

Gamma

Romans 3:21-31

Study 6 How justification works

Case 1

Lionel Chan was discussing with friends from another faith. They talked about various issues and there was common ground on topics like sin , how it was a transgression of God's law and there was a penalty of sin as well as it's power over people. When the topic changed to salvation it got heated and his friends insisted that to be saved from the penalty of sin one must counteract it with good works. These act as a counter balance to the sin in one's life. That is why God will be the one who will judge in the end of time. They insist almost all other religions believe in some kind of balance system.

- 1. How can Lionel explain that the system of good works counter balancing sin cannot simply work?**

Sin is not something that has weight that can be counter balanced by good works. God is a totally holy God and cannot be in the presence of even the slightest hint of sin as it is an affront to his dignity and character and being made in the image of God we need to reflect His character as that is our purpose and destiny. In the garden of Eden Adam and Eve were told that the moment they took the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they would die and their death began with a spiritual death which was a separation from God the source of all life. It would ultimately culminate in physical death the outward manifestation of the inward separation. The penalty of sin causing death is in a single act of sin. Good works cannot erase the penalty of sin simply because good works and behavior reflective of God's character is simply what we are all supposed to exhibit in the first place. Made in the image of God , that is what we were supposed to act like. It is the penalty and power of sin that continually grips us that needs to be answered and just counter balancing that with what we were supposed to do cannot possibly gain any merit towards erasing the poison of our sin. Imagine having been pulled over by the police for a traffic infringement and instead of offering to pay the fine we boast of our spotless driving record for the past 20 years. No police or judge will accept that

On top of that sin also has a debilitating power enslaving us to continue to sin and defy God. It numbs us to what God wants us to do and deep inside we do not

really want to please God or glorify Him. There is no way we ever leave the way of sin and really do good works.

Finally ,good works are those done for God and God alone for His glory and Paul says there is none that do good works and none that really seek for Him. They seek to save their own skins to get into heaven but make no mistake they don't seek to really love Him. They are too focused on themselves.

*All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
we all shrivel up like a leaf,
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*
(Isaiah 64:6 NIV)

That's what God thinks of our "good works"

**2. If good works cannot do the trick his friends reply " then how does the Christian God answer the problem of sin and grant salvation?
Answer the question using Romans 3**

The debt of sin has to be paid by death and separation from God. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God in verse 22. What we need to escape the death is a brand new start. A reset button in a computer game as it were. Because we are made in the image of God for us to be alive and live in fellowship with God we have to like Him and in the right standing with Him. This standing is called "righteousness".

God cannot simply just forgive us as there needs to be a basis for his forgiveness just like a human judge for the traffic offence cannot simply waive the penalty aside because the penalty is the reflection of the seriousness of the law which was broken. To simply waive the penalty is to diminish the holiness of the law. The law was set up by God and the law reflects His character and God will not do anything to undermine His own character.

The days of living in complete compliance with the Law went out the window from the moment we sinned our record is finished we can never go back to a perfect record which is what is required.

The good news is that Paul says in verse 21 that there is a way we can get back our original right standing with God and this way does not involve our personal compliance with the law.

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law,
although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—*
(Romans 3:21 ESV)

That's what he means by the "*righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law*" It does not involve our direct compliance with it after all we have already broken it hence there must be another way.

This way is through

"the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe"

(Romans 3:22 ESV)

We get a reset button a new record of perfect compliance so that we are in perfect standing with God. This is what the “*righteousness of God*” means a perfect record as if we had never ever sinned.

How is that possible then?

By trusting and believing in Jesus Christ!!! Says Paul

- 3. “Its unbelievable” says Lionel’s friends , How can God just do that by snapping his fingers and overturning his own law doesn’t that undermine his own standing dignity? What kind of God would that be? How would Lionel answer that? How does God save?**

He does not just snap his fingers and undermine the majesty of his own law ...and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith

(Romans 3:24-25 ESV)

God put forward Jesus as a “propitiation” by His blood. The context is the wrath of God is triggered by our sin as it is an assault of the dignity of His character. It is this wrath that will result in our eternal punishment long after our well deserved death. Jesus’ death on the cross is payment for the penalty of our sins. The word propitiation means an “appeasement”. We are in no position to pay for our own sins or appease Him even our best deeds are like filthy rags in Isaiah 64:6 . We are still under a death sentence. Jesus lived a perfect life as a man and died on the cross bearing upon himself all the wrath and punishment that our sins have unleashed. The work of reversing the effects of our sin is totally and completely done by Jesus.

We have a perfect record ... because Paul says we are “justified” which means made righteous which is more than acquitted or forgiven or pardoned. We have a perfect record the record of Jesus. This is given as a gift we don’t earn it. We get his record, He lived a perfect life and when we put our trust in Him we receive His perfect record

- 4. Lionel’s friends exclaim “ that’s where we have some common ground the key word is “faith”. We come from different backgrounds and religions but if we just have faith in our respective religions and not live for our own pleasure in the world if we just have faith religious faith which means sincere obedience to each of our own religions, God will honor that after all Paul says it is to be “received by faith” How will Lionel answer that?**

Not it is not just the quality of faith it is the object of faith that is important. Great faith in a creaky broken down bridge has no practical merit because it would have been misplaced faith. Faith in and of itself is never a virtue it is a way in which we reach out and grab the thing that really saves us.

Look at verse 22 through faith in Jesus Christ

It is faith in Jesus Christ not Buddha or the kitchen god

Look at verse 24-25 „through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith

The redemption is in Christ Jesus it is not in general if is found only in Jesus God put forward Jesus Christ as propitiation..as payment or appeasement and it is this Jesus and His work as payment or appeasement that is to be believed in We have faith in the person of Jesus and his work for us

- 5. Lionel went back to share with his church friends at the 2nd Baptist church and felt very good about the way he handled his friends. However he did share that there were bad days when he sinned and messed up his witness and struggled with confession and did not feel confident in his salvation. He felt a struggle to keep up an acceptable level of faith to please God to be saved. What is wrong with Lionel how has he confused faith?**

One of the most common errors of thinking is to think of faith as a kind of “work,” a calling up of some psychological state of feeling of devotion toward God. (Some people think of faith as a kind of intense attitude of surrender or a state of certainty and confidence.) But Paul shows us here that we receive this righteousness “freely” (v.24). The word “freely” means “without a cause — wholly and totally unwarranted.” It is not grudgingly dispensed based on the intensity of our feelings. Therefore we must not fall prey to the subtle mistake of thinking that our faith or the intensity of it actually saves us. Some say, “In the Old Testament, the works of the Law saved people, but now God has changed the requirements. Now all you have to do is put your heart in a state of faith, and that is all God wants.” But no, in both the OT and now, it is the work of Christ that merits our salvation, and faith is merely the way I receive it.

Lionel has fallen into the trap that he has come to think that his belief is the cause of his salvation, it will got him to look at the quality of his faith, and when he saw doubts will rattled him. What has happened? He has turned his faith into a “work!” Faith is only the instrument by which you receive your salvation, not the *cause* of your salvation. If you don’t see this, you will have something to boast of — you can say, “The reason I am saved is because I produced a heart of faith,” but 3:31 says there is no basis for boasting.

6. Take a look at this quote from Martin Lloyd Jones “We can put it this way: the man who has faith is the man who is no longer looking at himself, and no longer looking to himself. He no longer looks at anything he once was. He does not look at what he is now. He does not [even] look at what he hopes to be as the result of his own efforts. He looks entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work, and he rests on that alone. He has ceased to say, ‘Ah yes, I have committed terrible sins but I have done this and that...’ He stops saying that. If he goes on saying that, he has not got faith... Faith speaks in an entirely different manner and makes a man say, ‘Yes, I have sinned grievously, I have lived a life of sin... yet I know that I am a child of God because I am not resting on any righteousness of my own; my righteousness is in Jesus Christ, and God has put that to my account.’
Can you share in your group whether this has been your experience

Case 2

Kimoki is a Japanese Christian and was having lunch with her friends who were Christians from Korea attending the largest church in the world there. She noticed a few things about her friends that troubled her over lunch.

They were very proud of their church which they kept emphasizing was the largest in the world. They were founding members of the church and served as deacons in it, which was a rare privilege. They were highly critical of others and just loved to pick faults in the moral behavior of others. They loved to criticize pastors outside their church. They were not too impressed with Kimoki’s church. When Kimoki pointed out certain dubious teachings that had come out of their church they were very defensive and began to be very critical of Kimoki .

Take a look at Romans 3:27-30 and the behavior of these particular Korean Christians do you think they have really understood the gospel?

A great way to understand what Paul means about boasting here is to look at how the gospel changed him personally in this regard. Go to Phillipians 3:4-11. There he mentions all the things he used to *boast* in: "Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless." That includes family pedigree, racial background, professional/educational attainments and religiosity/morality. Then he says, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (Phil. 3:7-8)

"Boasting" to Paul evidently means something more profound than mere bragging. It is a profound psychological-spiritual concept. What you boast in is what fundamentally defines you, *what gives us our confidence as we move out into the world*. Paul shows that we can get our confidence out of racial pride, educational pride, religious/moral pride. But the gospel changes this completely so we only "boast" in the Lord's grace toward us.

The problems that "boasting" (in anything but the Lord) brings us:

1. Human divisions. Pride in race, social status, or achievement *necessarily* leads to prejudice and condescension and hostility. To get our confidence we must see ourselves as better than other classes of people.

2. Denial. If our confidence comes from our race/people, we will have to blind ourselves to the evils and flaws of our people. It leads to racism, classism, etc. If our confidence comes from our moral attainments, we will have to blind ourselves to our sins, our selfishness. It makes us tremendously touchy when someone criticizes our religion or moral character, because our moral purity is our only strength. If we lose it, we lose everything. If our confidence comes from someone's love (a parent's, a child's, a spouse's, a romantic partner's), we will have to blind ourselves to the beloved's sins, or we will have to blind ourselves to any unhealth in the relationship, or we will not be able to give "tough love" when needed.

3. Anxiety. When anything we boast in is threatened, our fundamental security is threatened. We are vulnerable to great terror.

1. How does the gospel help Kimoki to create a new mindset in life and handle criticisms in life

The gospel creates a whole new mindset. The marks of it:

1. Your mind is deeply satisfied with the doctrine of justification. You say, "I see it, It's staggering! He accepts me with all my flaws because Jesus paid it!"

What a wonder!" You never get tired of thinking about it — you can't get enough of it!

2. A new freedom from denial. The gospel gives you a grounding so criticism and "bad news" and negative evaluations can now be handled. "Bad news" no longer threatens your confidence. Now, the more you see your faults, your failures, the more amazing and precious does God's love appear, and the more loved by him you feel. This is a critical test! If fundamentally you reject the whole idea of the cross and Jesus as substitute, if you really think that it is your performance upon which your worthiness and acceptability hangs, then when your sin is revealed, instead of it making you feel closer to him, it drives you away

3. A new freedom from anxiety. Slowly you become a more courageous person — not afraid of death or the future or other people. You come to know that God is FOR you. "He is for me so I can face death, I know the future is in his hands, he wouldn't go to all this trouble and not give me what I really need."

2. Share with us how the gospel has helped you in this area of your life?

3. One of the biggest problems in church is with members criticizing each other in terms of moral behavior, why do you think it is so? What does it indicate? How should the gospel change this in a person? Have you too on occasion been like that, please share?

Criticism is a type of comparison and most folk come from a works back ground where merit is accorded to their works and moral behavior as a way to earn salvation or earn merit. Tearing others down is a way of affirming one's self and boosting one's self esteem. In Paul's terms it is boasting. Placing weight on things other than Christ's work

It is a sign that the understanding of the gospel has not really taken root in their lives. A true understanding will remove the need to boast or compare because in God's eyes are all evil and have nothing of merit to boast or compare
The gospel will bring humility where all our assets and achievement count for nothing and we rest only on what He has done.

4. How does Phil 3:12-14 help us to move away from an attitude of works righteousness and towards a gospel framework of life?

The key answer is to strive ahead , forgetting what is behind past achievements or pedigree or moral superiority. Striving ahead focusing on the upward call of our Lord Jesus which means paying attention to our own spiritual growth and not comparing to others. To do this we immerse ourselves in the Word which contains God's call to us and this will place us on the path to living gloriously for Him.

Case 3

How does having a gospel mindset alter your attitudes towards issues like for example the bringing in of 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers in to the country?