

Romans 3:21-31

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 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. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Romans 4:1-8

4 What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

- 7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;
- 8 blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

First job

Do you remember your first job? I mean your first paying job. It is one thing to do chores at home, but quite another thing to be paid for your work. Think back to that first pay check, how proud you were.

Work is a significant part of life.

There is pride in earning money by your own hand. There is pride in buying something by the sweat of your own brow. It is called **pride of ownership** and it comes from work.

A Christmas / Birthday gift

But now let's think along a different line. Remember some of your favorite birthday presents.

I bet the children here love birthday presents? And Christmas presents.

Now, if you think about it, birthday presents are not quite free or unexpected are they? Your birthday places a certain obligation on the giver. It's your birthday; you're supposed to receive a gift.

An unexpected gift

But sometimes, as a surprise, you receive a gift that is so extravagant, and so unexpected that you know it is completely free and unmerited. You know it comes from the heart of the giver and you know it is given only out of love.

Sometimes I talk to young men getting married and one of the things I tell them is that, of course you have to give flowers for Valentine's day and anniversary, but "the most important flowers you will give your wife are 'just because flowers,' just because flowers show up for no particular occasion, - but, - just because I love you." And by the way, just because flowers should show in a public way.

You see, **in our personal lives** we understand the contrast between a **gift given** and a **wage earned**. We understand that one comes from duty, it's earned, and one comes from love, it is given.

We understand the **pride of ownership** that comes with earning a wage and the **thankfulness** that comes with receiving a gift. We understand debt and duty. We wouldn't expect to be paid if we didn't work. And we understand love and mercy - we know that a gift given without cause or obligation is freely given.

But somehow, when it comes to God, when it comes to salvation, which is totally unearned on our part, coming entirely from **God's free grace**, motivated entirely by his love and mercy, when it comes to God, somehow the difference between a **wage** and a **gift** is often lost. Somehow, mankind always feels compelled to justify himself; to earn his place before God.

And I suspect that you know the reason, you have felt it in your heart just as I have in mine. **The reason is guilt**; you see, it is hard to **assuage a guilty conscience** with something you do not deserve.

In fact, a gift given from someone whom you have offended does just the opposite, it adds to your feelings of guilt and shame. - **The shame of a guilty conscience demands** that we earn our way out. It's just.

This is the plight of **sinful human beings** before a holy God. We have rebelled against God. We have violated his commands. We have offended Him to such an extent that we as fallen men and women have no way out. We cannot earn anything in God's sight, and yet a guilty conscience demands that we must somehow cover our guilt with a wage earned.

I say this because you need to have fixed in your mind the difference between a gift given and a wage earned.

Every religious "ism" out there is built on the principle of a wage earned – and the result is always bondage. But the gospel is built on the principle of a gift given – not of works lest anyone should boast.

You need to have fixed and permanent in your heart what is owed and what is freely given - because the gospel is freely given out of God's love and grace. And **the whole world wants to take it away from you**. I could list all the scholars and cults and heresies and "isms" I have studied, all seeking one way or another take away grace. – Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, New Age ism, modernism.

Have you ever noticed how; as churches lose the gospel of grace, they turn to the social gospel of works. It's all they have left to cover their guilt.

But, In Christ you have been saved, by grace - you have been justified, by grace - you have been adopted as God's own dear child, by grace - you are being sanctified, by grace - and someday, by grace, you will be glorified in the very presence of God. And God Himself will bring you safely home.

Now the context of Romans 4 is - Romans 3, - In Chapter 3, Paul declares that all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike, are under God's wrath and curse. – "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." "There is none righteous, no not one."

But then come these amazing, wonderful words: Romans 3:24, "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" – Being justified Freely, freely, freely, by His grace.

How can you and I, sinful creatures, be restored to a holy God? This passage says **Abraham, David and you and I are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.**

We will look at these three aspects of salvation.

1. **Salvation is by grace alone**
2. **Salvation is through faith alone**
3. **Salvation is in Christ alone**

I. Salvation is by grace alone

Firstly, we consider grace. Let me read verses 4 and 5 again so we can see the structure of Paul's argument.

4 **Now** to him who works, the wages are not counted as **grace** but as debt.

Notice the structure: To him who works - Wages are given to fulfill a debt. That is, work creates a debt and so wages fulfill the debt – It is right that wages are paid for work – they are due.

But the word “**not**” states that there is something that does not correspond to a debt, **grace**. Grace is something **not of work, debt, and wages**. To complete the contrast, grace is described the next verse.

5 **But to him who does not work** – this is grace, verse 4 said “not work” corresponds to grace.

(**but, rather than work, believes on Him who justifies the ungodly**), - what does the one who does not work do? He believes on Him who justifies the ungodly.

his faith is accounted for righteousness. – The outcome of grace believed by faith is righteousness.

These two verses describe opposites: The one who works, and the one who does not work.

Wages correspond to work, but grace is given to the one who does not work, but rather believes.

Now notice there is no middle ground – once you work, you are in the realm of debt and wages. **Only** the one, who does not work **period**, receives grace.

A. What is grace?

So what precisely is grace? In Scripture, **grace is a technical term**; this means that it is such an important idea that the Bible itself defines it. We don't go someplace else, like cultural usage, to understand grace; we go right here to the Bible. I have lexicons of common Greek usage at the time, but that is not where I go to learn what grace is. I go right here, to God's word.

And just a comment on terms, words like justification, imputation, grace, faith, these are God's words, these are words by which God communicates the gospel to us. God speaks to us in language.

So what is grace? We will take our lead from Paul here and go to the Old Testament Scriptures.

1. The people of Egypt and Joseph

Consider Joseph. In the midst of the 7 years of drought – The people of Egypt were starving. They had nothing left to pay for grain, but without grain they would die. They had no choice, they asked for mercy; they cast their very lives upon Joseph and asked that they might find grace in his sight.

Genesis 47:25 and they said, Thou hast saved our lives: let us find **grace** in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants.

Joseph showed grace.

Notice the wording, let us “find grace in the sight of my Lord” – These words are repeated over and over again in the Old Testament – Remember, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

- Grace is **found**. It is not due; it is not earned; it is found.
- Grace is found in the **sight of the giver**, this tells that grace **exists in the giver**, not the receiver.
- Grace **results in a gift to someone in great need**. These people would die without grain. The gift is not grace, but is given out of grace.

2. Ruth and Boaz

Or, consider Ruth and Boaz? Ruth understood, she would need to find grace to survive.

Ruth 2:2 "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find grace."

Ruth went out to glean in the fields; it says she happened upon the field of Boaz and **she found grace in the sight of Boaz**. And so Boaz protected her and gave her extra grain for herself and Naomi. Ruth and Naomi were destitute they had no choice but to depend on the grace of another. Do you notice the same words, “in whose sight I may find grace?” Grace is found, in the sight of the giver. It saves those who are in desperation.

3. David and Jonathan

Jump ahead to King David. 1 Samuel 20:3 says, “Then David took an oath again, and said (to Jonathan), “Your father certainly knows that I have found grace in your eyes.”

Here, David was fleeing for his life. Saul was seeking to kill him. What did David do? He sought help from Jonathan because he knew that he had **found grace in the sight of Jonathan**.

Jonathan had no obligation to help, it even endangered his own kingdom, but he helped David because he loved him. When David had nothing else to fall back on, he cast himself on grace. Notice the same elements, **grace is found in the sight of the giver**, it is given of no obligation, it results in action, it saves.

4. Exodus 33, 34

But the Hebrew word (חַן) “grace,” is applied **to God** -more than any other place in Exodus 33 and 34. And here we see a full display of God’s grace.

Moses was on the mountain. Aaron had molded a golden calf. The people had bowed down to worship it; they even said – and this is amazing – they said, “This is the god who brought us out of Egypt.” They had grumbled every step of the way. But now they completely rejected the Lord for an idol. And in Exodus 33:3 God gives the terrible judgement – I will not go up amongst you.

God said, “If I come among you I will destroy you” To be left without God! This is a terrible judgement.

Moses can call on nothing else to intercede for the people, so he calls on grace

Exodus 33:13–14 Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is your people.”

And the Lord granted grace.

And the Lord answered, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest

He said, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."

This is perhaps the low point for Israel and It is precisely at this point of greatest need that Moses and the people found grace in the sight of the Lord.

Now here is the point, God had no obligation to spare Israel.

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers.

It was not for anything in the people themselves but because of God’s covenant love that he showed grace.

B. Summary, Grace applied

Now you have heard grace defined as unmerited favor. And it is that. But Scripture gives us a fuller description of grace. Let me summarize 5 aspects of grace.

- 1) **Grace is found, it is not given out of duty or obligation.**, not earned. but freely given.
- 2) **Grace exists entirely in the heart of the giver.** (Grace is found in the eyes of the Lord).
- 3) **Grace always results in a saving gift or action.** The gift is not grace and grace is not the gift, but the gift is given out of grace.
- 4) **Grace is given to one in desperate need who cannot help themselves.** David does not need grace as a victorious king, but when he is running for his life. Ruth does not need grace married to Boaz, but as a destitute widow. And Israel receives grace at the moment of their greatest sin. --Where there is no need, there is no grace. Where there is an ability to save oneself, there is no grace.
- 5) **Specifically, God’s grace is expressed in covenant** because by covenant, God obligates himself to the salvation of his people. There is no obligation in grace. A covenant promise is God’s way of telling us that He does not change. That His grace is the same from age to age. That is, Grace is sovereignly given and maintained. By Covenant, God creates a bond between Himself and His people and, so, tells us that we live under the covenant of grace.

Now why go to such lengths to give a picture of grace? Because the gift that God gives by grace is salvation.

Titus 2:11, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,”

Notice, The grace of God **that brings** salvation.

Now I think you can see where this is going. Think about our natural condition, born in sin. Jeremiah says the heart is desperately wicked. Ephesians says we are dead in our sin.

Psalm 40 says that God drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

The picture is this. The miry bog. Deep mud. You try to pull one foot out and the other just sinks deeper and then you try the other foot and the first just sinks deeper. There is no way out without help. – This is our sinful condition. Without Christ we are stuck in the miry bog.

We cannot help our selves. – We are in need of grace. When you hear the word grace, I want you to think, “I know what that is,” and I know why it matters. It means salvation comes from God, it is a gift freely give.

Especially when you face the reality of sin and corruption in your heart, you need to know that grace comes to those in desperate need who cannot help themselves.

Romans 5:20 But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more

Let me stop here for a minute. Think about your relationship with God. It is defined by grace.

In verse 2, Paul says: For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about.

And that’s true. If someone is really righteous on their own. They have earned a reward before God and they have a boast. This idea is so repugnant before God that Paul immediately says, “but not before God.”

A right relationship to God is one of humble thankfulness, not one of prideful boasting.

This was the test for Adam and Eve – complete dependence upon God – and this is the test for you and me – will be live by grace. Entirely in God’s care.

Now I have just spent most of my sermon on grace. Why? Because if we get grace right, all of salvation falls into place. – Ephesians 2:8 – by grace you have been saved, through faith – and that not of yourselves – it is the gift of God.

II. Justification is through faith alone

A. Faith receives grace

Secondly we see that salvation is by faith alone. Look with me to verse 5.

Romans 4:5 And to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Faith corresponds to grace – to one who does not work.

Romans 4:16 Therefore it [that is, Salvation] is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed – the seed of Abraham

Salvation is **of** faith that it might be **according** to grace.” In other words, faith is the matching pair to grace. **Faith receives grace as a free gift.** If salvation was not through faith, it could not be by grace. Only faith receives what is freely given.

Ephesians 2:8 again, “by grace you have been saved through faith.” Salvation is “by” God’s grace. It is an act of God. It is received through the means of faith.

And remember the contrast in this passage, once you enter the realm of work you have entered the realm of wages and left the realm of grace.

B. Abraham was justified by faith, not work

1. Abraham was not justified by work

Now, Paul gives the example of Abraham. The objection from the Pharisees was that justification was not by faith in the Old Testament because Abraham was a righteous man in himself. To this, Paul answers,

Romans 4:1-2 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?

The answer is nothing. Abraham is just like the rest of us. He has no boast before God based on his own internal righteousness

So then, how was Abraham justified, if not by works? In verse 3:

For what does the Scripture say? [And Paul quotes Genesis 15:6] "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

C. Everyone who is justified is justified in the same way, by faith accounted for righteousness

Thus, Abraham’s **faith was accounted as righteousness.** Verses 4 and 5 **generalize** this to **everyone, including you and me, who believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.**

The only way for you to be saved is by God counting faith as righteousness. If you were to look at verses 1-8 in Greek, **two words** would stand out, **righteous**, and **counted**.

Righteous also shows up in its verb form, “justifies.” Consider again verse 5: And to the one who does not work but believes in him who **justifies** the ungodly(that is, declares the ungodly righteous), his faith is counted as **righteousness**,

So, God declares the ungodly righteous because their faith is counted as righteousness.

What does it mean, counted? It means that something is, marked down as belonging to you. When God counts you righteous, it means He sees you as possessing righteousness.

Notice that verse 8 gives the matching pair. Because you are forgiven, God does not count your sin to you. That is, God no longer sees you as possessing sin.

Perhaps you have been in a courtroom and heard a judge announce the verdict. Guilty, condemned. Or the opposite, innocent, justified. Condemned or justified. These are the only two

possible verdicts and they are both declarations by a judge. The picture here is God the Judge declares one of two verdicts, innocent, justified, or guilty, condemned.

If you have no righteousness in yourself and yet you must be righteous, the only option is for God to count a righteous to you – from outside of yourself.

D. Faith is not righteousness, it is accounted for righteousness

Now before get to the source of righteousness, we need to see what a beautiful picture of faith is given in this verse. Notice what it says, “But believes on Him who justifies the ungodly.” In other words the one who believes is still ungodly when he believes.

The point is this, faith is not a righteous act deserving of anything from the Lord.

Some churches can see faith as a kind of substitute commandment – As though God said, “OK, you couldn’t keep the Ten Commandments, this time I’ll just give you one – Believe in Jesus Christ for Salvation.”

If that were really the case, we would be back in verse 4 in the realm of works and wages. And we would be in trouble because we cannot fulfill that commandment any more than we could fulfill the ten, or Adam could fulfill his one. – and besides it would change our relationship with God from grace to boast.

What would you do if you have doubts? If faith is a commandment to gain righteousness, and you doubt, then you are lost. You are right back under law and not grace. In this case, there would be no way to live in real peace before God because faith is full of doubts, just as our intentions to do good are tainted by covetousness, lust, anger, and many other sins.

Do you see how this would shake your assurance in Christ?

No! Salvation must be through faith that it might be by grace – Grace is freely given and so faith freely receives. Romans 5:1 says – Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God. God’s grace, received by faith, leads to real peace with God as an entirely dependent creature.

If faith is not a command, what is it? Faith is trust; it is a desperate calling out for the righteous mercy of God because we have nothing righteous in ourselves.

Jesus gives a picture of faith in Luke 18, when He describes the tax collector in prayer. The tax collector who would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but stood afar off from the altar, beating his breast crying out, “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Jesus said, “This man went down to his house justified (that is, declared righteous by God – his faith was counted for righteousness).”

True faith is a complete and absolute trusting in “Him who justifies the ungodly.”

III. Justification by Christ alone

Now we need to back up for a minute. – If God counts righteousness to you as it says in verse 5: “His faith is counted for righteousness.” – Where does the righteousness come from? - It comes from Jesus Christ who lived a righteous life in your place.

And if God will not count your sin to you as it says in verse 8, where does your sin and guilt go? – They go to Christ who died the death of sin in your place. Jesus Christ took the wrath of God in your place. Christ took on human flesh so that He could take on your human sins.

Without Christ there would be no grace and no justification because there would be no satisfaction of God’s wrath and there would be no righteousness. – The center of our salvation is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:9-10 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

You see the great exchange here: 2 Corinthians 5:21 he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God

Remember Titus 2:11, “For the grace of God that **brings** salvation has appeared to all men,”

The give that comes from God’s grace is Jesus Christ Himself who is the savior of our souls.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with this. I am trying to accomplish two things here. The first is to show you again the way that Scripture interprets Scripture, to show how this book fits together to give everything we need for faith and godliness. The second is to raise a guard around your salvation. If you get the fullness of grace freely given, and beauty of simple receiving faith, and the two-fold work of Christ fixed in your heart, it will guard and protect you against the subtle spirit of the age which is still in bondage to guilt and constantly seeps into the church.

Salvation from sin is **by** grace alone, **through** faith alone, **in** Christ alone. This is the gospel. Paul concludes this passage by quoting, David, in Psalm 32.

Romans 4:6–8 just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

It is a great blessing to have our sins forgiven. It is a great blessing to have our sins covered and remembered no more against us; it is a blessing to have the righteousness of Christ counted to us; and It is a blessing to have the assurance that comes from grace through faith.

Think about your life for a moment, are you afraid of being found out by the God who sees all things. Do you want to hide from the searching light of the One who can see into every corner of your life, every corner of your mind, every thought, every careless word, every hurt you have caused, every action you have taken. Are you afraid to be exposed before your Creator? – Are you still caught in grip of guilt and shame, in bondage with no way out?

The Gospel’s prescription is this, cast all your cares on Jesus, trust in him and in him alone receive, by faith, the wonderful grace of God which brings salvation.

I said this once before: God is so good, even one day apart from him is too long. Let Jesus grab your heart and draw you gently to himself. He is the one who care for your soul. – **Amen Pray**