

Another Way Part 1

Romans 3:21-31

July 17, 2022

The focus of Romans is the gospel, an unfolding of the process by which we are changed from being enemies of God to children of God, from being under the wrath of God to being seen by God as righteous. Gospel means good news. There can be no better news than knowing that we are no longer under God's wrath and that He welcomes us into His kingdom. In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul listed reasons why we deserve to be under God's wrath. Now he begins to reveal the solution to this great problem of which all mankind suffers.

It is of paramount importance that we understand the gospel in order to explain it to others and to apply it to ourselves. Applying the gospel is a life-long process; we learn to love the gospel with a passion as we grasp its depth. We understand, first, that the gospel is totally the work of God. Many people think the gospel call of God is like Jesus standing nearby wooing (enticing?) us to come to Him. For those who respond to the gospel call with faith, it is better described as God grabbing us by the scruff of the neck and snatching us from Satan's grip.

What happens after we believe? This is when Satan turns his attention to us. While we were in his camp, he paid little attention to us because we were not a threat to him. Now that we believe in Christ, Satan begins to try to draw us away from God and back to himself. However, God is jealous, and He will not allow Satan to steal His sheep. Jesus assured us of this in John 10:28-29. God is also jealous for the purity of His sheep. God will begin removing the things in our life that tend to draw us away from Him. The gospel is our life; it is our counselor, and it leads us away from sin.

The gospel is a demonstration of God's love. So, what is love, the type of love that God has for His children? In addition to John 3:16, which we probably all know, the Apostle John describes God's love in this way: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another". (1 John 4:9-11) and "We love because he first loved us". (1 John 4:19) The gospel is all about love – God's love.

We have been discussing the gospel without ever defining it. One of the most concise definitions of the gospel is 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." In other words, because of God's great love for us, the Father, at Calvary, removed all the sin from our account and placed it

in Jesus's account, and He removed all the righteousness from Jesus's account and placed it in our account. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, the Father looked upon Him as the most despicable man of all times, and because of this great act of love, God can look upon us and see a perfectly righteous child. This is the great exchange! It is important to understand that the righteousness we now enjoy is a legally declared righteousness, an imputed (borrowed, alien) righteousness. Upon the death of a Christian, all desire and ability to sin is removed and he becomes truly righteous; our imputed righteousness becomes imparted righteousness.

As we have seen, Romans 1:18 through 3:20 focuses on the wrath of God. How do we go from being under God's wrath to being declared righteous? The key to being declared righteous is faith. As Paul said in Romans 1:16-17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." For faith to be effective, there must be an object of our faith. The persons crossing Niagara Falls pushing a wheelbarrow on a cable must have faith that the cable is strong enough to hold him. Similarly, the person who expects faith to save him from the wrath of God must have faith in the only one who is able to save him. This person is Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

The world needs the gospel, and so do we. Sin both defiles and condemns. While the sins of a true believer do not separate him from God, it does break fellowship as long as the sin remains unconfessed and there is no repentance. However, every breath taken by a person outside of Christ brings God's wrath. Such persons have no hope, and we need to "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Ephesians 2:12) Reflecting on how the gospel has affected our life should motivate us to share it with the lost. The gospel should not just be thought of as fire insurance to save us from a future in hell, but as a way of a life of peace and joy now. If we have experienced this peace and joy, we will want to share it with others.

Romans 3:24 introduces the idea of justification. Paul says that it is a gift from God, that we are justified by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Redemption carries the idea of exchange, an exchange of our sin for Christ's righteousness. Martin Luther said that the doctrine of justification is appointed to the rise or fall of the church. Justification is the heart of the gospel – it is the gospel. Luther preached justification by faith to his people every week because every week they forget it. Luther loved this doctrine because he understood what it meant in his life and what God had done for him. The core of the church is justification. We should understand

the beauty of this doctrine; we should love this doctrine; we should teach this doctrine and we should live this doctrine every day. The anchor of our faith is justification.

The message we explore today and for the next few weeks is super simple: *Instead of sinners facing the wrath of God on their own merit, Christ can bridge the gap by applying His righteousness to your life.* We are sinful people, deserving God's wrath, and justice must be satisfied. Justice was satisfied at Calvary, as Jesus took the punishment that we should receive. When Jesus cried out "It is finished" (John 19:30), justice was accomplished. Christ is the bridge between sinful man and Holy God. We should never tire or hearing this glorious truth, and neither can we ever plummet its depth. Because the righteousness of Christ has been applied to us, we have a clean record; we are no longer guilty before God – He treats us as if we had never sinned. God is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26). We are incapable of fully knowing or understanding the grace and love of God.

We need to reflect on all Christ did for us. He stepped out of heaven, took on the limitations of human flesh, suffered hunger and thirst, He was tempted in every way as we but did not sin, was rejected, abused, died a horrible death, and most importantly took the penalty for our sin, being rejected by God for a time, then rising on the third day, as the first fruits (1 Corinthians 15:20), guaranteeing our resurrection. Christ took the punishment that we should receive. Jesus being raised from the tomb was proof that the Father's wrath was satisfied. God offered to give us Christ's perfect righteousness in exchange for our sin. This is the gospel that Paul preached wherever he went. He loved the gospel and wanted everyone to love it too.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." Paul wanted everyone to understand that "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." (Romans 10:9-10) Believe what? We need to understand the gospel – that God punished Himself for our sin. This is justification, and there is no way we can comprehend a God who would have such love for sinners. Luther tried punishing himself for his sin, but this gave him no peace; he knew that his guilt remained. We do the same and find no peace either. Isaiah 53:4-6 tells us how we, like sheep who have all gone astray, find peace with God: He (Jesus) was smitten (punished) by God for our griefs (sins); He was wounded for our transgressions; upon Him was laid the chastisement that brought us peace. Drill this into your head: God punished Himself so that His children might be forgiven.

Believing the words of Isaiah and submitting to the lordship of Christ brings true peace with God. The world rejects the notion that God would punish Himself for the sins of His people. It is foolishness to them. This idea is what sets Christianity apart from every other religion. Every other religion teaches that you must do things that make you acceptable to God; Christianity teaches that God has already done everything necessary to make you acceptable to Him. The world hates Jesus and the Bible because it humbles them. There is God's way and there is man's way; pride prevents people of the world from submitting to God's way. Frank Sinatra sang "I did it my way", but my way only leads to a place of eternal torment. Peace cannot be found in a religion that believes you must do because if you don't do, you will fall from favor with God. God's way leads to an eternal life of peace and joy with Him.

The church at the time of Martin Luther was using the Latin translation for justification; it carried the notion that justification resulted when God made a person righteous through faith and the sacraments of the church, etc. If a person didn't achieve sinlessness in this life, he had to spend time in purgatory until his sins were absolved. Absolution could be obtained more swiftly, meaning less time in purgatory, through various means, including contributing financially to the church. It was the selling of indulgences that financed the magnificent cathedrals in Europe, and which was most abhorrent to Luther.

As Luther began to study the epistle to the Romans in preparation for teaching, he carefully examined the Greek text. Here he found that the Greek translation carried the notion that justification resulted when God declared a person righteous as opposed to Him actually making a person righteous. The light dawned, and he finally understood that righteousness was a gift from God, by grace through faith. Previously he had hated the phrase *righteousness of God* but once he understood that this really referred to a righteousness from God, it became the sweetest of phrases to him. He understood that God accepts the righteousness of Christ as belonging to us; it is an alien righteousness. If interested, the following link is a reading by Wink Martindale with commentary of Martin Luther's Here I Stand:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cBK1LwTDBY>

Any course on evangelism or apologetics must be centered on justification. We must understand the importance of justification by faith. Justification is a beautiful doctrine because it bridges the gap between a holy God and sinful man. Martin Lloyd-Jones called the verses in Romans 3:21-31 the most important in the entire Bible. Because of the levity of these verses, we must walk slowly and deliberately through them. It is critical that we understand the doctrine of justification and how it applies to our life.

I. Justification is Built on the Righteousness of Christ (vv. 21-22a)

Jesus becomes the bridge to understanding the righteousness of God in justification.

✓ A justified separation

Because Paul has explained the sinful nature of man, we understand that there is a justified separation between sinful man and Holy God. Initially the wrath of God was revealed, but now the righteousness of God is being manifested. Verse twenty states that no one will be justified by works of the law, all are under God's wrath. Then in verse twenty-one he pivots to focus on God's righteousness. Sinful man tries to justify himself before God; he attempts to earn his righteousness. God is telling us that the way to Him is a way apart from the law. In other words, the way to God is not found in any human effort to obey the law, even God's own revealed law. That is why in verse twenty-one Paul says that "the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." We need to repent of the idea that there is a way to God other than through faith in Christ. No human effort can achieve the righteousness that God demands.

✓ God's Righteousness is Christ (vv. 21b-22a)

God is the only person who can meet His own demands, and He must meet His demands; He established it this way. The law cannot save; it only reveals our sinfulness (verse 20). The substance of righteousness is the character of God manifested in Christ Jesus. Galatians 4:3-5 describes us a children enslaved by the law who receive adoption as sons when God sent His Son, born under the law, to redeem those under the law. Romans 5:6 adds that while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. At the proper time, God revealed His plan of justification, how He was going to impute His righteousness to sinful mankind.

We understand that the wrath of God remains on unbelievers and that, before the beginning of time, He planned for the redemption of the elect. We know that there are people who stand guilty before God. In the end, all that matters is what God determines when you stand before Him in judgment. It will be determined either that you are guilty of your sin, or that you are justified. Rejection of God's free offer of salvation, rejection of His Son, is the greatest possible offense to God. Those who reject God's plan, finally, will remain under His wrath forever.

II. Justification is Applied by Faith (vv. 22b-23)

Justification is applied to our life through faith. The only way we can be justified, the only way we can participate in the great exchange – our sin for God's righteousness – is, and always has been, applied by means of faith. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as: "... the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." It is a God-given assurance of this future reality, that He will see us justified and we will see Him in glory. There has never been another way to

receive the holiness of God outside of faith in Christ. Romans 4:13 states that this promise of righteousness through faith was first given to Abraham. Though somewhat veiled in Genesis 12:3, Galatians 3:8 states that the Scriptures preached Christ to Abraham. Romans 5:1 tells us that, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 11:6 declares that without faith it is impossible to please God. Once we have been justified through faith in the finished work of Christ, the conflict between us and God is over – our rebellion has been crushed, we have surrendered to God.

There are three elements to faith:

- a. Knowledge
- b. Agreement
- c. Trust.

Knowledge must have some substance to it; it must be based on the truth of Scripture, the truth that God is holy, the truth that He is rightly wrathful against sin, the truth that Jesus exchanged His righteousness for our sin, etc. Agreement is the conviction that the facts we believe about justification are from God. Trust is to simply rest in the promises of God. Hebrews 4:9 tells of a Sabbath rest for the people of God, a rest from the labor of trying to make ourselves acceptable to God. To have faith in Jesus means we fully trust in what Jesus has done for us.

Implications of Justification

The understanding of justification brings many applications into our life. Paul points out that the doctrine of justification by faith means freedom from legalism and freedom from self-effort. Other benefits are...

✓ Justification abolished shame and guilt

If we have ever experienced shame and guilt, we should learn to love justification. If we have trusted Jesus, we have to replace lies telling us we should be ashamed, with the truth of God, the God who sets us in a place of honor. No matter what has happened in our life, our standing before God does not change because we are justified. He sees us as radiant and beautiful because He sees us in Christ.

✓ Justification eradicates fear

Instead of spending restless days in anxiety and depression, we can rest in our justification. At the point of faith, all the righteousness of Christ was applied to the believer. The imputation of His character is sufficient to silence any charge the law bring. God now holds the believer close to Himself; He loves His Son, and He loves us; He provides for His Son, and He will provide for

us. We understand that believers will continue to sin, for in Romans 7:21-25 Paul lamented that he did the things he didn't want to do, and he didn't do the things he wanted to do. He asked the rhetorical question in verse twenty-four, "Who will deliver me from this body of death"? Then, in verse twenty-five, he praised God that Jesus would deliver him. God promises in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that He will not allow temptation to come beyond our ability to withstand it, for He will provide a way of escape. As long as we remember our justification, we need not fear Satan. We need not fear anything because Romans 8:28 assures us that God is in control of all things, and He will work them out for our good and His glory.

✓ Justification ignites love

We can love freely, in the way that God loves. We can love with a long-suffering love, without reservations. We can love because of the love given us by God. Many of us have been hurt by others, a church, a parent, a spouse, a child, a friend, etc. Because of these hurts, we create barriers around us. Once hurt, it is difficult to build up trust, but we need to understand that, because we are sinful people, much of the time we are not trustworthy either. It is only by the grace of God working through the Spirit of God that we can be trustworthy. It can be a hurtful experience to love someone, but not be loved in return. Believers need to see themselves as God see them, not as peers see them. If we have been justified, we can demonstrate love in difficult situations and, thus, be a witness for Christ.

✓ Justification empowers forgiveness and wards off bitterness

Why can we forgive? Because we have been forgiven! There are sins which we have committed, sins which we are committing, and sins which we will commit; through all these, God does not change the way He regards us. The reason why we are reluctant to forgive, but hold onto bitterness, is that we don't think justice has been served. The greatest injustice ever is the perfectly righteous Son of God having the sin of the world imputed to Him! How can we expect forgiveness from God when we withhold forgiveness from one who has sinned against us. Jesus gave a very sobering warning in Matthew 6:15, "if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." For unbelievers, this warning should cause serious searching of the heart, but believers need not fear this warning because God will do whatever is necessary, including severe discipline, to ensure that we do forgive others. God commands us in Colossians 3:13, "as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive".

Summary: The doctrine of justification can change the prospective on every aspect of our life. We can properly deal with shame and guilt; we can be free from fear; we can love more as God loves; and we can forgive others while letting go of bitterness. Being justified allows us to experience true peace.

Selah:

- 1) How will you overcome any shame or guilt that you might have?
- 2) What is your greatest fear? How will you deal with it?
- 3) How can you deal with hurts in a loving way? Will you be able to trust again? What must you do to prevent bitterness from eating you alive?