

Justified by Faith in Jesus

Isn't that Sheldon Abbott?" Latrell asked in shock after the tall, retreating figure.

Sheldon was making his way to the restroom as Latrell and Brayton headed to join C.J. at their restaurant table.

"Yes," said Brayton.

Brayton had met the wealthy Sheldon in high school, after securing a scholarship to attend the private institution. Brayton hated to typecast him, but Sheldon had proven to be the typical privileged, spoiled rich jock. But he wasn't dumb, thank goodness. His family had power and prestige. He had good looks and the adoring eye of most of the pretty girls.

Sheldon Abbott had it all, which is why Brayton was surprised when he bumped into him several months ago, and Sheldon wanted to hang out with him.

Turned out, Sheldon remembered Brayton from high school for his "genuineness and peace." The two started talking now and again, and Brayton spoke about a lifestyle that money couldn't buy.

"I know you've probably heard it all before," Brayton had said, "but really listen with your heart."

"Why would Sheldon want to hang out with you?" asked Latrell, on their way to their seats. "I'm surprised he would agree to come to a restaurant like this."

"He's hungry for the Lord," Brayton said. "You love God, Latrell. Would you deny Sheldon that? God's love and forgiveness is for everyone."

1. *Why is it only God can give us forgiveness for our sins?*

2. *Why does every person need to experience God's forgiveness?*

3. *What role does faith have in receiving God's forgiveness and justification?*

Justified Freely by His Grace

Romans 3:21-24, KJV

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:21-24, NIV

²¹But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Our passage begins with the phrase, “But now,” which indicates a transition from one train of thought to another. Prior to our lesson’s Scripture, Paul had made the argument that everyone stands condemned before a holy and righteous God. No human has an excuse, because all creation declares the truth of a Creator, and God has made that truth plain to each person (Rom. 1:18-20). Worse yet, despite knowing God, people reject Him, which results in a downward spiral of idolatry and immorality, until they are completely given over to sin and depravity (vss. 21-32).

Paul also warned against judgmentalism. For no matter how good one may look on the outside, everyone is guilty of the same thing and will not escape judgment (2:1-5).

Furthermore, no amount of religious activity can make one righteous in God’s eye. Rather, when the religious hypocrite is exposed, dishonor to the Lord’s name is too often the result (2:12-24). So if observing the clear evidence of a Creator found in creation, trying to behave properly, or keeping religious standards cannot make a

person righteous before God, then what can? Our passage answers this question clearly. Righteousness does not come from trying to keep the law of God. Rather, as testified by the Law and the Prophets, which refers to the Old Testament Scripture, the righteousness of God comes only by faith in Jesus Christ.

And, there is no difference in this regard between Jews and Gentiles, for everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standard, namely His own glory (vs. 23). Thank God that we do not have to measure up to that, for He freely redeems and justifies us by His grace when we receive forgiveness for our sins by faith in Jesus Christ.

4. *Who witnessed the righteousness of God apart from the law?*
5. *What is the righteousness of God apart from the law?*
6. *Who has sinned, and what is the remedy for sin?*

Justified Fully by His Blood

Romans 3:25-26, KJV

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;
26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Romans 3:25-26, NIV

²⁵God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

God provided the way of salvation from sin. Here, Paul used the technical term “propitiation” (vs. 25, KJV) or sacrifice of atonement. The Greek word used here is *hilastērion*, and it is sometimes translated as “mercy seat.” This

links us to the temple and the most holy place, where the ark of the covenant resided. The lid of the ark was also called the mercy seat, which represented the place where the presence of God resided among His people. The high priest would enter once a year to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat. This foreshadowed what Jesus would do for us in the holy place of heaven. There in His role as High Priest, He entered in, not with the blood of ceremonially clean animals, but with His own blood to obtain everlasting redemption for sinners (Heb. 9:11-12).

The atoning sacrifice of Christ demonstrated the righteousness of God in two ways. First, Christ's shed blood covered the sins of the Old Testament saints. Second, the atoning sacrifice of Christ demonstrates God's righteousness today by covering the sins of those who now trust in the Savior. Both cases demonstrate God's righteousness because the price of redemption has been paid. Because God is holy and righteous, He cannot overlook sin and transgressions forever. But because God is also merciful and gracious, His Son willingly went to the Cross to pay for everyone's sin for all time.

What a glorious and loving God we have! His righteous, holy anger was satisfied by the shed blood of Jesus, so the gift of salvation is available to everyone.

7. *How did God provide for the atonement for sins?*

8. *Why did He provide for the atonement for sins?*

9. *How do sinners appropriate atonement for their sins?*

Justified by Faith, Not by Works of the Law

Romans 3:27-30, KJV

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

Romans 3:27-30, NIV

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:

30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

of the law that requires faith.

²⁸For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ²⁹Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

There is no room for boasting because a person is not justified by law, but by faith. God is not the Lord of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. Since Gentiles were never under the law, if keeping the law was required to be justified, Gentiles would not have been able to be right in God's eyes.

But He is also the God of those who have not been circumcised. At the Jerusalem council where whether Gentile believers in Jesus had to also keep the law was discussed, Peter noted that even the Jews could not keep the law. He asked, "Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10, KJV). So if the Gentiles could not be justified by the law because they were never under the law, and if the Jews could not be justified by the law because it was too great a yoke, then how can people be justified? We have a gracious God who justifies Jews and Gentiles who come to the Savior by faith.

10. *Why is boasting excluded from justification by faith?*

11. *What plays no role in a person being justified before God?*

12. *Who are justified by faith?*

Forgiveness at the Cross

While sitting at the airport, a little girl gazed up at me and asked, "Why do you wear that cross with the man hanging on it?" I replied, "Because it reminds me of what Jesus did on the Cross for me to know Him." Confusion filled her face. So, I explained that over 2,000 years ago, God sent His Son to die on the Cross for everyone's sins.

"Why?" questioned the little girl.

I asked her, "What happens when you disobey your parents?" She said her parents send her to her room or don't let her do something she wants to do. I said, "When we disobey God's commands for us, it separates us from Him, just like when your parents send you to your room for disobeying them. After you come out your room, what do you do to make your parents happy again?"

She said, "I tell them I'm sorry and won't do it again."

"What happens after you apologize?"

She hugged herself to show how her parents give her a hug.

"Well, that's why Jesus had to die on the Cross, so when we come to God and say, 'I'm sorry,' God can forgive us. Because God doesn't do wrong, someone had to die on the Cross for our wrongdoing. Only Jesus could do it because He never sinned. So Jesus died on the Cross, so that when we do wrong, God can forgive us. When we tell God that we are sorry, He remembers Jesus' death and forgives us and our relationship with God is made new."

The girl said, "Wow, that cross means a lot!"

"I hope one day it will mean a lot to you, too. Because Jesus died on the Cross for everyone to experience God's forgiveness and have a relationship with Him."

13. *Why is it important to believe and accept what Jesus did on the Cross to experience God's forgiveness?*

14. *What role does "I'm sorry" or confessing our sins play in experiencing God's forgiveness?*

15. *Have you experienced God's forgiveness in your life?*

Spiritual Cleansing

You probably routinely cleanse your body and living environment, but what about spiritual cleansing? Spiritual cleansing involves two steps: confessing your sins and asking for the Holy Spirit to take control of your life again. As 1 John 1:9 tells us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” And Ephesians 5:18 reminds us that we should be filled not with sin but “with the Spirit.”

► *Do you desire to experience sweet fellowship with God through daily spiritual cleansing? If so, start your cleansing right now with a prayer of confession, asking God to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.*

KEY VERSES

For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. —Romans 3:22b-24, KJV

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. —Romans 3:22b-24, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 6 through May 12

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Matthew 20:1-16—God Is Generous to the Unworthy.

Tues. Genesis 13:14-18—A Great and Blessed Nation.

Wed. Genesis 15:1-6—A Promise of Countless Heirs.

Thurs. 1 John 2:12-17—Little Children, Your Sins Are Forgiven.

Fri. Psalm 32—God's Abundant Forgiveness.

Sat. Romans 4:1-12—Trust God, Who Justified the Ungodly.

Sun. Romans 4:13-25—Christ Was Raised for Our Justification.