



SERMON REFLECTION GUIDE

Christian Doctrine, Part 10: God Balances: The Doctrine of Justification
Romans 3:20-4:5 - October 18, 2026

SERMON OUTLINE

Intro - “keep the change”, a world seeking justice/proportionality/equivalence, and the unsettling imbalance in righteousness between us and God.

A. Sin & The Law’s Lack (**Romans 3:20**)

- **Romans 1** - the sinfulness of all humanity, especially godless pagans
- **Romans 2** - the law as insufficient even for religious Jew
- **Romans 3** - a crescendo of biblical punches that underscore humanity’s desperate need.
- All of this leads up to the “BUT” (v. 21) that Tim Keller calls the “most important transition in the Bible”.

B. Justification, Righteousness, and Grace (**Romans 3:21-31**)

- **Important:** In the Greek New Testament, “**to justify**” is simply the verb form of the word for “**righteousness**”. Biblically, “justification” is the act of God in “making someone righteous”.
- The conundrum: If God is truly righteous, and mankind is unrighteous - *HOW can God justify the sinner without compromising his own righteous character or forsaking true justice?*
- The answer will not come from the sinner, because all sinners have “fallen short” (v. 23)
- Therefore, they need to be “justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (v. 24)
- Theologians refer to this as “imputation”, God’s application of Christ’s righteousness to us.
- **Atonement** - forgiveness of sins, the *removal* of that which is unrighteous.
- **Justification** - the imputation of righteousness, the *addition* of what we need.
- Humans apprehend this righteousness through “faith”, which also is graciously given to the believer by God.
- In Romans 3, we see that in his death - Jesus JUSTIFIES - makes us right with God. Jesus REDEEMS - sets us free from sin. And, Jesus PROPITIATES - satisfies God’s wrath.
- “This is the righteous basis on which the righteous God can ‘righteous’ the unrighteous without compromising his righteousness.” - John Stott

C. Credited to the Ungodly (**Romans 4:1-5**)

- Paul uses **Abraham** as an example of God’s grace and justification - which is incredible because Abraham lived before the Law and before the establishment of the Jewish people.
- Paul quotes **Genesis 15:6** in **Romans 4:3** - that Abraham believed God and his belief (or faith) was “credited to him as righteousness.”
- **Romans 4:5** is an astonishing verse, as Paul finally comes right out and says it: God “**justifies the ungodly**” and faith is credited as righteousness.
- The gospel of Jesus Christ will never be a religion of “doing more” or “being better”. Sinners do not climb their way up to God or balance the scales through their own reform or effort.
- In fact, Paul says that this type of thinking “*nullifies the grace of God*” (**Gal. 2:21**)
- Instead, Christ descends to us, dies on the cross, is raised, and then is exalted on high with God. THEN, God credits Christ’s righteousness to anyone who puts their faith in him.
- God does not so much “balance” the scales of righteousness, as he brings us all the way up to where Jesus is, counting Jesus’s righteousness to our account.

Application

We cannot be so sinful that God’s grace cannot reach us.

We cannot be so moral that we can reach God’s grace.

Instead - God shows grace, we believe the gospel, and God justifies us - makes us righteous.



SERMON REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel when there is a lack of balance in your life - from time, to finances, to offenses or wrongs? How important is it to you to “make things right”?
2. When you consider your standing before God, does this same mindset plague you? That you might need to “make things right” with God?
3. What does Paul say about unrighteousness and self-righteousness in the first three chapters of Romans?
4. What is “justification” in biblical terms? How is it different from the doctrine of “atonement” that we spoke about two weeks ago?
5. How does God justify the ungodly? Can he truly be “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”? (v. 26)
6. How is this different from “religion” as it is commonly practiced regardless of which religion you are talking about?