

The Gift: Justified by Grace

With Bishop Ronald K. Powell

Introduction:

Beloved friends, have you ever felt the weight of not being enough?

The nagging sense that despite your best efforts, you fall short?

Perhaps it's the echo of past mistakes, the struggle with present temptations, or the fear of a future you can't control. We all, in our deepest selves, long for acceptance, for peace, for a clean slate. We crave to be truly "right" – right with ourselves, right with others, and most profoundly, right with God.

Today, we delve into one of the most liberating and astonishing truths of our faith: the doctrine of Justification. It's a word that can sound academic, theological, perhaps even a bit intimidating.

But I promise you, when we uncover its meaning, it will not just touch your mind; it will melt your heart and set your spirit free. Justification is not merely a theological concept; it is the very heartbeat of God's love for you.

The Problem: Our Unjust State

Let's be honest. If we are to understand the beauty of justification, we must first acknowledge the reality of our condition. The Bible is unflinching in its assessment.

Romans 3:23 (NIV): “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

This isn't an accusation; it's a diagnosis. It's not about being “bad” people versus “good” people. It's about a universal human reality: a separation from God's perfect standard, a leaning towards self, a brokenness that permeates every aspect of our being.

We try to earn our way, to be good enough, to balance the scales. We strive to be worthy, but the truth is, we can't. Our own efforts, no matter how sincere, will always fall short of God's absolute holiness.

This truth can be heavy. It can lead to despair, to a sense of hopelessness. If our righteousness is like “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6), then what hope is there for us? Is there a path to being truly right with God?

The Solution: God's Radical Act of Grace

Here is where the glory of the Gospel bursts forth! God, in His infinite love and mercy, did not leave us in our condemned state. He made a way where there was no way. This is where Justification steps onto the stage.

What is justification? In simple terms, it is God declaring us “not guilty,” but more than that, He declares us “righteous” in His sight. It's a legal term, but it has profound implications for our souls. It's not based on what we've done, but on what Christ has done.

Romans 5:8 (NIV): “But God demonstrates **his own love for us** in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Notice the timing: “while we were still sinners.” Not after we cleaned up our act, not after we became perfect, but in our messy, sinful state, Christ offered Himself. This is the heart-reaching overture of God! He doesn’t wait for us to earn His love; He lavishes it upon us.

How Are We Justified? **By Grace Through Faith!**

This is crucial. We are not justified by works, but by grace through faith.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV): “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

This is the incredible exchange!

Grace: God’s undeserved favor. It’s a gift freely given, not something we can earn or merit. Imagine receiving a full pardon for a crime you committed, not because you deserved it, but because of the King’s benevolent heart. That’s grace!

Faith: Our trusting response to God’s grace. It’s not just intellectual assent; it’s a confident reliance on Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross. It’s reaching out an empty hand to receive the overflowing gift God offers. It’s believing that Jesus paid the price for our sins, and His righteousness is now credited to us.

Romans 5:1 (NIV): “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is the breathtaking outcome! Peace with God! The barrier is broken. The hostility is removed.

We are no longer His enemies but His beloved children. This peace is not the absence of trouble in our lives, but the presence of an unshakable assurance that we are right with Him.

The Benefits and Implications of Justification:

Justification isn't just a theological transaction; it transforms everything!

Peace with God (Romans 5:1): As we just heard, the war is over! No more striving, no more guilt, no more fear of judgment. We can approach God's throne with confidence, knowing we are accepted in the Beloved.

Access to Grace (Romans 5:2): "through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." We now have direct, unhindered access to God's presence, to His strength, to His unending love. This isn't a one-time event; it's a continuous standing in His favor.

Future Hope (Romans 5:2): "And we boast in the hope of the glory of God." Justification assures us of our eternal destiny. We are not just declared righteous for today; we are heirs of eternal life, destined for glory with God. This hope is an anchor for our souls in the storms of life.

No Condemnation (Romans 8:1): "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The accuser has no charge against us! Our past, present, and future sins are covered by the blood of Christ. This is freedom!

New Identity (2 Corinthians 5:17): “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” We are no longer defined by our failures but by Christ’s righteousness. We are children of God, forgiven, redeemed, and beloved. This isn’t just a legal status; it’s a radical transformation of who we are.

Heart-Reaching Overture:

My friends, perhaps you’ve been carrying the burden of guilt for too long. Maybe you’ve tried to earn God’s favor through your own efforts, only to find yourself exhausted and disheartened. Today, I invite you to lay down that burden.

Hear this with your heart: *God doesn’t ask you to clean yourself up* before you come to Him. He asks you to come as you are, with all your mess and brokenness, and receive the magnificent gift of His Son.

He longs to declare you righteous, not because you deserve it, but because He loves you with an everlasting love.

Imagine standing before the Creator of the universe, and instead of judgment, you hear Him declare: ***“Not guilty! Righteous! Beloved!”*** That is the sound of justification ringing in the ears of a redeemed soul.

Call to Action:

For those who have never embraced this astonishing gift, I urge you today:

Acknowledge your need for a Savior.

Believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again.

Confess Him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in His finished work on the cross for your justification.

For those of us who have already received this gift:

Live in the freedom of your justification!

Walk confidently, not in your own strength, but in His righteousness.

Extend grace to others, just as God has extended it to you. Remember, we were justified while we were still sinners.

Share this glorious truth with a world that desperately needs to hear it.

Conclusion:

Justification by grace through faith is not just a theological cornerstone; it is the wellspring of our hope, the foundation of our peace, and the source of our deepest joy.

It is God's magnificent declaration over your life: "You are mine, you are righteous, and you are loved."

May we leave this place today with hearts overflowing with gratitude for this astonishing gift, living lives that reflect the boundless grace that has made us right with God. Amen.