

The Andrew CHIU Memorial
New Testament Theological Conference



**"Justification by Faith
in Romans and Galatians"**

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Summary

Justification by faith is central to the Christian faith. It tackles the fundamental question of our human condition: How can a sinner be accepted by a holy God? It can be seen as Paul's summary of the gospel. It means that we sinners who are in Christ are not under condemnation. God accepts us despite our sin. We are justified by faith in Christ instead of being justified by what we do. It is the center of Paul's soteriology.

1. We are all sinners who cannot fulfil the Law's requirements.

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul depicts God's wrath against sinful human beings. Both gentiles and Jews are sinners for no one is righteous.

As it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."
(Romans 3:10-12)

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)

2. Law-observance cannot save sinners

Paul rejects works as a means of salvation since all human beings are ungodly (Romans 4:5).

Paul says,

"We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. "
(Galatians 2:15-16)

"Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Galatians 3:11)

He also writes,

"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. " (Romans 3:20)

3. Justification through faith alone

Apostle Paul says,

"For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." (Romans 3:28)

Faith is the means by which we are united to Christ. This is the sole means of justification. The function of it is to receive what grace freely offers. All human works, contributions and boastings are excluded.

In John Stott's words,

"The love, the idea, the purpose, the initiative, the action and the gift were all God's."¹

4. The ground of justification

The ground of justification is the saving work of Christ. Through his death and resurrection, we can have the foundation of justification. Christ's sin-bearing death on the Cross is the only ground of our justification. According to Luther, faith takes hold of Christ and it is the means by which we attain the remission of sins and righteousness.² In other words, we possess Christ through

¹ John Stott, *The message of Romans* (Nottingham: IVP, 1994), p. 11.

² Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Classics, 1979), p. 71.

our faith. He lives in us and becomes our righteousness. Faith unites our soul with Christ.

Paul says,

"whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins." (Romans 3:25)

He also says,

"who [Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." (Romans 4:25)

5. Righteousness is forensic

The forensic meaning is obvious in the following text.

Paul writes,

"Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." (Romans 8:33-34)

The word "justify" here clearly means "declare righteous," which indicates that justification is forensic.

On the other hand, no one is declared to be righteous by keeping the law. Paul clearly says,

"You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace." (Galatians 5:4)

6. Imputation of righteousness

Human beings are sinful for they are united with Adam. However, if they are united with Christ, they are righteous.

Paul says,

"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned — for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression

of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:12-19)

Dr. Thomas Schreiner says,

"The whole of Jesus' obedience — the entirety of his righteous life — is counted or credited to us when we are united to him."³

Human beings belong to either Adam or Christ. Christians are righteous because they are united with Christ. "All of who Jesus is belongs to us and is counted to us — both in paying sin's penalty and in his obedience to the law."⁴

7. Justification is purely God's grace

The source of our justification is indicated in Paul's words,

"and [sinners] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:24)

This is a divine favour. Our justification is freely by His grace. God gives himself generously in and through Jesus. Since "none is righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10), no one can declare himself to be righteous in God's sight. Self-justification is impossible. It is God who

³ Thomas Schreiner, *Faith alone* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2015), p. 183-184.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

justifies (Romans 8:33) and He does it "freely". (Romans 3:24)

This doctrine of "Justification by faith" is important because it reminds us of the grace of the gospel. Our salvation is entirely of God. The works of human beings cannot achieve salvation. "Justification by faith" gives all the glory to God. Paul says,

"Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due." (Romans 4:4)

Since we cannot earn our righteousness, we can only rely on Christ's gift of righteousness

Apostle Paul says,

"For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:17)

8. Effects on our justification

The first is attaining the identity of becoming sons of God. Apostle Paul says,

"for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." (Galatians 3:26-29)

Secondly, we belong to the messianic community of Jesus. The members of the new community are eager to do what is good. Paul says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love." (Galatians 5:6b)

Conclusion

Justification by faith alone apart from works is the right interpretation of the Scriptures. The core of justification is the freedom in Christ. Apostle Paul writes,

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

In short, the forensic declaration of justification of sinners make them just in the sight of God. Just as the sin of Adam is imputed to human beings, so the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to Christians. We receive God's righteousness since we are united to Christ. Our righteousness is based on the redemption of Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen one. Regeneration and sanctification come after God's justifying work. The doctrine of justification by faith does not imply a neglect of works. We are justified by faith alone. In this way, our salvation is definite and our future is bright.

All Scripture quotations are taken from English Standard Version (ESV) (2016)