

JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH

Romans 3:21-26; 4:1-8

Key Verse: 3:24

"...and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

In 2:17-29 Paul deals with the falsity of the Jews. The Jews boasted that they were a chosen people. Therefore they were a special people. They thought that they were superior to all peoples on earth because they were circumcised as a mark of being God's people. So they thought they were exempt from the judgment of God. Paul says that they were special because they were chosen to be Bible teachers. (3:1,2) But they neglected teaching the Bible, so they were not special at all. Also, they were not special because of circumcision, for physical circumcision is nothing--only circumcision of the heart is effective. (2:29)

In 3:1-8 Paul again deals with the Jews, who thought they were special because God gave them his promises, and because they were a covenant people. If they were not special, God would be unfaithful in keeping his promises. Paul testifies that God is faithful even though he did not treat the Jews exceptionally, for God promised them not only blessings, but also punishment. If they suppressed the truth of God, they would be punished.

Look at 3:9,10. Human life without God is not free, as worldly men expect. Their deliberate rejection of God marks their ways with ruin and misery, and the way of peace they do not know. (3:16,17) No one is righteous, not even one. (10) Without God each person is godless and extremely evil. (Read 3:10-18) Paul summarizes man's situation without God in Romans 3:23, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." To fall short of the glory of God means that man does not measure up to God's righteous standard or God's opinion. According to Romans 6:23, "...the wages of sin is death." Even all of man's good works done apart from God result in death. There are two kinds of death, physical death and spiritual death. Spiritual death is eternal punishment in hell. (Rev 21:8) Many people think that physical death is the end of everything. But the Bible says that "...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." (Heb 9:27) Romans 3:10 says, "There is no one righteous, not even one." Because of their sins, men became the objects of God's wrath and are destined for eternal punishment. In today's passage Paul tells us how God solved man's sin problem, and how unrighteous people can be justified by God's grace to be the righteous children of God.

I. God's righteousness and man's faith in the Son (3:21-25a)

Look at verse 21. "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify." People of the world are all eager to exercise their authority and power. One young man tried to exercise his authority as a husband to his wife during their honeymoon. But he only lost his wife's respect. Because of men's sins God Almighty who is the sovereign Ruler of history, should have revealed his wrath and anger and put all men into eternal punishment. But God did not do so. Instead, God first gave the Law of Moses to his lawless people. Then he gave them a righteousness from

God. "A righteousness from God" refers to Jesus, to whom the Law and the Prophets testify. In other words, God did not punish sinners. Instead, he sent his one and only Son to save men from their sins according to his promises. (Gn 3:15; 22:18; Isa 9:6,7; 11:1)

In verse 21, the word "righteousness" from God is contrasted with the word "wrath" of God. (1:18) All mankind is in need of this righteousness, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23), and because without righteousness from God all men are under the wrath of God forever. Plainly speaking, a righteousness from God is the ticket to his kingdom. Otherwise we will all go to hell. How can we obtain this righteousness? Read verse 22. "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference..." We can obtain God's righteousness only by believing in Jesus Christ. Whoever believes in Jesus is exempt from the wrath of God and clothed in the righteousness of God. This faith applies to all mankind. When we think about 3 key words: "redemption," "a sacrifice of atonement," and "justification," we can understand better the meaning of "a righteousness from God."

First, redemption. (24) How then does God redeem men from their sins? Read verse 24. "...and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." In this verse, we find the word "redemption." Redemption means deliverance from slavery. For example, the Israelites were slaves under Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. At that time, they groaned in their slavery. They suffered from hard labor. (Ex 2:23; 6:9) They had to swallow all kinds of humiliation and mistreatment. Still, in order to eat and survive they had to endure whippings from their taskmasters day after day. Virtually they lived in a hell. They cried out to God to save them from their slavery. God saw their misery and sent Moses to deliver them from slavery to Pharaoh. Likewise, God sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ to this world to deliver men from their sins. But the rescue mission was not easy: It was very costly. In the movie, "Uncommon Valor," the father of a young man who was imprisoned in a POW camp in Cambodia determined to rescue his son at the cost of his huge oil company. He didn't care what happened, if only he could redeem his son.

When Jesus was sent to redeem people from their sins, he had to renounce all the glory, power and honor of his kingdom. Although he is God, he humbled himself and came to this world in a human form. When he came to this world, he lived a most beautiful life in the sight of God. Jesus became eyes to the blind. Jesus became a physician for the sick. Most of all, Jesus preached the kingdom of God to the poor. Finally, Jesus succeeded in his rescue mission through his death on the cross as the Lamb of God. In this way God redeemed us from the strong grip of sin and Satan. "Redemption" is God's marvelous grace. Ephesians 1:7,8 says, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."

Second, a sacrifice of atonement. (25a) Read verse 25a. "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood." In this verse, "him" refers to Jesus, and "sacrifice of atonement" is a ransom payment. Why then, did God give his one and only Son as a sacrifice of atonement? Because it was the only way to meet the demand of sin. They say that the

Ayatolla Khomeini demanded 26 billion dollars as a ransom payment for the American hostages he held. Khomeini appreciated U.S. dollars. But even the almighty U.S. dollar does not work with sin and Satan. The demand of sin is greater than any demand made by men throughout history. Sin demands only lifeblood. Satan is extremely hungry for men's lifeblood. Hebrews 9:22b says, "...and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." How did God pay for the demand of sin? Verse 25a says, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood." God met the demand of sin by shedding his one and only Son's precious blood. How can it be that God shed the blood of his one and only Son to pay the price of sin? God's grace is greater than the highest mountain and the deepest ocean. God shed his Son's blood to save us from our sins. Therefore we must believe the efficacy of the blood of Jesus; we must believe in our hearts that we are purchased by the precious blood of Jesus. This historical event took place once and for all 2,000 years ago. Yet, when we believe this, we experience a mysterious change in our hearts. Just as a new era in human history began with the birth of Jesus, so our new life begins when we believe in the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. What happens when we believe in the blood of the Son?

First of all, we begin to long for God's holiness. Before being cleansed through the blood of Jesus, we only craved evil things out of our sinful desires. Also, we became very self-righteous to justify our sins. One young man wanted to live a holy life in God. But when he tried to do so with his will-power, he got worse. So he gave up on himself. However, as soon as we believe in the blood of Jesus Christ, our attitude toward sin changes, and our sinful desires gradually subside. Then we begin to hate to enjoy sinful desires. At the same time, we begin to enjoy a holy life in God, even though it is very burdensome at first. In a matter of time, this burdensome feeling is replaced by a longing for the holiness of God. This happens because Jesus replaces our dirty blood with his own holy blood. Finally God enables us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. (Lk 1:74,75) Above all, the shedding of Jesus' blood satisfies the requirements of the Holy God, and he credits as righteous those who believe in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we experience God's love. When we believe in our hearts that God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement, the love of God begins to sprout in our hearts. The love of God in one's heart moves one to love himself or herself. When one loves himself in God he loves others, too. It is indeed mysterious to live in the world of divine love.

Third, justification. (24) Look at verse 24 again. "And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." This verse attests why redemption and atonement were substantially necessary. It is so that all kinds of sinners may be justified through Jesus by faith.

What does it mean to be justified? "Justification" means being pronounced "not guilty." We are justified by Jesus Christ and pronounced "not guilty" before the Holy God. Also, justification restores us to a right relationship with God. A man who has no righteousness of God is unhappy, not because of his human conditions, but because his life is a succession of punishment, guilty conscience and the accusations of Satan. In addition, sinners are most unhappy when they see other

sinners like them selves, because they hate themselves, so they hate those who are just like themselves. But God, in his great mercy, pronounced his one and only Son "guilty for the sin of the world" so that he might justify us and regard us as his righteous and precious children. Even though we are not righteous at all we are justified when we believe in the Son. One young man said, "Even God cannot forgive me. I also cannot forgive myself. I am washed up." But that's not true. See the criminal who hung beside Jesus on the cross. He said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Lk 23:42,43) He had been tried by men and found guilty and sentenced to death. Humanly it was impossible for him to ask for Jesus' grace. But by faith he asked for Jesus' grace. Jesus pronounced him "not guilty," even though he had a terrible record of crimes. Because of his faith he was justified as a righteous child of God. This man was welcomed to the kingdom of God. Probably when he passed through the pearly gates of the New Jerusalem, Abraham, Moses, David, Gideon, and Isaiah came to see him. When he entered the heavenly kingdom, he was clothed with royal robes and a sash around his chest before the throne of God. God justifies us. Therefore, we should not remain in guilt. Instead, we must believe in the Son's blood. This is the essence of faith in Jesus.

II. God's character in his redemption (3:25b,26)

We learned that God paid the price of sin and ransomed those who believe. It is God's work of redemption. We further learn that God's character is revealed in his work of redemption in two ways. First of all, God is just. (25b,26) When we read verse 26, we can see two sides of God's nature in conflict. Verse 26 says, "He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." Justice inevitably demands punishment. Because God is just, he should punish sinners mercilessly. But God, in his great mercy, was willing to justify sinful men. So he presented his Son as a sacrifice of atonement to meet the requirements of his justice. How wonderful it is to know that God should have demonstrated his justice in wrath and anger against sinful men, but instead, God demonstrated his justice not in wrath, but in love. In this way his justice was proved to be divine justice. Secondly, God is love. (25,26) No one can be just and at the same time be a man of love. But God is just, and at the same time, God is love. Verse 25b says, "Because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished." In other words, God, out of his love, did not shower his wrath and anger upon the godless and the wicked. God is just. At the same time, he is rich in kindness, tolerance and patience. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God, who saves sinners through the blood of his Son, is love. It is very important for us to believe in the love of God.

III. Abraham and David, forefathers of faith (4:1-8)

First, Abraham's faith. (4:1-5, 9-25; Genesis 15:1-6) Paul introduces two men of faith in order to teach us more about the essence of faith. Look at verse 3. "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." He was not justified by his own merit, but only by faith. What then, did Abraham believe? He believed God's promises. When he had no son, God promised that he would be the "heir of the world" and the

father of many nations. (13,17) The promises of God were too great and too vague to believe. How did Abraham respond to his promises? Against all hope, he believed. Even though he knew that his body was as good as dead--and that Sarah's womb was barren--he still believed the promises of God. It was possible for him to do so because Abraham honored God as God and thanked him for his promises that were seemingly too vague to believe. For Abraham, to have faith in God was to have hope in God against all human hopes. Therefore, to have faith in God means that no matter what the situation may be, we should not doubt the promises of God, or God's faithfulness to keep his promises. Abraham also believed that God was the Almighty God who would fulfill what he had promised. (21) In short, Abraham believed God's promises and became the father of many nations. (18)

Second, David's faith. (4:6-8) Look at verse 6. "David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works." Plainly speaking, David believed God's grace of forgiveness. Read verses 7,8. "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." Once David was not happy, although he was a king, because he committed sin against God. (2 Sa 12:7-13) He could have justified his sins, using his privilege as king over his people. But he did not justify himself with self-righteousness. He admitted that he had sinned against God. He believed God's grace of forgiveness and prayed to God with many tears until God forgave his sins. Because of his faith in God's forgiveness, he was justified as righteous before God. David became a father of faith by believing God's grace of forgiveness.

Let's read verse 22. "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference..." In this passage we learn that we are justified by faith in Jesus. We also learn that we must come to Jesus with repentant hearts to obtain the justification by faith.