and Discussion – Justification (*Romans 3.9-26*)

1. Have you based your life on the truth of the gospel, the truth that declares that ‘you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, yet you (are) more accepted and loved than you ever dared hope at the same time because Jesus Christ lived and died in your place?’ If you have, how has this truth played out in your life, i.e. in the way you go about your work, in the way you relate to others, in the way you relate to God etc...
2. What boldness do you gain in life from knowing that God is totally for you?
3. What drives you in life? Does the acceptance of others (parents, siblings, friends, co-workers, superiors) play a part in this? If so, how?
4. Does your acceptance with God shape the way you relate to the acceptance or non-acceptance of others? If so, how?
5. In what ways and in what times are you most tempted to forget the truth of justification, to forget that in Christ you are forgiven of your sins and are accepted fully by God?
6. Are you more prone to the temptation of despair or pride? Why do you think this is so (Be specific)? How does the truth of justification counter this temptation?
7. Take time to praise God concerning the truth that if you belong to Jesus God’s fatherly smile rests upon you and nothing can ever change that. Take time to praise him that your salvation does not rest upon your own accomplishments or your own perfection, but upon Christ’s perfect accomplishment on your behalf.