

Justification By Faith

#11

In the first several chapters of Romans, the apostle Paul summarizes the universal lost state of mankind. He also underscores to the Jews that possessing God's laws did not make them any more righteous, or any more successful, than Gentiles at keeping them.

Read Romans 3:20

How does the Law make us conscious of sin? _____

The Mosaic Law (a.k.a. the Law of Moses was contained in the first five books of the Bible and consisted of not only the Ten Commandments but also hundreds of other rules) functioned like a speed limit sign. It only made you aware that you were speeding (sinning), but had no power to help you slow down. In fact, Paul later argued that the Law increased sin (Romans 5:20,21).

How do you think it did that? _____

Have you ever had someone tell you, "Whatever you do, don't touch that?" What did that make you want to do? Exactly, it made you want to touch it.

Read Romans 3:21-24

How would you explain the words righteousness and justified?

Righteousness: _____

Justified: _____

Paul is using legal, courtroom terminology to help explain what God has done for us. Righteousness means a "right-standing" before the judge (God). Justified means for the judge (God) to declare you "just." The courtroom background is important, because even if someone is guilty, a judge has the ability to reduce their penalty. Here now, is the big idea. When we think of Christ's death for our sin, we think only that He has forgiven our sins, but these verses are saying something far greater: God actually credited to us Jesus' righteousness. To use a financial analogy, not only was our debt covered, we were also awarded a billion dollars.

What makes it all the more amazing is that it's given to us as a gift. We didn't earn it, but received it by faith. If this incredible generosity is difficult for us to grasp, it was doubly so for the Jews in Paul's audience. They were steeped in the belief that one is justified or righteous only by observing every letter of the Mosaic Law.

Paul then, must prove his point to his skeptical Jewish hearers. So, in Romans chapter four, he introduces two testimonies into the court he has metaphorically constructed: Abraham and David, the pillars of the Old Testament and men renowned for their godliness. To paraphrase his argument, Paul says, "Hey reread your Bible! These guys were declared

righteous by faith, not by how good they were, by their works, or how well they followed the Law of Moses.” The great men of God were considered righteous because of their faith alone. They believed God and therefore God considered them righteous.

Read Genesis 15:6.

Abram (Abraham) believed and God credited it to him as righteousness. If we look at Abraham’s life and when this happened, it occurred before the Law of Moses was even given (Moses wasn’t alive yet), before the covenant of circumcision, and before Abraham followed God’s command to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham had many impressive displays of living faith during his life, but before all of these, he was credited by God as righteous because of his faith alone!

Read Paul’s summation to his argument in Romans 5:1-2, 9

One way to illustrate this incredible truth is to take a dirty page and shove it inside a book. The book represents Christ, the dirty page, us. God does not see our sin, but sees the righteous life of Christ, that has been credited to us by our faith in Him. Because we are in Christ, God sees us as “righteous.” We are clothed, like the dirty page in the book, in Christ’s righteousness. But this leads to the obvious reflection that we are still, in practice, far from righteousness. To help us grasp this concept, we have two more theological terms to look at.

Sanctification: The process by which God aligns our actions to what He has already declared us: righteous. The definition of the word sanctify is to “set apart” or “to be made holy.” For an overview of the process of growth and sanctification, read Ephesians 4: 11-16.

What do you think would be some qualities of a mature Christian? _____

How does God cause growth? _____

How have you seen growth occurring in your life? _____

Glorification: The final step on the spiritual journey is seen in 1 Corinthians 15:50-55 and 1 John 3:2. These passages assure us that one day the process will be complete, and we will be made holy.

What area of your life are you most looking forward to seeing perfected? _____

Memorize: Romans 5:1

Read Romans 3-6 for more in depth review of justification by faith.