

LESSON 10

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Justified by Faith in Jesus

As a pastor, I'm amazed at how the diverse people in my congregation—all with such widely variant backgrounds—love the song “Come to the Table” by the Sidewalk Prophets. Indeed, scores of them have come to me requesting that we sing the song more often. And when they do, I typically ask them which part of the song they like the most. The differences in their answers reflect the differences in their backgrounds.

For though many of them acknowledge the set up in the opening verse (“We all start on the outside, the outside looking in; this is where grace begins”), almost every one of them refers to one of the persons in the list of the “motley crew of misfits” found in the rest of the song. They identify with one of those groups: the thieves or the doubters, the heroes or the cowards, the soldiers or the prisoners, the young or the old, the first or the last, or the failures in life who know they have been forgiven.

As the band was working on the album of songs that includes “Come to the Table,” they said they had a movie that went along with each song. The movie that meshed with “Come to the Table” is *Hook*. So when the line “motley crew of misfits” was mentioned, they thought of the scene in which Peter Pan and Rufio and others were throwing food at one another. It reminded them, they said, “of the people that God calls. We are the lost boys; we are the lost children of God; and we need to come back home. And so ‘Come to the Table’ is for everybody.”

- 1.** *Why is it only God can give us forgiveness for our sins?*
- 2.** *Why does every person need to experience God's forgiveness?*
- 3.** *What role does faith have in receiving God's forgiveness and justification?*

LESSON FOCUS: Know that God's forgiveness is for all people.

Justified Freely by His Grace

Romans 3:21-24, KJV

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

Romans 3:21-24, NIV

²¹But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

²²This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Our passage begins with the phrase “But now,” which indicates a transition from one train of thought to another. Prior to our lesson’s Scripture, Paul had made the argument that everyone stands condemned before a holy and righteous God. The apostle began by pointing out that no human has an excuse, because all creation declares the truth of a Creator, and God has made that truth plain to each person (Rom. 1:18-20). Worse yet, despite knowing God, they reject Him, which results in a downward spiral of idolatry and immorality, until they are completely given over to sin and depravity (vss. 21-32).

And just in case a person thought that these people were uniquely evil and wicked, Paul warned against judgmentalism. For no matter how good one may look on the outside, everyone is guilty of the same thing and will not escape judgment (2:1-5).

Furthermore, lest people think that being religious makes a person right before God, the apostle also addressed this misconception. For no amount of religious activity can make one righteous in God’s eye. Rather, when the religious hypocrite is exposed, dishonor to the Lord’s name is too often the result (Rom. 2:12-24). So if observing the clear evidence of a Creator found in creation, trying to behave properly, or

keeping religious standards cannot make a person righteous before God, then what can? Our passage answers this question clearly. Righteousness does not come from trying to keep the law of God. Rather, as testified by the Law and the Prophets, which refers to the Old Testament Scripture, the righteousness of God comes only by faith in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, there is no difference in this regard between Jews and Gentiles, for everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standard, namely His own glory (vs. 23). Thank God that we do not have to measure up to that, for He freely redeems and justifies us by His grace when we receive forgiveness for our sins by faith in Jesus Christ.

4. Who witnessed the righteousness of God apart from the law?

5. What is the righteousness of God apart from the law?

6. Who has sinned, and what is the remedy for sin?

Justified Fully by His Blood

Romans 3:25-26, KJV

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Romans 3:25-26, NIV

²⁵God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Our lesson's passage continues with more details regarding how God provided the way of salvation from sin. Here, Paul used the technical term *propitiation* or sacrifice of atonement. The Greek word used here is *hilastêrion*, and it is sometimes translated as "mercy seat." This links us to the temple and the

most holy place, where the ark of the covenant resided. The lid of the ark was also called the mercy seat, which represented the place where the presence of God resided among His people. This place was also where the high priest would enter once a year to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat. This foreshadowed what our Savior would do for us in the holy place of heaven, where in His role as High Priest, He entered in, not with the blood of ceremonially clean animals, but with His own blood to obtain everlasting redemption for sinners (see Heb. 9:11-12).

The atoning sacrifice of Christ demonstrated the righteousness of God in two ways. First, Christ's shed blood covered the sins of the Old Testament saints who looked forward to Calvary with the sacrifice of ceremonially clean animals. Secondly, the atoning sacrifice of Christ demonstrates God's righteousness today by covering the sins of those who now trust in the Savior. In both cases, God's righteousness is demonstrated because the price of redemption has been paid. Because God is holy and righteous, He cannot overlook sin and transgressions forever. But because God is also merciful and gracious, His Son willingly went to the Cross to pay for everyone's sin for all time.

What a glorious and loving God we have! His righteous, holy anger was satisfied on Calvary by the shed blood of Jesus. As a result, the gift of salvation is available to everyone. But as with any gift, salvation must be received to be effective. This glorious gift of grace and mercy is received by faith in Jesus. Only by faith can we receive the forgiveness and cleansing of sins that Jesus' blood provides. And for those who have accepted this glorious gift, they have been justified and declared righteous in Christ. Now, when they stand before the throne of grace, God sees the righteousness of His Son and not the sins that have been forgiven and washed away forever.

7. *How did God provide for the atonement for sins?*

8. *Why did He provide for the atonement for sins?*

9. *How do sinners appropriate atonement for their sins?*

Justified by Faith, Not by Works of the Law

Romans 3:27-30, KJV

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:

30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

Romans 3:27-30, NIV

²⁷Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. ²⁸For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ²⁹Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

Our lesson's passage continues with a question regarding boasting. In essence, when it comes to being justified before God, is there any room for boasting on our part? And the answer is absolutely not. There is no room for boasting because it is not by works of the law that a person is justified, but rather by faith (vs. 28). After all, God is not the Lord of the Jews only; but He is also the God of the Gentiles. The point here is that since Gentiles were never under the law of Moses, and if keeping the law was required to be justified before God, then Gentiles would not have been able to be right in God's eyes.

But praise God that He is the God of those circumcised under the law and those who have not been circumcised! We have a gracious God who justifies both Jews and Gentiles who come to the Savior by faith. What we cannot do for ourselves, Jesus did for us; so now all who are His by faith stand before our holy God justified and righteous in His sight. And that is something to thank Him for every day, for eternity!

- 10.** *Why is boasting excluded from justification by faith?*
- 11.** *What plays no role in a person being justified before God?*
- 12.** *Who are justified by faith?*

Forgiveness at the Cross

While sitting at the airport, a little girl gazed up at me and asked, “Why do you wear that cross with the man hanging on it?” Surprised at her question, I paused and replied, “Because it reminds me of what Jesus did on the Cross for me to know Him.” Confusion filled the little girl’s face. So, I quickly explained that more than 2,000 years ago, God sent His only Son to die on the Cross for everyone’s sins.

“Why?” questioned the little girl.

I knew I needed to bring my explanation down to her level. I asked the little girl, “What happens when you disobey your parents?” She smiled and said her parents send her to her room or don’t let her do something she really wants to do. Returning her smile, I said, “When we disobey God’s commands for us, it separates us from His presence, just like when your parents send you to your room for disobeying them.”

I then asked her, “After you come out your room, what do you do to make your parents happy again?” She quickly replied, “Well, I tell them I’m sorry and won’t do it again.”

“What happens after you apologize?” The little girl hugged herself to show how her parents give her a hug afterward.

I explained, “Yes, that’s why Jesus had to die on the Cross, so when we come to God and say, ‘I’m sorry,’ God can forgive us. Because God is holy and doesn’t do wrong, someone had to die on the Cross for our wrongdoing. Only Jesus could do it because He never sinned. So Jesus died on the Cross, so that when we do wrong, God can forgive us of our wrongdoings.”

The little girl looked at me and said, “Wow, wearing that cross with Jesus hanging on it means a lot!”

“Yes.” I grinned. “And I hope one day it will mean a lot to you too. Because Jesus died on the Cross for everyone to experience God’s forgiveness and eternal love.”

13. *Why is it important to believe and accept what Jesus did on the Cross to experience God’s forgiveness?*

14. *What role does “I’m sorry” or confessing our sins play in experiencing God’s forgiveness?*

15. *Have you experienced God’s forgiveness in your life?*

Spiritual Cleansing

You probably routinely cleanse your body and living environment, but what about spiritual cleansing? Spiritual cleansing involves two steps: confessing your sins and asking for the Holy Spirit to take control of your life again. As 1 John 1:9 tells us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” And Ephesians 5:18 reminds us that we should be filled not with sin but “with the Spirit.”

► *Do you desire to experience sweet fellowship with God through daily spiritual cleansing? If so, start your cleansing right now with a prayer of confession asking God to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.*

KEY VERSES

For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. —Romans 3:22b-24, KJV

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. —Romans 3:22b-24, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Week of May 6 through May 12

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Matthew 20:1-16—God Is Generous to the Unworthy.
- Tues.** Genesis 13:14-18—A Great and Blessed Nation.
- Wed.** Genesis 15:1-6—A Promise of Countless Heirs.
- Thurs.** 1 John 2:12-17—Little Children, Your Sins Are Forgiven.
- Fri.** Psalm 32—God’s Abundant Forgiveness.
- Sat.** Romans 4:1-12—Trust God, Who Justified the Ungodly.
- Sun.** Romans 4:13-25—Christ Was Raised for Our Justification.