

JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Bill Walton

Text: Rom. 3:4

Introduction:

- I. Verse 1: “‘Tis the grandest theme thro’ the ages rung; ‘Tis the grandest theme for a mortal tongue; ‘Tis the grandest theme that the world e’re sung, “Our God is able to deliver Thee.

Verse 3: “‘Tis the grandest theme, let the tidings roll To the guilty heart, to the sinful soul; Look to God in faith, He will make thee whole; Our God is able to deliver Thee.

Chorus: “He is able to deliver thee, He is able to deliver thee; Tho’ by sin opprest, Go to him for rest; Our God is able to deliver Thee.”

- II. William A. Ogden beautifully expressed in poetry and song the grand theme of Romans chapters three and four: Our God is able to deliver the sinner who believes
 - A. That’s the grandest theme of all, and that’s the theme Paul elaborates in this epistle, and especially in these chapters
 - B. He does so by describing: (1) the human condition, (2) the consequent condemnation, and (3) the Divine solution.

Body:

- A. **THE HUMAN CONDITION**
 - B. All men are sinners. That goes without saying, doesn’t it? No, it doesn’t.
 1. That’s why Paul, in the first four chapters of Romans, says it again and again and then elaborates upon it at length.
 2. Many, perhaps even most, think within themselves, “⁴¹...I am not like other men -- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” (Lk. 18:11-12)
 - a. And “they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Cor. 10:12).
 - C. All men are sinners. That’s the human condition.
 1. The Jews, in possession of the oracles of God, of all people ought to have known that – but many didn’t. So Paul talks about “our unrighteousness” in Rom. 3:5.
 2. He elaborates on that unrighteousness in Rom. 3:9-18
 - a. “⁹ What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. ¹⁰ As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. ¹² They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.’” ¹³ “Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit”; “The poison of asps is under their lips”; ¹⁴ “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” ¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways; ¹⁷ And the way of peace they have not known.” ¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
 3. In Rom. 3:19 he says the purpose of God’s holy law is that “every mouth may be stopped, and **all the world** may become guilty before God.”

- 4. In Rom. 3:23 he charges that “**all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- 5. And Paul continues his charge of universal unrighteousness in his other epistles.
 - a. In Eph.. 2:1-3 he says, “¹ And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,³ among whom also **we all** once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, **just as the others.**”
 - b. And in Tit 3:3 he admits, “³ For **we ourselves** were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”
- D. Paul’s indictment of sin applies to every accountable human being, despite our protestations to the contrary.
 - 1. You say, “I’ve never committed adultery, or killed anyone.” But have you ever looked at a woman to lust for her, or have you ever hated someone or committed an outburst of anger?
 - 2. You say, “I’m no thief and I’m no liar.” But have you ever gained anything, even favor, by any kind of dishonesty, and have you ever deceived anyone or misrepresented anything?
 - 3. You say, “I have never taken God’s name in vain.” But have you ever cursed, or gossiped, or do you ever backbite or act as a talebearer?
 - 4. You say, “I try to be a good neighbor and help other people.” But do you ever not do the good you know to do when you have the opportunity?
- E. Sin is the universal problem of mankind.
 - 1. “There is no one who does not sin” (1 Kgs. 8:46).
 - 2. And “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:8).
 - 3. And the fact is, we have no excuse for our sins. That’s what Paul means when he says, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped....” (Rom. 3:19).
 - a. In Psa. 32:2 David said: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” “No guile” means “no dishonesty, no attempt to disguise, gloss over, extenuate, or justify the sin” (*Speaker’s Commentary*, Vol. IV, p. 243)
- F. In these first few chapters of Romans, Paul tries by every means to make us realize what we are, because only then may we make the effort to become what we ought to be.

G. THE CONSEQUENT CONDEMNATION

- H. Having established in Romans chapter 3 that “all the world” is “guilty before God,” it is the righteous judgment of God that “those who practice such things are **deserving of death**” (Rom. 1:32).
 - 1. Eph. 2:1-3: “¹ And you...were **dead in trespasses and sins**,² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,³ among whom also we all once con-

ducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature **children of wrath**, just as the others.”

- I. I believe the biggest challenge I face in trying to save my neighbor from his sins is convincing him he needs saving.
 - 1. Perhaps it wouldn't be hard to convince someone who has committed adultery and murder that his terrible sins have damned his soul. Unless his conscience is seared, he feels the burden of his guilt.
 - a. David, in the Old Testament, had an innocent man killed in order to cover up his adultery. And, in two of the Psalms, he describes how his conscience was tortured because of it:
 - 1) Psa. 32:3-4: “...my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer”
 - 2) Psa. 51:1, 3, 14: “Have mercy on me, O God....For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me....Save me from bloodguilt, O God....” [NIV]
 - 2. But, if my neighbor has not involved himself in such grievous sins, sins abhorred by almost everyone, he may be unable to see how he could possibly be under the same condemnation as the man who has.
 - a. On one occasion Jesus was a visitor in the home of a man who showed by his attitude that he saw the sinfulness of some people, and the terribleness of some sins, very clearly, but he did not see his own sinfulness.
 - b. So Jesus used a parable to try to get him to see his own need for forgiveness: “Two men owed money to a certain money-lender. One owed him five hundred *denarii*, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?” (Lk. 7:41-42, NIV).
 - c. Yes, one was deeper in debt than the other, just as some are more deeply involved in sin than others. But neither one could pay his debt!
- J. We must understand that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18).
 - 1. Paul says the homosexuals, the fornicators, the murderers, and those who hate God are worthy of death (Rom. 1:26-32).
 - 2. But he says the same thing about the whisperers, the backbiters, those who are disobedient to their parents, the deceivers, and those who are full of envy.
 - 3. I don't have to see myself as the worst sinner who ever lived. But I do have to see myself as owing a debt to God (because of my sins) that I cannot pay.
 - a. I must see myself as “a sinful man” (Lk. 5:8) who needs God's grace and forgiveness. And I've got to get my neighbor to see that the same is true of him. That's where salvation begins.
- K. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). We earn condemnation, and fully deserve it. But there is no way to earn justification. We are helpless; and, without God, we are hopeless.
 - 1. “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

L. THE DIVINE SOLUTION

M. The Book of Job is thought by some (perhaps many) to be the oldest book of the Bible. If that's so, it means the question of how sinful men can be justified in the eyes of the holy God has challenged the minds of thoughtful men almost from the very beginning, because the question is asked in Job 25:4, "How then can man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of woman?"

1. In his letter to the Romans especially, but also in his letter to the church at Ephesus and his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul gives the solution to man's greatest problem. Here in the third and fourth chapters Paul sets forth the solution in considerable detail and with compelling argument. And then he summarizes what he has said in the beginning verses of the fifth chapter. The solution is justification by grace through faith.
- a. Rom. 5:1-2: "¹ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also **we have access by faith into this grace** in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
- b. Rom. 4:7-16: "⁷ Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; ⁸ Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin." ⁹ Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. ¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, ¹² and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. ¹³ For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, ¹⁵ because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ Therefore **it is of faith that it might be according to grace**, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all"
- c. Rom. 5:1-2: "¹ Therefore, having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also **we have access by faith into this grace** in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
- d. Eph. 2:8: "For by **grace** you have been saved through **faith**, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God....*"

N. Justified By Grace

1. All that has been said already about the human condition and the consequent condemnation ought to make it unnecessary to say that salvation is only by the grace of God. Our sins render us helpless to save or justify ourselves.
2. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* is helpful in giving us an accurate understanding of "grace": It is "*on the part of the bestower, the friendly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds, graciousness, lovingkindness, goodwill generally... especially with reference to the Divine favor or 'grace'*" (p. 277).
3. Notice, grace takes place in the heart (Col. 3:16), and it is a disposition of heart characterized by love, mercy, and kindness.
 - a. Paul uses all four words in this letter to the Romans and in Eph.. 2:4-8 and in Tit. 3:3-7 in setting forth the doctrine of salvation by grace.

- b. It is this disposition of heart (grace, love, mercy, and kindness) that caused God to do all that He has done to save us from our sins.
- c. But it is important to understand that there is a distinction to be made between “the friendly disposition” and the “kindly act” that proceeds from it.
 - 1) It is possible to have a gracious, loving disposition of heart toward another person but for one reason or another not express it or demonstrate it (Pr. 27:5; 2 Sam. 13:38-39).
 - 2) But would anyone suppose that we are saved by the grace of God apart from the demonstration of His grace, “the gift by the grace”?
- d. Listen to Paul in Rom. 5:6-15:
 - 1) ⁶“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰ For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹ And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation....¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more **the grace of God and the gift by the grace** of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.”
- 4. It ought to be obvious that in passages such as Rom. 5:15, where salvation is attributed to “grace” plus “the gift by the grace,” that “grace” is being used in a narrow sense – it’s “grace” with a little “g”. But in passages such as Rom. 5:1-2 and Eph. 2:5-8 where salvation is attributed to “grace” without any mention of anything else on God’s part, it ought to be obvious that “grace” is being used in a broad, comprehensive sense that includes “the gift by the grace” though “the gift by the grace” is not specifically mentioned.
- 5. It’s impossible not to see that salvation by grace includes the **demonstration** of grace, “the gift by the grace”.
 - a. Tit. 2:11: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has **appeared** to all men”
 - b. Tit. 3:4-7: ⁴But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man **appeared**, ⁵not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”
 - c. Jn. 3:16: “For God so loved the world that **He gave** His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”
 - d. 1 Jn. 4:9-10: ⁹“In this the love of God was **manifested** toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”
- 6. It’s impossible not to see that “the gift by the grace” was absolutely necessary to salvation by grace. How else could God be “just and the justifier” (Rom. 3:26)? And if the death of Jesus was not necessary, would not God have spared His own Son the agony of

the cross (Mt. 26:38-44; Heb. 5:7)? Clearly, the demonstration of grace (“the gift by the grace”) was absolutely necessary to our justification.

- a. Heb. 9:22: “and without shedding of blood there is no remission”
 - b. Lk. 24:46: “Thus it is written, and thus it was **necessary** for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,”
 - c. Jn. 3:14: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so **must** the Son of Man be lifted up.”
7. Now let’s summarize what Paul and the other Bible writers tell us about justification by grace.
- a. Salvation is only by the grace of God.
 - b. Salvation by grace includes the demonstration of grace.
 - c. The demonstration of grace is absolutely necessary to salvation by grace.
8. Therefore, we must understand that every Bible passage that says we are justified or saved by grace is talking about grace in a broad, comprehensive sense that includes the demonstration of grace, “the gift by the grace.”
- a. “Grace,” in many passages, is used as a one-word summary of all that God has done to save us.
9. “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!”

O. Justified Through Faith

1. To say there is a Divine solution is to say the solution originates with God, is founded and grounded in God. But to say there is a Divine solution is not to minimize or deny human participation in that solution.
 - a. Human participation is seen in the fact that there is even a sense in which we save ourselves (Acts 2:40, ASV, KJV, NIV, NRSV).
 - b. Yes, we are drawn to Jesus by the Father (Jn. 6:44), but we must listen and learn (Jn. 6:45) and be willing to come (Jn. 5:40; Mt. 22:2-3).
 - c. Yes, the faith we have and confess is granted to us by God for Christ’s sake (Phil. 1:29), and He opens our hearts to believe (Acts 16:14), but we must have good and honest hearts (Lk. 8:15) and we must seek (Mt. 7:7) and search (Acts 17:11) and be willing to believe (Mt. 11:14-15).
 - d. And, yes, the goodness of God leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4), but we must follow His lead (Acts 17:30).
 - e. And after all:
 - 1) We must do the believing (Jn. 8:24; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9-10).
 - 2) We must do the repenting (Acts 3:19).
 - 3) We must do the confessing (Rom. 10:9-10).
 - 4) And we must get ourselves baptized (Acts 22:16).
 - f. We are by no means equal partners with God in working out our salvation, but we certainly must work out our own salvation (Phil. 2:12), and yet such admonitions are meaningless if there is no human participation in God’s plan of salvation.

2. Just as “grace” is a one-word summary of all God has done to save us, “faith” is a one-word summary of all that we must do in order to be saved.
 - a. And *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* is helpful in giving us an accurate understanding of the word “faith” as it used by Paul in Romans chapters three and four, and other contexts where the doctrine of justification through faith is set forth: *“the main elements in ‘faith’ (pistis) in its relation to the invisible God, as distinct from ‘faith’ in man, are especially brought out in the use of this noun and the corresponding verb, pisteuo; they are (1) a firm conviction, producing a full acknowledgement of God’s revelation or truth, e.g., 2 Thess. 2:11-12; (2) a personal surrender to Him, John 1:12; (3) a conduct inspired by such surrender, 2 Cor 5:7. Prominence is given to one or the other of these elements according to the context”* (p. 222).
 - b. Thayer’s treatment of saving “faith” is consistent with Vine’s: *“used especially of the faith by which a man embraces Jesus, i.e. a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah – the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, conjoined with obedience to Christ”* (p. 511).
3. It is this broad, comprehensive, inclusive, faithful, obedient faith that Paul has in view in every case where he uses the word “faith” or “believe” in Romans chapters three and four.
 - a. And it is only with this understanding that we can avoid bringing the “faith” passages in Romans into conflict with the “obedience” passages in Romans (1:5; 6:3-4; 6:17-18; 16:26; etc) and the “obedience” passages in the gospels, and in Acts, and in the other epistles.
4. We have seen that “grace” takes place in the heart (Col. 3:16) and is a disposition of heart that causes one to act graciously and do acts of mercy and kindness. So it is also that “faith” takes place in the heart (Rom. 10:9-10) and is a disposition of heart that causes one to act faithfully and render an obedience of faith.
5. It ought to be obvious that in passages such as Mk. 16:16, where salvation is attributed to “faith” plus something else (baptism) that “faith” is being used in a narrow sense – it’s “faith” with a little “f”. But in passages such as Rom. 3:21-26 and Rom. 5:1-2, where salvation is attributed to “faith” without any mention of anything else on man’s part, it ought to be obvious that “faith” is being used in a broad, comprehensive sense that includes “the obedience of faith” though “obedience” or some act of faith is not specifically mentioned.
6. It ought to be plain for all to see that salvation by faith includes the demonstration of faith, “the obedience of faith.”
 - a. Both at the beginning and at the end of the letter to the Romans Paul says he is an apostle of Jesus Christ preaching the gospel of Christ in order to bring about “the obedience of faith” among all the nations (Rom. 1:5; 16:25-26).
 - b. So James says, “**Show** me your faith without your works, and I will **show** you my faith by my works” (Jas. 2:18).
7. Not only is it the case that obedience to the gospel is necessary for salvation, but it is at the point of obedience to the gospel that we experience that transformation of life that is elsewhere referred to as being born again.
 - a. Listen to Paul in Romans, chapter 6: “¹⁷ But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you **obeyed** from the heart that form of doctrine to which you

were delivered. ¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6:17-18).

8. And who does Paul use as his example of justification by faith in Romans, chapter 4? He uses Abraham, the same example James uses to argue that justification by faith necessarily includes the deeds of faith and is NOT by faith only (Jas. 2:14-26).
9. Is the demonstration of faith, “the obedience of faith,” really necessary to justification by faith?
 - a. Let Paul answer: “⁷ and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,” (2 Th. 1:7-9).
 - b. This is the same thing the Lord taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 7:21), and the same thing that is affirmed by the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 5:9).
10. The New Testament writers also establish a connection between the demonstration of grace and the demonstration of faith – a connection between our obedience and the death (blood) of Jesus. This connection is clearly set forth in a number of passages.
 - a. 1 Pet. 1:1-2: “¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:...”
 - b. Rom. 6:3-4: “³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”
 - c. Heb. 10:22: “²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”
 - d. 1 Jn. 1:7: “⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”
11. Now let’s summarize what Paul and the other Bible writers tell us about justification through faith.
 - a. Salvation is through faith.
 - b. Salvation through faith includes the demonstration of faith.
 - c. The demonstration of faith is absolutely necessary to salvation through faith.
12. Therefore, we must understand that every Bible passage that says we are justified or saved “by” (or “through”) faith is talking about faith in a broad, comprehensive sense that includes the demonstration of faith, “the obedience of faith.”
 - a. “Faith,” in many passages, is used as a one-word summary of all that God requires of us in order for us to be saved.
13. “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way.”

Conclusion:

- I. There are two ways to summarize the New Testament doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

- A. One way is to use “Grace” and “Faith” in the broad, comprehensive sense -- and Paul does that in Rom. 5:1-2.
 - 1. He says, “¹ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”
- B. But there is another way to summarize the doctrine, and that’s by using “grace” and the demonstration of grace, and “faith” and the demonstration of faith in the same passage -- and in that case “grace” and “faith” are to be understood in their more narrow sense. Paul summarizes the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in that way in Gal. 2:20.
 - 1. He says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”
 - 2. You see, it’s “faith” and the demonstration of faith (“the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith”). And it’s “grace” and the demonstration of grace (“gave Himself for me”).

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