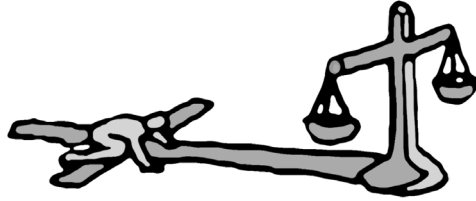


# Justification *by* Faith



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 3:19–28.*

**Memory Text:** “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (*Romans 3:28*).

In this lesson we come to the basic theme of Romans: justification by faith—the great truth that, more than any other truth, brought about the Protestant Reformation. And, despite all the claims to the contrary, Rome has no more changed regarding this belief now than it did in 1520, when Pope Leo issued a papal bull condemning Luther and his teachings. Luther burned a copy of the bull because if there were one teaching that could never be compromised, justification by faith was and is it.

The phrase itself is a figure based on law. The transgressor of the law comes before a judge and is condemned to death for his transgressions. But a substitute appears and takes the transgressor's crimes upon himself, thus clearing the criminal. By accepting the substitute, the criminal now stands before the judge, not only cleared of his guilt but also regarded as never having committed the crimes for which he was first brought into court. And that's because the substitute—who has a perfect record—offers the pardoned criminal his own perfect law keeping.

In the plan of salvation, each of us is the criminal. The Substitute, Jesus, has a perfect record, and He stands in the court in our stead—His righteousness accepted in place of our unrighteousness. Hence, we are justified before God, not because of our works but because of Jesus, whose righteousness becomes ours when we accept it “by faith.” Talk about good news! In fact, the news can't get any better than that.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 28.

## The Deeds of the Law

**Read** Romans 3:19, 20. What is Paul saying here about the law, about what it does, and about what it does not or cannot do? Why is this point so important for all Christians to understand?

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Paul is using the term *law* in its broad sense, as the Jew in his day understood it. By the term *torah* (the Hebrew word for “law”), a Jew, even today, thinks particularly of God’s instruction in the first five books of Moses but also more generally in the entire Old Testament. The moral law—plus the amplification of this in the statutes and judgments, as well as the ceremonial precepts—was a part of this instruction. Because of this we may think of the law here as the system of Judaism.

To be under the law means to be under its jurisdiction. The law, however, reveals a person’s shortcomings and guilt before God. The law cannot remove that guilt; what it can do is lead the sinner to seek a remedy for it.

As we apply the book of Romans in our day, when Jewish law is no longer a factor, we think of law particularly in terms of the moral law. This law can’t save us any more than the system of Judaism could save the Jews. To save a sinner is not the moral law’s function. Its function is to reveal God’s character and to show people wherein they fall short of reflecting that character.

Whichever law it is—moral, ceremonial, civil, or all combined—the keeping of any or all in and of itself will not make a person just in God’s sight. In fact, the law never was intended to do that. On the contrary, the law was to point out our shortcomings and lead us to Christ.

The law can no more save us than the symptoms of a disease can cure the disease. The symptoms don’t cure; they point out the need for the cure. That’s how the law functions.

**How successful have your efforts in law-keeping been? What should that answer tell you about the futility of trying to be saved by keeping the law?**

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## The Righteousness of God

**“Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (Rom. 3:21). How are we to understand what this text means?**

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This new righteousness is contrasted with the righteousness of the law, which was the righteousness with which the Jew was familiar. The new righteousness is called “the righteousness of God”—that is, a righteousness that comes from God, a righteousness that God provides, and the only one that He accepts as true righteousness.

This is, of course, the righteousness that Jesus wrought out in His life while here in human flesh—a righteousness that He offers to all who will accept it by faith, who will claim it for themselves, not because they deserve it but because they need it.

**“Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account. Christ’s righteousness is accepted in place of man’s failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son.”**—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 367. **How can you learn to accept this wonderful truth for yourself? See also Rom. 3:22.**

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The faith of Jesus Christ is here, doubtless, faith *in* Jesus Christ. As it operates in the Christian life, faith is much more than intellectual assent; it is more than just an acknowledgment of certain facts about Christ’s life and His death. Instead, true faith in Jesus Christ is accepting Him as Savior, Substitute, Surety, and Lord. It is choosing His way of life. It is trusting Him and seeking by faith to live according to His commandments.

## By His Grace

**Keeping** in mind what we have studied so far about the law and what the law cannot do, read Romans 3:24. What is Paul saying here? What does it mean that redemption is in Jesus?

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What is this idea of “justifying,” as found in the text? The Greek word *dikaioo*, translated “justify,” may mean “make righteous,” “declare righteous,” or “consider righteous.” The word is built on the same root as *dikaosune*, “righteousness,” and the word *dikaioma*, “righteous requirement.” Hence, there is a close connection between “justification” and “righteousness,” a connection that doesn’t always come through in various translations. We are justified when we are “declared righteous” by God.

Before this justification a person is unrighteous and thus unacceptable to God; after justification he or she is regarded as righteous and thus acceptable to Him.

And this happens only through God’s grace. *Grace* means favor. When a sinner turns to God for salvation, it is an act of grace to consider or declare that person to be righteous. It is unmerited favor, and the believer is justified without any merit of his or her own, without any claim to present to God in his or her own behalf except his or her utter helplessness. The person is justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus—the redemption that Jesus offers as the sinner’s substitute and surety.

Justification is presented in Romans as a punctiliar act; that is, it happens at a point in time. One moment the sinner is outside, unrighteous, and unaccepted; the next moment, following justification, the person is inside, accepted, and righteous.

The person who is in Christ looks upon justification as a past act, one that took place when he or she surrendered himself or herself fully to Christ. “Being justified” (*Rom. 5:1*) is, literally, “having been justified.”

Of course, if the justified sinner should fall away and then return to Christ, justification would occur again. Also, if reconversion is considered a daily experience, there is a sense in which justification might be considered a repeating experience.

**With the good news of salvation being so good, what holds people back from accepting it? In your own life, what kinds of things cause you to hold back from all that the Lord promises and offers you?**

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## The Righteousness of Christ

In Romans 3:25, Paul expounds further on the great news of salvation. He uses a fancy word—*propitiation*. The Greek word for it, *hilasterion*, occurs in the New Testament only here and in Hebrews 9:5, where it is translated as “mercy seat.” As used in Romans 3:25 to describe the offer of justification and redemption through Christ, *propitiation* seems to represent the fulfillment of all that was typified by the mercy seat in the Old Testament sanctuary. What this means, then, is that by His sacrificial death, Jesus has been set forth as the means of salvation and is represented as the One providing the propitiation. In short, it means that God did what was needed to save us.

The text also talks about the “remission of sins.” It is our sins that make us unacceptable to God. We can do nothing of ourselves to cancel our sins. But in the plan of redemption, God has provided a way for these sins to be remitted through faith in Christ’s blood.

The word for “remission” is the Greek *pareisis*, literally meaning “passing over” or “passing by.” The “passing over” is in no sense an ignoring of sins. God can pass over the sins of the past because Christ has paid the penalty for all people’s sins by His death. Anyone, therefore, who has “faith in His blood” can have his or her sins remitted, for Christ has already died for him or her (*1 Cor. 15:3*).

**Read** Romans 3:26, 27. What point is Paul making here?

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The good news that Paul was eager to share with all who would listen was that there was available to humanity “His [that is, God’s] righteousness,” and that it comes to us, not by works, not by our merit, but by faith in Jesus and what He has done for us.

Because of the Cross of Calvary, God can declare sinners righteous and still be considered just and fair in the eyes of the universe. Satan can point no accusing finger at God, for Heaven has made the supreme sacrifice. Satan had accused God of asking of the human race more than He was willing to give. The Cross refutes this claim.

**Satan, likely, expected God to destroy the world after it sinned; instead, God sent Jesus to save it. What does that tell us about the character of God? How should our knowledge of His character impact how we live? What will you do differently in the next 24 hours directly as a result of knowing what God is like?**

## Without the Deeds of the Law

**“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28). Does this mean that if the law doesn’t save us we are not required to obey it? Explain your answer.**

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In the historical context, Paul was speaking in Romans 3:28 of law in its broad sense of the system of Judaism. No matter how conscientiously a Jew tried to live under this system, that person could not be justified if he or she failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Romans 3:28 is Paul’s conclusion to his claim that the law of faith excludes boasting. If a man is justified by his own actions, he can boast about it. But when he is justified because Jesus is the object of his faith, then the credit clearly belongs to God, who justified the sinner.

Ellen G. White gives an interesting answer to the question, “What is justification by faith?” She wrote: “It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 456.

Works of law cannot atone for past sins. Justification cannot be earned. It can be received only by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, in this sense, works of law have nothing to do with justification. To be justified without works means to be justified without there being anything in ourselves to merit justification.

But many Christians have misunderstood and misapplied this text. They say that all one has to do is to believe, while downplaying works or obedience—even obedience to the moral law. In so doing they completely misread Paul. In the book of Romans and elsewhere, Paul attaches great importance to the keeping of the moral law. Jesus certainly did, as did James and John (*Matt. 19:17; Rom. 2:13; James 2:10, 11; Rev. 14:12*). Paul’s point is that although obedience to the law is not the *means* of justification, the person who is justified by faith still keeps the law of God and, in fact, is the only one who *can* keep the law. An unregenerate person who has not been justified can never fulfill the requirements of the law.

**Why is it so easy to get caught up in the trap of thinking that because the law doesn’t save us, we need not worry about keeping it? Have you ever rationalized away sin by claiming justification by faith? Why is that a very dangerous position? At the same time, where would we be without the promise of salvation, even when tempted to abuse it?**

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Righteousness of Christ in the Law,” pp. 236–239; “Come and Seek and Find,” pp. 331–335; “Perfect Obedience Through Christ,” pp. 373, 374, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “Things New and Old,” pp. 128, 129, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“Though the law cannot remit the penalty for sin, but charges the sinner with all his debt, Christ has promised abundant pardon to all who repent, and believe in His mercy. The love of God is extended in abundance to the repenting, believing soul. The brand of sin upon the soul can be effaced only through the blood of the atoning Sacrifice . . . of Him who was equal with the Father. The work of Christ—His life, humiliation, death, and intercession for lost man—magnifies the law, and makes it honorable.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 371.

“Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

“When the Apostle says that we are justified ‘without the deeds of the law,’ he does not speak of the works of faith and grace; for he who does such works, does not believe that he is justified by doing these works. (*While doing such works of faith*), the believer seeks to be justified (*by faith*). What the Apostle means by ‘deeds of the law’ are works in which the self-righteous trust as if, by doing them, they were justified and so were righteous on account of their works. In other words, while doing good, they do not seek after righteousness, but they merely wish to boast that they have already obtained righteousness through their works.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 80.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read over the texts for this week and then, in your own words, write a paragraph summarizing what they are saying. Share your paragraphs with each other in class.
- 2 Read Luther’s quote above. Why would such a truth like this have spurred him on as it did? Why is what he said such a crucial point to understand even for us today?
- 3 “Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as heirs of and builders upon the Reformation insights into biblical teaching on justification by grace through faith alone, and restorers and exponents of the fullness, clarity, and balance of the apostolic gospel.”—Ivan T. Blazen, “Salvation,” *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 307. What reasons do we have to believe this about ourselves?

## One Year in Mission: Part 3

“Here we have done even more than we could in New York,” Leonid said.

One hundred fifty missionaries came to Kiev—all were specially chosen by their unions or conferences. In addition, a youth team was formed, with 18 members from across the Euro-Asia Division. During the nearly six-month training program, the missionaries worked alongside Bible workers and medical missionaries and helped in the health stores. Additionally, 400 pastors came during two-week rotations to prepare for similar programs to be held in other cities throughout the division.

Anna, who led the youth group, was involved in several facets of the program. “We went prayer walking and walked close to the doors of the houses where we would be returning. At each house we prayed, ‘Please God, give us this house. Give us these people. Prepare them for us.’”

The next day team members went two by two, with one speaking while the other prayed. “First, we talk with the person about events happening in the world,” Anna describes. “Then we ask if they have ever read the Bible and if they think there is a connection between spiritual life and health. We try to continue the conversation and become acquainted with them.”

“What works in this method,” adds Leonid, “is not our faces or our questions. It’s that God prepares a special person for us, to hear what we have to share. This is very important.”

After just two weeks of going door-to-door, the team rejoiced that 26 new people came to church. Additionally, the health program participants were delighted to learn how to live longer and better and were enjoying being with the missionaries. “You have such a wonderful team,” they told Leonid and Anna. “We want to be with you. We like what you are doing.”

Anna is especially pleased with the effect the project is having on the youth. “I’m so happy when I hear them say, ‘You know, we feel like we’re in heaven. We feel like we’re really living here.’ At home, they have other worries, but here they feel the love of Jesus. When we work with Jesus and for Him, it’s real life.”

“Our youth program is part of the larger Mission to the Cities project,” Leonid said. “Here we’re all involved in one project—one mind, one spirit, and it’s really great!”

“This project is the result of a lot of prayers,” adds Anna. “Our entire world church has been thinking about how to reach people in the cities. If we’re all together, we can do wonderful things—and Jesus will come!”

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*ANNA GAVELO, 23, represented the Euro-Asia Division (ESD) in the pilot program of One Year in Mission (OYIM). She, along with 13 other young adults, worked in New York City as part of the church’s Mission to the Cities outreach.*



## *The Lesson in Brief*

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▶ **Key Text:** *Romans 3:28*

▶ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Grasp the foundational importance of Romans 3:19–28 in the flow of Paul’s overall exposition of “the gospel” in Romans.

**Feel:** Assimilate a strong sense of the utter importance of justification by faith alone in the imputed righteousness of Christ.

**Do:** Clarify his or her understanding of justification and be able to relate it properly to sanctification and a richer life in the Spirit.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: God’s Healing Grace and Redemption From Sin**

**A** Why is it important to realize that sin is a spiritual malady, not just a series of sinful acts and attitudes?

**B** What is the proper sequence between spiritual healing and proper practice?

**II. Feel: Internalize the Crucial Nature of the Themes Associated With Justification by Faith**

**A** Why is salvation by works of the law so futile?

**B** Why do so many feel that God’s free forgiveness could lead to “cheap grace”?

**III. Do: Take Practical Steps to Gain Greater Clarity on Justification.**

**A** What are the dynamics in justification by faith that can relieve a guilty conscience?

**B** What is inherent in justification by faith that contributes to the assurance of salvation that salvation by works cannot impart?

▶ **Summary:** The key passage for this week begins Paul’s direct exposition of justification by faith alone. With the “but now” of 3:21, Paul reaches an important turning point in Romans.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Romans 3:28*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** We now celebrate the 500-year anniversary of the launching of the Protestant Reformation. At this time, we seek to understand fully the dynamics of justification by faith alone and its classic scriptural expression in the book of Romans. Hardly a more foundational issue for personal salvation exists than justification by faith.

**Just for Teachers:** Earnestly impress upon class members the crucial importance of clarifying their understanding of justification by faith alone.

**Opening Discussion:** Ask class members to share their respective personal journeys in coming to terms with the issue of pardon, forgiveness, and a new legal standing of acquittal before God. Which was hardest for them to attain: intellectual (doctrinal) clarity or the admittance of their great need? Invite them to share what it means, subsequently, to embrace God's merciful pardon. Finally, what does their new legal standing as God's adopted children mean?

**Consider This:** The true heart of the discovery of both the apostle Paul and Martin Luther was genuine clarity on how the demands of God's justice could be satisfied without doing away with His law. Key for them was the fact that Christ met the demands of divine justice for us in His life of active, perfect obedience to the law and in His passive, substitutionary death for sinners. Thus, as the Sin Bearer, Christ satisfied the just demands of God's law, which demands eternal "death" (*Rom. 6:23*) as payment for the wages of sin. And through Christ's payment of the debt and His holy life, God has made full provision for the forgiveness of human sin.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ What has been the hardest thing for you to face up to: admitting that you have great need because of your sinfulness, or simply depending totally on the free mercy of God?
- ❷ What is it in our sinful human nature that always seems to drive us to meet the demands of God's justice through our own merit?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** The message found in Romans 3:19–28 has been characterized by venerable New Testament commentator Leon Morris as “the most important single paragraph ever written” (cited from Leon Morris’ commentary by George R. Knight in *Exploring Romans: A Devotional Commentary* [Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2010], p. 88). The transitional expression “[b]ut now” (*Rom. 3:21*) is one of the most decisive moments in the flow of Paul’s argument in Romans, and it opens up to readers the possibility for the hopeful transformation of the sinful human predicament. Thus, we need to ponder these verses with the utmost care.

## Bible Commentary

**Introduction:** What follows are the “high points” of Romans 3:19–28. The comments of the Standard Edition lesson are judiciously helpful here. To augment our study of the lesson, we will extract the most salient points and add a few supplemental comments.

### I. The Role of the Law in Justification *(Review Romans 3:19, 20 with your class.)*

The role of the law in leading to justification is essential. When Paul refers to “law” in the broad sense of torah, he refers to the first five books of Moses and more generally to the entire Old Testament. Yet, very often, he has in mind the moral law and its biblical amplification in the statutes, judgments, and ceremonial precepts. To be “under the law” means to be bound to the law’s jurisdiction as the definer of sin and the generator of guilt before God. Yet, the key point here is that, while the law has no power to redeem, it can very forcefully lead the sinner to seek a remedy for sin. In other words, the law cannot make a person just in God’s sight. As has been said, the law can no more save than the symptoms of a disease can cure the afflicting disease.

**Consider This:** Sinful humanity’s law-keeping is laudable, but why does keeping the law have no power to justify any sinner?

### II. Contrasting the “Righteousness of God” and the Righteousness of the Law *(Review Romans 3:21, NKJV, with your class.)*

Read Romans 3:21. What is the meaning of this crucial text? The “righteousness of God” is clearly contrasted with the “righteousness of the law.” This “righteousness of God” comes from God; indeed, it has been provided by Him, based on what has been done in the life and death of Jesus. And

this divine “righteousness” has been offered to all who will receive or accept it by faith—not because they deserve it but because they absolutely need it.

**Discussion Question:** *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 367, contains what is probably the clearest Ellen White statement ever rendered on justification. Ask the class how this statement has affected them and their attitude to Ellen White and her views on justification by faith. (It also may prove helpful to urge them to ponder prayerfully pages 300 to 400 in the same volume.)

### III. The Connection of Justification and “Righteousness” (Review Romans 3:24, NKJV, with your class.)

Romans 3:24 clarifies the key Greek term that has been translated as “justified,” and follows it with a discussion of the connection between justification and “righteousness” (*Rom. 3:25*).

**Consider This:** One of the key results of “grace” is the blessing of God in “declaring” repentant sinners to be “righteous before God.” Now, in one important sense, justification is “punctiliar” (happening at a particular point in time). But it also can be “linear” (ongoing) in the sense that, because of our human weakness, we need Christ, as a living Intercessor, to be constantly making up for our unavoidable deficiencies in our faith and in our walk with God. Ask the class: After carefully pondering these crucial points, why do you agree or disagree?

### IV. Differentiating “Propitiation” and “Remission” (Review Romans 3:25 with your class.)

Romans 3:25 leads us to the meaning of two key Greek words, *hilasterion* and *paresis*, which are normally translated into English, respectively, as “propitiation” and “remission.” These terms in this context are critically important for defining the work of Christ in behalf of sinners. Christ has made provision for the satisfaction of the demands of God’s justice. The requirements having been met, God can then offer the repentant sinner “remission,” or forgiveness and pardon, for his or her sins.

**Consider This:** What are some ways that we can translate more clearly these key terms in our cultural context?

### V. Justification and the Fairness of God’s Forgiveness of Sinners (Review Romans 3:26–28 with your class.)

In Romans 3:26, 27, Paul sums up the saving implications of Romans 3:24, 25. Because of what Christ has done, God can declare sinners to be righteous; yet, He can still be seen as totally fair in the eyes of the onlooking universe.

And in Romans 3:28, Paul can conclude that the sinner is justified “without,” or “apart from” (*NKJV*), the deeds of the law.

**Consider This:** Acts of obedience have no power to justify. But they do have the positive effects of vindicating both the genuineness of a person’s faith and the declaration of God’s forgiveness. Yet, some mistakenly assert that Paul’s diction in Romans 3:26, 27 (as reflected in the words “without,” or “apart from”) suggests that grace does away with the law and the obedience of faith. Based on a correct interpretation of Romans 3:24, 25, why is the opposite true?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** As has been pointed out, this week’s passage is utterly foundational. And here we need to challenge the class to sense not only the theological and doctrinal importance of this passage but also the utter seriousness that these truths imply for personal sanctification. Thus, invite serious consideration of the following questions:

#### Application Questions:

- ① In what possible ways does this theology of Paul inform how believers should live out their lives before both the church and the world?

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- ② How does this message of Paul seem to inform the counsels of Ellen G. White and her understanding of the life and death of Christ? And how should these both, in turn, inform the believer’s experience of salvation from the guilt and power of sin?

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### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** In response to the above two questions, ask the class how these passages from Paul and the commentary of Ellen G. White have shaped their theology of the meaning of Christ’s life and death. Challenge the class to review carefully the chapters entitled “Calvary” and “‘It is Finished’ ” from Ellen White’s book *The Desire of Ages*. How does the author either vindicate or reject the concepts that Christ’s perfect life and death were given to satisfy the demands of God’s justice so that He could offer merciful forgiveness for our sins?

**Activity:** Plan a follow-up meeting to address the questions presented under “Just for Teachers” for Step 4.