

A Simple Guide to Big Words

Text: Romans 3:19–28; 5:1–11

Topic: Justification

Big Idea: All of humanity is guilty and unable to justify their lives in the presence of a holy God. It is Jesus's death that redeems, so that the believer is declared righteous through him, by faith.

Application Point: Justification, by faith, through Jesus, frees the believer from striving to make things right with God so our focus of living can simply be on God's glory in all that we do.

Talking Points:

1. In the previous chapters of Romans, Paul has spent a lot of time pointing out how guilty we are. There really should be no doubt, if we've read the first two chapters of Romans, that every single person has some serious sin issues—and it doesn't matter if you are Jewish or not Jewish. So, when we get to our passage for today, Paul tells us that we can just shut our mouths (Romans 3:19). The law has shown us that we cannot justify ourselves. It has merely revealed the blatant truth; we are guilty, and not one of us can justify ourselves before God (v. 20). The story doesn't end there, because there is a "but ... God" moment in the next section. The law was a dead end, but God revealed himself in a different way. We have seen the righteousness of God in Jesus (v. 21). This is good news, because even though we all "fall short of the glory of God" (v. 23), we are justified by the gift of grace through Jesus (v. 24)! Christ has redeemed us by being our "propitiation by his blood" (v. 25). God has shown us his righteousness, in that he is both "just and the justifier" (v. 26)! Paul goes on to say that abiding by the law is no longer a reason to boast, but instead we can boast in our faith, because it is by faith, not the law, that we find justification (vv. 27–28).
2. Justification and sanctification (next week) work in tandem to deal with our sin. Justification addresses our guilt. It is a legal declaration. God pardons the sinner of all his sins and credits the sinner as righteous at baptism. Our justification is a complete and finished act. Justification means that every believer is completely and finally freed from condemnation and the wrath of God.
3. Because we have been justified, we don't have to worry if we've appeased some list or rules or demands from God. We aren't earning points. No one would ever earn God's approval, because we are not righteous in our own power. However, through Jesus we are seen as righteous in God's eyes. This is the best possible news! We don't have to strive for God's approval or measure our worth by our actions, hoping we've tipped the cosmic scales in our favor. Instead we can focus on glorifying God in every aspect of our lives in response.
4. When we look at the gospel of Jesus and make it just another set of rules to follow—a law rather than a relationship—our faith can grow stagnant and resentful. When we understand that Jesus and his righteousness has freed us from performance-driven or fear-motivated faith, we are transformed by God's grace. We can try to get right with God by unearthing every dark thought and impure motive in the heart, but there is no comfort there. The system of confession and penance often leads to deeper despair at pleasing God. We begin to see God as one who opposes and punishes sinners without mercy. The righteousness of God, by his grace and mercy, justifies us through faith. This opens the doors to a freedom of living that can only come through being justified by Christ's sacrifice.
5. Later in Romans, justification shows up again. Paul wants his readers to truly grasp that God's love is so great that even when we were "enemies" of God, Christ still died for us, and we have been "justified by his blood" and "saved by him from the wrath of God" (Romans 5:6–11). When we look at the big picture of how Christ has atoned for and expiated our sins, how he has served as our propitiation and justified us through his righteousness, we do not have to live in fear or self-loathing. He truly frees us from any expectation, so that we may fully love him and fully live in his power through the Holy Spirit.