

Justification  
(Romans 3:9-10, 19-20)

In our day it is evident that though many still affirm justification in its essential matter, they do not consider its importance to be as great as Scripture declares it to be. Justification is important not merely because the church stands or falls on it. It is important because on it we stand or fall.

The doctrine of justification has to do with our status before the justice of God. The word justification is a legal term related to the idea of acquittal. And by definition, justification refers to the divine act whereby God makes humans, who are sinful and therefore worthy of condemnation, acceptable before a God who is holy and righteous.

And this is exactly what Paul has in mind as he pens Romans 3:9-10, 19-20.

Herein is our dilemma. There will be a judgment. It will be a righteous judgment. And as fallen people, we are not righteous. To make matters worse, Paul leaves us with this ominous warning that “no flesh [will] be justified in [God’s] sight” (v. 20). Fortunately for us this is not the whole sentence.

It is not an absolute denial of justification. If there will be no justification in His sight, then we might as well close our Bible’s and go home. If there is no justification, then there is no gospel – no good news, it is all bad news for fallen humanity.

But this is not the entire statement. Paul does not say there will be no justification. What he does say, however, is that no flesh will be justified in God’s sight “by the deeds of the law” (v. 20).

Now we come to the heart of Paul’s concern. Paul does not exclude justification altogether. He does however, exclude it by virtue of our doing deeds of the law to gain God’s favor. What Paul does here with one stroke of the pen is eliminate as an option justification on the ground of our works!

The law of God requires perfection. It is a requirement sinners do not and cannot meet. However, Paul does not leave us in a fallen state without hope, or without help. Paul will now declare a way of justification different from justification by the deeds of the law. A justification that not only supersedes all the foolish little delusions behind which men hide, but a justification that even supersedes the law.

And he begin to unfold this lofty position of justification with the little conjunction “but.”

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God: Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:21-26).

Faith, and faith alone, in the atonement of Christ redeems us, places us in Christ, gives us the gift of righteousness, thus enabling God to truthfully declare us justified – declare us righteous, because we are in Him.

Jerry W. Arnold  
All Rights Reserved