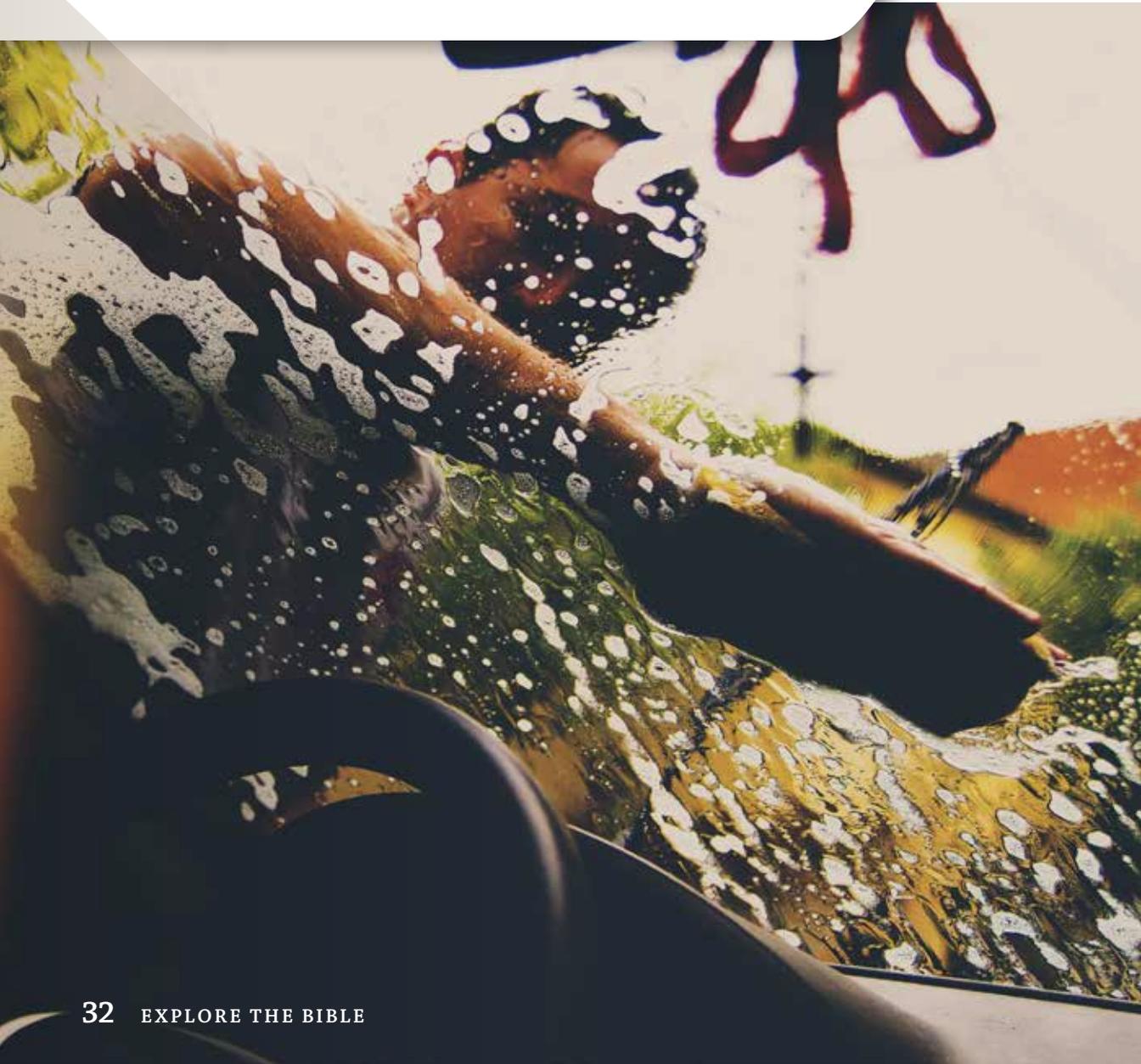


Session 4

Justified

All who accept the gospel by faith are justified before the Father.

Romans 3:21–4:3



Which would be a greater embarrassment: having your card denied at a restaurant or realizing you are a dollar short at a cash-only restaurant? Explain.

Most of us want to avoid the embarrassment that comes with having our debit card denied or realizing we are a dollar short and unable to pay for the meal we just ordered. When those things happen, it feels like the eyes of everyone are suddenly on us. Paul reminded the Roman believers they all fell short when it came to God's righteousness. He also explained that through faith in Jesus, we find God's grace and His willingness to cover our shortcomings.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Paul spent the first portion of his letter to the Romans explaining the dire spiritual situation of both Gentiles and Jews. The Gentiles ignored the truth of God by worshiping the creation instead of the Creator (Rom. 1:18-32). The Jews considered themselves superior to the Gentiles but were just as separated from God by their sin (2:17-29). No one—Jew or Gentile—could claim a righteous standing before God. It would seem the human race was trapped in a hopeless dilemma. We are all separated from God and incapable of restoring our relationship with Him on our own. Our actions could never be enough to pay for our offenses against Him.

Paul turned an important corner in Romans 3. While all have sinned and are separated from God, God has provided a way of salvation (3:21-31). The way is by acknowledging God's grace and coming to Him through faith in Christ. Instead of relying on our own efforts, we need to look toward the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

This means two things. First, humans have no reason to brag about our own spirituality. Jesus is our only hope. Second, God's offer is open to anyone who is willing to accept it by faith alone. If the Jews would look back at their history, this would be evident. Their patriarch Abraham was redeemed by faith long before Moses received the law on Mount Sinai (4:1-3).

David also recognized the importance of faith, as Paul emphasized with a quote from Psalms (Rom. 4:6-8). But Abraham understood what was truly needed. Instead of trusting in circumcision or some other legal restraint, faith remains the only option. His faith in God was what made him righteous, and it was what would make his descendants (and the Gentiles) righteous as well (4:13-24).

ROMANS 3:21–4:3

3:21 But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets. **22** The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction. **23** For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

24 They are **justified** **A** freely by his grace through the **redemption** **B** that is in Christ Jesus. **25** God presented him as an **atonement sacrifice** **C** in his blood, received through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God **passed over** **D** the sins previously committed. **26** God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be righteous and declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus.

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By one of works? No, on the contrary, by a law of faith. **28** For we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, **30** since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. **31** Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we **uphold the law** **E**. [...]

4:1 What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? **2** 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 credited to him for righteousness.

Passage Outline

Through Faith
(Rom. 3:21-24)

In Jesus
(Rom. 3:25-26)

For All People
(Rom. 3:27-31)

Including Abraham
(Rom 4:1-3)

Keywords

- A. We're declared righteous because of what Jesus has done on our behalf.
- B. See Luke 21:28; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7,14; 4:30; Col. 1:14; and Heb. 9:15.
- C. God's gracious act through Christ's sacrifice shows the fullness of His grace.
- D. In the Old Testament Passover event the death angel passed over the Israelites because they had applied lamb's blood on the doorposts of their homes. Now, Jesus is God's Passover Lamb who rescues anyone from certain judgment when they apply the blood of Jesus' sacrifice to their own lives.
- E. We love the Lord; therefore we choose not to live lawless lives.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

KEY DOCTRINE: Man – By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race (1 John 1:8-10).

People tend to be legalistic and compare themselves to others based on external standards and rules. But God has revealed His plan for salvation outside the law. Faith in Jesus does not require perfection; it only requires God's *grace*. While God's gift is free to us, it cost Him dearly. Because of Christ's sacrifice, we can have a relationship with God we don't deserve—and avoid His wrath that we do deserve. This is grace.

What word or phrase in verse 24 stands out the most? How does that word or phrase counter the reality of verse 23?

The Jews understood sacrifices. Even before the law, they slaughtered animals to make things right with God. Paul said that God was actually the One who offered the ultimate sacrifice. God initiated our salvation.

How might we explain Jesus' atoning sacrifice for our sins to a person who is not a believer? What illustrations or analogies could we use to explain unfamiliar words like sacrifice?

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary. – Look up the words "expiation" and "propitiation" in a Bible dictionary (either print or online). Read the following verses: Luke 18:13; Hebrews 2:17; 9:15; 1 John 2:2; 4:10. Read Exodus 25:17-22; 30:10. Compare the Old Testament description of sacrifice with the New Testament passages. Summarize the insights you gained about Jesus' sacrifice for our sins.

Salvation by faith underscores the breadth of God's offer. Under the law, it was easy to assume salvation was a "Jewish thing." But this salvation offered to all required a fresh understanding of the wideness of God's love and grace. God is not concerned whether an individual is a Jew or a Gentile. He doesn't see people as circumcised or uncircumcised. Instead, He is interested in our faith.

How does salvation being offered to all impact how believers should relate to other people? How might it impact how believers pray?

Paul affirmed that God justified Abraham by faith. To support that claim, he quoted Genesis 15:6. The apostle made it clear that Abraham chose to believe what God said, even when it didn't make sense to him. That decision to believe—to live by faith—is what saved Abraham.

How does the faith of Abraham compare to the faith required of believers today?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God gives salvation freely to anyone who places their faith in Jesus.
- God declares those who place faith in Jesus to be righteous.
- Since all are saved through faith in Jesus, boasting is excluded.
- Faith is the only path to God.

What sins do you tend to categorize as requiring God’s immediate judgment? Based on this passage, what adjustments do you need to make in your attitude toward people who commit the sins you identified?

What can you and the members of your Bible study do to intentionally show love to people who are different from you? When will you start?

Write about how you accepted God’s offer of salvation through faith. Take time to thank Him for providing you salvation. If you haven’t made that choice, what’s holding you back? Who can you talk to about it?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: We all need a Savior.

Read Romans 3:21-23, underlining verse 23.

Paul introduced this passage with *but now*, one of his favorite transitional phrases. He used it to prepare readers for a coming contrast. While both Jews and Gentiles had a sin problem, God had a solution for both. Those who disputed Paul on this needed to take a closer look at the Scriptures. Both the Law and the Prophets affirmed this truth, pointing to God's plan of salvation through faith alone.

The way to a right relationship with God is *through faith in Jesus Christ*. The Old Testament pointed to God's righteousness coming through faith. For Jews, this meant moving away from their spiritual scorecards. Meanwhile, Gentiles coming out of a pagan environment would have struggled with the idea of a personal, loving God. God saw *no distinction* between Jews and Gentiles. They all have the same need. They all receive the same benefit. They all receive it the same way. They are all sinners granted salvation through the work of Jesus alone. There is a universal need for a Savior because *all have sinned*. Paul made this same point earlier by quoting passages from the Psalms and Isaiah (Rom. 3:10-18). God's standard of righteousness is His own perfection. Humanity cannot live up to that standard. Every person misses the mark.

How is sin the great equalizer? How does sin cause you to “fall short”?

Day 2: Anyone who places their trust in Jesus receives salvation.

Read Romans 3:24, understanding how it is we receive salvation through Christ.

As Paul noted later in the passage, any attempt at earning salvation or taking credit for God's work is futile. Anything we might bring to the equation—other than childlike faith—comes up lacking. We need Him.

Just as there is no distinction in who sins, there is no distinction in who can be *justified*. Anyone who places his or her trust in Christ can be saved. Paul's wording may have reminded Roman readers of slaves being redeemed from captivity. Through the free gift of God's grace, we are rescued from slavery to sin and restored to a right standing with God.

What word or phrase in verse 24 stands out the most? How does that word or phrase give you hope in light of verse 23?

Day 3: Our salvation comes through Jesus' work alone.

Read Romans 3:25-26, highlighting the repetitions of the word *righteousness*.

Verses 25-26 emphasize God's work through Christ. Jesus was the *atonement sacrifice* that makes all other sacrifices obsolete. Making atonement means paying the penalty that restores a relationship.

God's motive for this incredible act was to *demonstrate his righteousness* and grace. Obviously, God owes us nothing. However, He loves us, and His gift of salvation proves that love.

God's timing is always perfect. He had chosen *the present time* to reveal Jesus to the world. In a sense, Christ's death was God's announcement that redemption was now available. But the cross wasn't just an announcement; it is also an invitation. God will *declare righteous* anyone who accepts Jesus' sacrifice in faith. His righteousness becomes our righteousness.

This salvation is not something added to what we were already doing. It is based on Jesus' finished work alone. Our good works mean nothing toward our salvation; His death means everything. Through accepting His free gift through faith, we are made right with God.

How would you explain Jesus' atoning sacrifice for our sins to a person who is not a believer? What illustrations or analogies could you use to explain unfamiliar words like sacrifice?

Day 4: Justification comes through faith in Jesus.

Read Romans 3:27-28, identifying how justification works.

Paul told the Romans that Jesus' death and resurrection leaves no room for *boasting*. The wording points toward Israel's pride as God's chosen people. Paul used a series of rhetorical questions to show how such spiritual pride is empty. It is inappropriate to brag about a gift that is given, not earned. Plus, this gift is available to everyone. The *law of faith*—total dependence on Jesus—stands in contrast to *works of the law*—dependence on ourselves. Thus, bragging on Jesus and His free gift should replace boasting in our feeble efforts.

Justified is a legal term that describes one who has been declared not guilty of a crime. Despite being accused of violating a standard, a judge's decision cleans the wrongdoer's record and frees him or her from the consequences of guilt. Spiritual justification works the same way. We stand accused before a perfect Judge. Because we put our faith in His Son, the Judge declares us not guilty. Our record is cleared, and we escape the sentence we deserve.

How does salvation being offered to all impact how you should relate to other people? How might it impact how you pray?

Day 5: Our debt is paid through our faith.

Read Romans 4:1-3, noting how Abraham was justified.

Paul's question was pretty simple: How was Abraham justified? The answer probably surprised many of Paul's Jewish readers. Most devout Jews would have assumed that Abraham earned God's favor by obeying God's laws. However, the historical timeline would not support their claim. Since Abraham lived hundreds of years before Moses, his obedience could not have been tied to observing the law.

Using business terminology, Paul described the spiritual transaction that took place in Abraham's heart. He deposited his trust in God's words, as demonstrated by his willingness to obey. God recorded that faith as a credit to his account. Abraham's debt was paid in full by his faith in God—just as ours is paid through our faith in Christ.

How does the faith of Abraham compare to the faith required of you today?

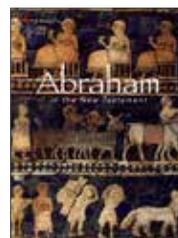
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Romans 3 and 4, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What does "justified" mean? How would you explain it to a 10-year-old?

As believers, how should we view the Old Testament law?

How can we respond to those who say there are many paths or ways to God?



For additional context, read "Abraham in the New Testament" in the Spring 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.