

## Romans 3:25-26 How can God welcome us into His family?

### Introduction

‘I’m not good enough to be a Christian’ –words to this effect I suspect many of us have heard from well-meaning people with whom we have been in conversation. They are sincerely spoken by a man or woman who knows their own heart and mind and has seen something of the depth of human sinfulness. Not that they have necessarily done anything at all that we might consider a crime or serious criminal or civil misdemeanour, rather that they have observed that even some of the good things we say and do can have a complex motivation. We might have encouraged someone or carried out an act of kindness in the hope they might assist us in something else. Not that we had mentioned it at the time, but hoped our own generosity might be reciprocated later. We might have done something that we really didn’t want to do –genuinely too busy or having more important priorities, but we were afraid that other people might look unfavourably upon us –so we carried out the task but not with any great enthusiasm. All of us have been there! Other people have said I would like to be a Christian, but I cannot keep it up. I know that it would affect the way I carry out my work or my social life or (substitute the appropriate thing!). I remember an Alpha course some years ago in another church. A Christian from that Church was attending with their best friend. The course had reached the final night and the friend had not only willingly attended all the sessions but done the homework as well and was deeply interested in the messages being taught. On that final night after most people had gone the two of them sat deep in conversation plus lots of tears. I found out later the cause of the heartache. This person was describing areas of their life to their friend (nothing they didn’t already know), but they knew that if they followed Jesus that changes would inevitably follow. In summary the cost was seen as too great. There was no dispute about the truthfulness of the messages heard and what ought to have been done –it was about making the changes and keeping up a very different way of life. This is not a new issue. Several thousand years ago in the book of Job, the main character asked this question: *How can a mortal (human being) be righteous before God (Job 9:2)?* Job in anyone’s book was a good employer and a successful businessman. He had been a good husband and father and had contributed well in voluntary service in the wider community of his day. Ezekiel, a prophet and pastor to the Jewish exiles in Babylon approximately 1,500 years later, made reference to him in a message about the sins of the people of Israel and why God had allowed them to be exiled. Ezekiel 14:12-14 states: *The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>13</sup> ‘Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its people and their animals, <sup>14</sup> even if these three men – Noah, Daniel and Job – were in it, **they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord.*** Without going into the details of Ezekiel’s message what is immediately obvious is that Job was perceived by Old Testament Jews as one of the holiest men of their faith. Yet such a person was acutely aware of his imperfections. This was the very issue that acutely concerned Augustinian monk Martin Luther as he lived an incredibly strict life as a monk and as he taught the Bible to theological students in the monastery where he lived in Germany. He had grasped very clearly that it was impossible to earn God’s favour but had tried by completing every form of law-keeping or penance he knew in the Roman Catholic Church, but it did not clear his conscience of his failure live up to God’s holy standards. However, God’s revelation came to him in 1515 while reading in Romans 1:17: *For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’.* What a joy that brought to his heart grasping the truth of justification by faith alone, through God’s grace alone. What is it, then that Paul is speaking about in Romans 3:26 when he states

that God asked Jesus to die in our place on the cross: *He 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.*

### **1. What does it mean if God calls me just or righteous?**

Justification is the free act of God in declaring righteous the sinner who believes in Jesus. This is a simple definition of this doctrine at the very heart of the Christian faith. In the New Testament there are a handful of passages that address the subject of **Redemption** (a ransom by the payment of a price) or **Propitiation** (where the anger of God against sin was executed in such a way that His holy justice could be genuinely satisfied and simultaneously the one who had committed the sin be forgiven), but 229 uses of forms of the Greek word for **Justification** (James Boice, *Romans*, Vol.1, p. 379-380). There is no doubt then that this idea is central in understanding the New Testament teaching about the death of Jesus and its significance for us. What are the most important things for us to grasp here?

(a) **Justification is an act not a process** Paul in Romans 5:1 states: *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...* The tense he uses (Greek aorist tense) describes an act at a moment in time in the past which has produced this result –in this case in the justification of a man or woman who has faith in Jesus. It was a definitive act, once for all time. If you are a Christian this morning then you can know with assurance that through the sacrifice of Jesus your standing before God was transformed at a moment in time in the past. Now it also means that because it is as a result of what Jesus did – not you or me- then we are all in exactly the same place before God –no-one is better than anyone else or worse than anyone else. The moment you genuinely by faith accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour, the benefits of His sacrifice on the cross are credited to your account. No longer a sinner separated from God, instead a child of God welcomed into His family with joy –it is an act of grace –there is nothing we can do as a result to make God love us more or less than He did in obtaining our salvation through Jesus on the cross. We could not earn it whether our sins are small in number and extent or vast in number and depth. No-one is good enough to earn it, but the person who comes simply by faith to receive what God wants to give us as a result of His grace has this incredible blessing. As Paul states in Romans 4:5: *However, to the man (or woman) who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his (or her) faith is credited as righteousness.*

(b) **Justification can never be removed** it is a legal term and status that is objective not subjective. Now it must not be confused with what the theologians call ‘sanctification’ –that is the process by which we co-operate with the Holy Spirit to help us live as a Christian day by day and hopefully become more like Him in our thought patterns and behavioural choices. Nor must it be confused with forgiveness from God for our sins, because that happens repeatedly as we confess our shortcomings to Him on a regular basis. Justification is about our status before God not our conduct in relation to Him. It is not the same either as pardon, whereby a prisoner could have their sentence commuted and their freedom be gained earlier than expected, but their transgression is still on the file. In Justification God erases from your record and mine any trace of our sins –such that He cannot recall them! Hallelujah – what a wonderful truth this is. At an unknown date in the first half of the twentieth century the story was told of a Englishman who owned a Rolls Royce who took his pride and joy for a motoring holiday in Continental Europe. Somewhere in France the vehicle broke down and a mechanic was sent out from England to repair it. Whatever the problem was it was resolved and the car was soon back on the road with no more problems on the trip. When the man got home he was concerned about the cost of the repair and wrote to the company asking how much he owed them. The letter he received in return was reported to have included these lines: ‘Dear Sir, There is no record anywhere in our files of your Rolls Royce breaking

down...’ (story told by Warren Wiersbie) –that is an illustration of justification. Are you in a right position before God today? You can be if you have taken this step of faith and received Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

## **2. How do I a sinner become favoured by a holy God?**

In other words how am I justified?

(a) **The source of our justification - by grace** Romans 3:24 that we *are justified freely by His grace...* There was nothing in us that merited such an action by God. It was a free choice of His to favour us in this extraordinary manner. This is the hardest thing to grasp but also the most wonderful. To understand what it means is to be liberated from a legalistic mindset of hoping against hope to do enough good works to be allowed into heaven; that our good deeds would outweigh the bad ones –but with no certainty when we left this life how the scales would balance. In standard human courts of law there is a primary requirement for justice. This is spelled out in Deuteronomy 25:1, for example: *When people have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty.* This is their responsibility and citizens of any given country have reasonable expectations that this will be the case. Civic society has to have a legal framework which is upheld in order to function. Notice that the judges are not making either good morally-upright people legally right or making a defendant who has committed a crime guilty. The judge has a duty to declare what is factually correct, after due process of law. The person is either innocent of the charge brought or convicted of their guilt. What is so extraordinary about what happened at the cross through the sacrifice of Jesus is what Paul declares in Romans 3:26, that God *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.* No wonder John Newton called it ‘Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found; was blind but now I see.’ Romans 3:10 has described a hopeless situation. *There is no-one righteous, not even one;* this is confirmed in Romans 3:20: *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.* This miraculous transformation of our status in justification –viewed just as if we had never sinned – comes about through God’s grace.

(b) **The ground of our justification –through what Jesus has done** (Romans 3:25) *God 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.* Justification is not an amnesty for wrongdoing; letting someone off because you could without good reason. US Presidents can pardon a convicted criminal without giving the reason to the general public. Some have been suspected of receiving pardons for giving donations to favoured parties or political causes, in the way that inclusion in the New Years Honours List in our own country is not always merited – sometimes political or other interests have ‘pulled strings’ to gain undeserved awards for certain individuals. Justification emphatically is not a pardon without principle or a forgiveness that forgets to address wrongdoing and bring it to justice. In justifying sinners God is not declaring that bad people are good, or denying that they were ever sinful, instead he is declaring them legally righteous, free from liability to the claims of His holy law, because in the person of Jesus –His Son our Saviour, He has born the penalty of their lawbreaking through *the shedding of His blood* (Romans 3:25a). It was concerning the issue of justification that led to the conversion of Charles Spurgeon, the greatest of the Victorian preachers. In his testimony he wrote: When I was under the hand of the Holy Spirit, under conviction of sin, I had a clear and sharp sense of the justice of God. Sin, whatever it might be to other people, became to me an intolerable burden. It was not so much that I feared hell, but that I feared sin. I knew myself to be so horribly guilty that I remember feeling that if God did not punish me for sin He ought to do so. I felt that the Judge of all

the earth ought to condemn such sin as mine... I had upon my mind a deep concern for the honour of God's name, and the integrity of His moral government. I felt that it would not satisfy my conscience if I could be forgiven unjustly. The sin I committed must be punished. But then there was the question how God could be just, and yet justify me who had been so guilty...I was worried and wearied with this question, neither could I see any answer to it. Certainly, I could never have invented an answer which would have satisfied my conscience. But there came a time when he grasped the solution to his dilemma. Jesus has born the death penalty on our behalf... Why did he suffer, if not to turn aside the penalty from us? If then, He turned it aside by His death, it is turned aside, and those whose who believe in Him need not fear it. It must be so, that since expiation is made, God is able to forgive without shaking the basis of His throne. [C.H. Spurgeon, *All of Grace* quoted by James Boice, *Romans*, Vol.1, pp 384-385] Paul is hinting in Romans 3:25 at Old Testament era sinners who appeared to get away without punishment for their sins. For example, David on the surface appeared to evade punishment for his sin with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband Uriah. Had God unjustly let these people off their sins? No! whatever question marks may be raised about events in the past, says Paul, the answer to this dilemma is that through the death of Jesus God's honour has been upheld; His name vindicated. Through the sacrifice of Jesus God the Father can be truly righteous and stand firmly to His principles yet at the same time reach out in amazing love to sinners like you and me.

(c) **The means of our justification is by His blood** (Romans 5:9) *But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.<sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!* (Romans 5:8-9). God could not simply save us through arbitrary means or random acts of forgiveness. His salvation was free to us at the point of reception, but it is obtained at infinite cost through the shedding of His precious blood. Some biblical scholars who did not want to acknowledge the biblical teaching about the cross wanted to water it down to a gospel of expiation –that is of God wiping the slate clean; so that no record remains of the wrong we have done. They could not and cannot answer how that might be possible. Just imagine the furore if a person was standing trial for the murder of a young child and the judge announced to the court that he had disposed of all the evidence so that there was no information available to link the defendant with the crime, and therefore, was releasing him as a free man. The public outrage would know no bounds and there would be a serious question mark over whether that judge could preside over a similar criminal court case in future. There can be no justice in the simple removal of evidence without dealing with the wrong that has been committed. God had to take the initiative and go to extraordinary lengths to save us because there was simply no possibility of a 'Plan b'. Therefore, Romans 4:25 reminds us concerning Jesus that: *He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.* The devil might say through your conscience –'You don't deserve this great salvation; how arrogant it is to claim that your sins have been forgiven –who do you think you are to state that God finds you acceptable to have fellowship with Him? The response is simple the blood of Jesus –of infinite worth cleanses / purifies me from all my sins, past present and future. John explains this truth in I John1:7-9: *But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.<sup>8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* Have you experienced the forgiveness of your sins? This gift is yours the moment you reach out by faith to receive it.

(d) **The reception of our justification is by faith** (Romans 3:26) *He 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.* The exercise of faith is the means whereby we receive our justification –that is viewed by God as if we had never sinned. Now the fact that you and I have exercised faith in God and some other people havn't yet taken this stand does not make us in any way better than them. Why? because even the faith by which we place our trust in Him is God's gift to us as His children. Ephesians 2:8-9 spells that out so clearly: *For it is by grace you have been saved,*

*through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God –<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.* Our good works are but a response to His amazing love not the means by which we obtain His favour and the welcome into His family. Have you put your faith in God through Jesus? When did you consciously stop and recognise your need of Jesus and confess your sins, believing that He died in your place on the cross and receive from Him the precious gift of salvation? If you have never taken this step then please do it today. There is no more important choice you can ever make in your entire life on earth! Now some people think that justification by faith is something new in the Christian era. It is not! God has not changed the means whereby we are accepted by Him. Paul in Romans 4 will focus on the salvation of Abraham as an illustration of it. However, here it is important to note Genesis 15:6. This incredible statement about the patriarch 4,000 years ago said this: *Abraham believed the Lord and He credited it to Him as righteousness.* The Gospel of Jesus in its essence is simple enough for a child to believe and receive but yet profound enough for an adult to spend a lifetime marvelling at the wonder of it all.

(e) **The purpose of our justification is to give us life** (Romans 5:18) *Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. <sup>19</sup>For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.* Justification is not simply a process that affects only the Father and the Son as they planned a way by which the Church of Jesus Christ, His redeemed people from every ethnic people and language group can be saved. It has a much greater purpose to bring to us a quality of life in all its fullness that goes beyond our expectations. Jesus, in His teaching on the Good Shepherd and His flock, contrasted His message with that of those who proclaimed another way of salvation. In John 10:7-10 He said: *Therefore Jesus said again, 'Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* It is far from an abstract idea –on the contrary to grasp this truth brought about the Protestant Reformation, a recovery of biblical truth supremely but not exclusively concerning our salvation. It led to a fresh appreciation of the priesthood of all believers that we can approach God directly and not require the services of an earthly priest to speak to God on our behalf; it led also to a recognition of our calling to the wide range of occupations through which people earn their living; that a person could be an office-worker, a banker, a teacher, a doctor, a [fill in the blank!] ...to the glory of God, that grants a dignity to each occupation when it is carried out for the good of other people and to the glory of God as we use the gifts entrusted to us. Have you ever stopped to think how as a Christian your understanding of your work is enriched by the insight that God intends you to bring glory to Him by the way in which you complete the tasks necessary in your workplace. To be a person of honour and respect for others; to have principles of integrity and fairness; truthfulness in speech and a consistency of character in line with His guidelines for living. It also led to a grasp of democratic principles for national governments. The magnificent monument of the Reformation, erected in Geneva in 1529, gives the evidence for this assertion in a display of the evidence with statutes of key figures in different countries. Although not acknowledged there, this liberation of ordinary people through a rediscovery of the Gospel, led to the birth of the modern scientific revolution of recent centuries. This is no accident as a number of outstanding scientists such as Isaac Newton began –in his words – ‘to think God’s thoughts after Him’. When Jesus said in John 10:10, *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full* it was not pious rhetoric; it was a statement about what the liberating message of the Gospel can accomplish when applied to each area of our lives; Praise God for this wonderful biblical truth of justification –may we receive it by faith but also be able to work out in daily life its implications for us personally and collectively, for Jesus’ sake, Amen.

