



Romans 3:21 4:25

Abiding in Faith

How can a holy and righteous God be just and holy and at the same time allow sinful man to come into His presence?

The Bible clearly teaches that God is holy, and in His holy character, He will not allow sin in His presence.

It also teaches that man is a sinful creature. In fact, he is dead in his sins and trespasses. Our moral attitudes and behaviors separate us from God. All sinners must pay a terrible penalty. "The wages of sin is death . . . " (Romans 6:23a).

Romans 3:21-26 is "possibly the most important single paragraph ever written." In it Paul brings out something of the grandeur of Christ's saving work. He views salvation in three ways: as justification (imagery from the law court), as redemption (imagery from the slave market), and as propitiation (imagery from the averting of wrath of God).

Why is such a question critical for us today? It is because our eternal destiny hinges on an accurate understanding of the answer. Where will you spend eternity? On this subject we had better make sure we have the right answers. Our sacred opinions, and philosophies, or religious undertakings won't do. What does God say?

WE HAVE ALL SINNED (3:21-23)

There are no double standards with God.

By His own character, God must be perfectly consistent with Himself. He can not break His own Law nor violate His own nature. This truth is explained in the first three chapters of the Apostle Paul's letter to Rome. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . . (Romans 1:18).

There are no distinctions with God.

Both Jewish and no-Jewish people have fallen short of the glory of God. Everyone in the entire world has sinned and fallen short of or lacks the glory of God. God's law demands absolute perfection. No one is perfect in God's sight. Man has no merit at all; his sin has disqualified him in the heavenly court.

court.

No one can base his hope for acceptance with God on his own goodness. We are all guilty before Him.

Then the question naturally comes to our mind, How can God be both "just and the justifier" of those who are sinners?

RIGHTEOUSNESS COMES FROM GOD (3:21-22)

God came to the rescue.

God does this without sacrificing His righteousness. The gift of God is a righteous standing with Him.

God did it out of love. God loves the sinner. Romans 5:6-8 says, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

This righteousness goes into effect apart from the law (3:21-23).

"But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:21-23).

It is not something you can earn; it is a gift. You can not earn it by being obedient to God's law. You can not earn it by doing your best to please God. There is no way you can measure up to God's standards. It is a righteousness "apart from the works of the law." It is apart from the law of any kind. It is a gift of grace.

It is important to keep in mind the law could demand perfect righteousness, but it was powerless to produce the perfect righteousness that God demands. The reason is because man is sinful at the very core of his nature. Depraved sinful man can not produce righteousness in God's sight no matter how many laws he passes.

Paul can hear the emotional plea of some of his readers: "What about those of us who have tried hard to please God by means of our effort to live in harmony with God's law? You don't suggest this is in vain, do you? Are we no better than those who do not obey the law? Is there no distinction between them and us? Why this is not fair!"

There are those who believe that saving grace depends upon what the penitent does or fails to do, be it in ever so refined form. They teach not only grace but also good works contributes to justification. The problem,

ever so refined form. They teach not only grace but also good works contributes to justification. The problem, however, is this is teaching a salvation by works. It goes completely against the main thrust of the Scriptures which stresses salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Our spiritual equation goes like this: *Christ* + _____ = *righteousness with God*. You fill in the blank. Christ + "my virtue," or Christ + "my good works of righteousness," or Christ + "my baptism," or Christ + "my church membership," etc.

The correct equation is: *Christ + nothing = a right relationship with God*.

The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is a gift from God that is received by faith in Jesus Christ. Look up in your Bible and study Romans 1:17; 3:28; 4:3, 6-8; Galatians 2:16, 21; 3:10-13; Ephesians 2:9; Philippians 3:9; II Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5.

The Law and the prophets testified to the gift of God. The Law provided a system of offerings and sacrifices that men could bring to the altar in the Temple. This system looked forward to and pictured the death of Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

JUSTIFICATION IS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH (3:22, 24-25)

Paul now tells us how we can receive this gift from God.

There is only one way to receive it and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. It is by faith in Christ that you come to a right standing with God. He is the Savior. He alone saves us. It is a living relationship with Christ.

What is faith?

Faith is not trying to obey and fulfill some kind of law. It is not working ourselves up to a certain emotional level. It is not doing our best to try to live up to some religious or moral standard. Trying to live up to someone's law, no matter where it comes from, is not faith. That is living by works. Faith is not expecting God to accept you because you have tried your very best to live a certain way. God does not love and accept you because you have tried hard to do what you think was right.

God's righteousness comes to all who exercise faith in Jesus Christ (3:22).

The object of Paul's faith is Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:21; John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12).

"Righteousness is granted to all, and only to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. Even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (vv. 22-23).

God grants this righteous relationship as a gift, without payment made by the one who receives it. It is granted without any human merit. By His grace beautifully expresses Paul's idea of salvation as a gift. Read at your convenience First Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:4.

The basis of justification by faith (vv. 24-25).

Paul continues, "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His

God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed*" (vv. 24-25).

Justification is a forensic term meaning to declare righteous. It stands over against condemnation (Romans 8:1, 33, 34). However, God did not declare man free without doing something about his sins. Remember that God had to be true to His character. He is holy, and His holiness demands that He deal with sin.

The Apostle Paul tells us God redeemed through the death of Jesus Christ. "*Redemption*" indicates deliverance by means of the payment of a ransom. God removed the barrier of the wrath of God against sinners by the payment of the propitiation. The wrath removing sacrifice of Jesus turned the wrath of God away from the guilty sinner. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word for "propitiation" indicates the blood-sprinkled lid of the Ark of the Covenant, or mercy seat.

The important thing to bring out in this word is that what God did in Christ averted the divine wrath from sinners.

God's righteousness is satisfied by the death of Christ. The death of Christ is a "propitiatory sacrifice." God's justice is satisfied in the death of Jesus. Now God can declare, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Propitiation means satisfaction. God's holy wrath is satisfied by the death of Jesus as a payment for the penalty of our sin. God's justice is satisfied. Christ's death is the only sufficient payment for sin. My sin debt has been paid in full.

The sacrifice does not go into effect automatically, however. Sinful man must trust in Christ. The believing sinner is justified by faith in Christ.

Justification is the sovereign act of God whereby He declares righteous the believing sinner while he is still in his sinful condition. It is a judicial act whereby God declares the sinner acquitted. In a divine act God declares a sinner who believes on the atoning sacrifice of Christ absolutely acceptable to God from the moment he trusts in Christ's payment for his sin.

Since the Father is satisfied with His Son, He is also satisfied with those who believe in His Son. By faith we have identified ourselves with Jesus Christ. If God is satisfied then why can't we be satisfied?

God *imputes* (reckons, charges to the account) the sinner's guilt to Christ and His righteousness is imputed to the sinner (Psalm 32:1, 2; Isaiah 53:4-6; Romans 5:18, 19; II Corinthians 5:21). *Imputation* is the reckoning or "charging to the account" of one what properly belongs to the account of another. Because of the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ, God imputes or credits our sin to the person of Jesus Christ and imputes His righteousness to our account through faith in Him. The word used is the verb *logizomai* which means "to count, reckon, credit, charge to the account of another."

Paul tells us in Second Corinthians 5:21, "He (God) made Him (Christ) who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Jesus Christ had no personal experience with sin. He was morally free of sin. He was not a sinner. However, God "treated as sin" the one "who knew no sin." No wonder He cried from the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He was the sinless One dying for the condemned sinner who is worthy of the death penalty. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). All of our sins were imputed to Christ who was sinless. He died representing the guilty sinner! No wonder David can cry out in his psalm, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity" (Psalm 32:1-2).

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Moreover, Paul goes on to tell us the purpose of Christ's death, "so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." This is the only way we can obtain God's righteousness. God imputes Christ's righteousness to our account the moment we believe on Him. This is the only way sinful man can ever have a right relationship with God.

LET ME ILLUSTRATE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (4:1-25)

The Apostle Paul says, "Let me illustrate this fact. Here is an example from the Old Testament."

"For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account" (vv. 3 8).

Abraham's faith saved him.

Jews supposed Abraham was justified by works or the works of the flesh (4:1-2).

Paul declares faith saved him (vv. 3-5). Paul is referring us back to Genesis chapter fifteen. God appeared to Abraham one clear night and showed him the sky full stars. "Look up at the sky, Abe." The sky was full of glory with stars blazing from horizon to horizon. God said, "If you can number the stars, you can number your descendants. They will number far more than all the stars of heaven." The Apostle Paul said, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Cf. Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3). Abraham believed God.

Abraham received the gift of righteousness 430 years before the Law was given to Moses. The object of your faith is the important thing. It is not a question of how big or how little your faith is, but in whom you have fixed your faith. The question is how big is your God?

Abraham's faith grew over a 25 year period. He came to realize that God is the One who raises the dead! (vv. 17 18). He is the God who makes dead things live. He calls into existence the things that do not exist. He is the Creator. Abraham fixed his faith on God. He looked at his sexually dead body and remembered that God raises the dead. He is the God who calls into existence that which does not exist. Is there anything too hard for God when He says He will do it? Do you worship a God who can rise the dead and call into existence that which does not exist?

The key word in Romans chapter four is "*reckoned*" (vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 22, 23, 24). It means to charge to his account, to credit something to someone's financial account. Abraham believed God would do what He said He would do. God transferred righteousness to Abraham's account. Works earns a wage; believing receives a gift.

Jesus Christ fulfilled all the promises that Abraham would have a heavenly seed as well as earthly seed. Christ rose from the dead as a living Lord to give life to men and women thus fulfilling the promise to Abraham. Abraham believed God's promise about the seed and was justified.

Did Abraham earn that righteousness? Verse five says, no. It was a gift from God. If you work for something, then it is never a gift. It is what you have earned. You get it because of your labor. It is an obligation to you. A gift is never an obligation.

King David is justified by faith (4:6-9).

David is another outstanding Old Testament saint who comes to Paul's mind. David was a good, upright, righteous, law-abiding citizen, wasn't he? Didn't keeping the law save him? No, he wasn't; he was an adulterer and a murderer with blood on his hands. He was guilty. Then how in the world would God save Him?

He was lost in his sins and "God reckons righteousness apart from works" (vv. 6-8). He was the recipient of God's grace. He humbled his heart and asked God to forgive him of his transgressions. He believed God's word.

Abraham's being a Jewish person did not save him (4:10 12).

Romans 4:9-13, 16 clarifies this point for Paul. Abe was circumcised 14 years after he believed the promise! Besides, the circumcision was only a sign of righteousness that he had already received by faith. The Jewish people thought that circumcision was what made a man acceptable to God. We have many today who think that baptism is what makes a man acceptable. Neither circumcision nor baptism does. Abraham was a Gentile when he believed the promise of God! The sign of the covenant came years later.

Was it because he fulfilled the Law? No, the law was given to Moses 430 years after Abe lived!

PAUL'S CLOSING ARGUMENTS FOR JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE (VV. 16-21).

In regard to the promise God gave Abe that he would have the son of the promise, Abe for all practical purposes was a dead man. He was 100 years old, and his body was now dead in its ability to produce children. Sarah's womb was barren. He was too old to have children, but he took God at His word. He believed God. He is the One who calls into existence that which does not exist. He gives life to the dead. (vv. 17-22).

Our sin debt has been paid in full by Jesus Christ (vv. 24-25). Jesus took the bill and paid it in full on Calvary. The payment was His own blood. Jesus rose from the dead and presented the bill as paid to His Father who stamped it "Paid in Full" and gave it to His Son. The Son has the receipt to prove it.

Salvation comes by faith alone in Jesus Christ. The Lord says to us, "Take it. It is free. I have paid the cost for you." There is nothing you can do, but receive it by faith. Take God at His word and rest securely on it.

The justified sinner is still a sinner and not without personal sins, but he is still viewed and treated as righteous by God and justly so because of the gift of Christ's righteousness by imputation. The believer stands in the righteousness of Jesus Christ and his sins are not imputed to him.

Justification does not mean "to make righteous." Justification means that God accepts us and views us as righteous in Christ even though in our experience we will commit acts of sin or unrighteousness. We will not be perfect in our daily condition until the day we see Jesus Christ in heaven. But we are saved sinners.

The Bible says, "As many as received him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God (John 1:12). Has there come a time in your life when you opened your life to Christ and asked Him to be your Lord and Savior? Romans 10:9-11 says, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.'"

Salvation is not universally and automatically applied to people. You are saved when you personally believe on Jesus Christ. Faith is the hand that receives the gift that God freely offers. You must receive it by faith. The moment you add works, or merit, or church membership, or baptism, you destroy the grace of God. God freely, completely, and wholly saves us. It is His work alone. We do not contribute anything to it. We are "justified freely by His grace."

There is only one sin today that can keep a person separated from God and lost. It is the sin of rejection of Christ as your savior.

Let's suppose for a moment that I died tonight and stood before the LORD God who is the Supreme Judge of the Universe. No doubt He would ask me, "Wil Pounds, why should I let you into my heaven? You are a guilty sinner. How do you plead?"

My response would be, "I plead guilty, Your Honor."

My advocate, Jesus Christ, who is standing there beside me, speaks up for me. He says, "Your Honor. It is true that Wil Pounds is grievous sinner. He is guilty. He deserves eternal punishment for his sinfulness. However, Father, I died for him on the cross and rose from the dead. Wil Pounds has put his faith and trust in Me and all that I have done for Him on the Cross. He is a believer. I died for him, and he has accepted Me as his substitute."

The Lord God turns to me and says, "Is that true?"

I will respond to Him, "Yes sir! That is the truth. I am claiming the shed blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse me of all my sins. I have put my faith in Jesus to save me for all eternity. This is what You have promised in your word. Jesus said, 'For God so loved the world (and this includes Wil Pounds), that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'"

The Lord God responds: "Acquitted! By order of this court, I demand that you be set free. The price has been paid by My Son."

The truth is we all "fall short" in our effort to attain a relationship with the holy God. We need someone to rescue us and set us free. That person has to be a substitute for us because sin requires the death penalty. We need someone who is holy and just in the eyes of the LORD God. Only He can satisfy the holy eyes of God. God in His rich mercy toward us sinners provided someone.

Acts 4:12; John 3:17-18, 36; 14:6; Ephesians 2:8-9

We don't receive God's forgiveness just once for all. It is something we do repeatedly. It is the very basis on which we as Christians live. We constantly take the fresh forgiveness from the hand of God. It is something we do daily. It is His gift to us who believe. It is already paid for. All we have to do is receive it by faith. "If

we do daily. It is His gift to us who believe. It is already paid for. All we have to do is receive it by faith. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us for all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Our Savior stands ready to forgive us right now and renew our fellowship with Him. If you have put your faith in Him you are his dear child and that will never change! Claim your inheritance in Christ.

Want to know more about your position in Christ? Try these Bible studies below.

In this passage of Scripture it is crucial for us to bear in mind that we have been describing the Christian life. It begins with a spiritual birth. If you are not bearing fruit it may be because you have never been born again. That is where this kind of life begins. We are always ready to help you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Here is where you can find out how to trust in Christ as your Savior. [How to Experience Peace with God](#)

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