

SOUND DOCTRINE FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS – Studies in Romans

Justification by Grace through Faith in Christ (Romans 3:21-26)

Having made this important transition in Romans 3:9-20, the apostle Paul now reveals the quintessential doctrine of New Testament theology: justification by grace through faith in Christ. Romans 3:21-26 introduces us to this all-important doctrine, supplemented, illustrated and amplified by several others, concluding with Romans 5:21. Nevertheless, there is no simpler, clearer and better expression of justification by faith than what we read in Romans 3:21-26 –

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe, for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

The profound significance of what Paul affirms in these verses above cannot be overlooked or underestimated. It creates the critical connection between God’s righteousness and His gracious offer of salvation as a gift, which cannot be earned by works, but can only be received by faith. The equally necessary truth which is foundational to justification by grace through faith in Christ, expressed with beautiful simplicity by Paul at the end of v26 is this – If God is to justify the sinner by faith, it must be done in a manner that validates, and doesn’t violate His justice. It must occur in harmony with His perfectly righteous character.

Paul mentions the righteousness of God four times in these six verses. He wants every Jew and Gentile alike, every converted and yet to be saved individual to know, that even though our salvation is a free gift, it was purchased at a very high cost, in order to ensure that God would remain perfectly just, in justifying sinners by faith. Faith in who? Faith in Jesus Christ and His redemptive work which He accomplished for us all, by means of His death, burial and resurrection on our behalf. The concept of redemption, mentioned in v24, speaks of a ransom by the payment of a price. This was our Savior’s primary purpose in taking upon Himself a sinless humanity, as He states so powerfully in Mark 10:45. Paul also describes the process in Colossians 2:14 –

“. . . having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

The debt we owe to God consists of the sins we have committed against Him. Without a payment of that debt, the corresponding penalty incurred by each of us involves an eternal punishment in hell, separated from the presence of God forever (Revelation 20:11-15). When Jesus died on our behalf, God nailed our certificate of debt to His Cross. It has been paid in full (John 19:30). This redemption is no mere abstraction, written on paper, housed in some envelope. In accomplishing our redemption, Jesus became our Redeemer. When we place our trust in Him, and Him alone, God justifies us, in perfect harmony with His justice.