



PREPARATION

Spend the week studying Romans 3:21-26. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

DETERMINE | which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group

PRAY | for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members and their openness to God's Word.

LANDING POINT | Goodbye guilt and shame. God declares us 'not guilty,' because Jesus justifies us before God.

• Remember the 4 Rules for Small Group Discussion

1. **Confidentiality.** What's said in the group stays in the group.
2. **No cross-talk.** Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.
3. **No fixing.** We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.
4. **Sharing.** Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Last week your group discussed propitiation and how Jesus' atoning sacrifice at the cross turned God's wrath away from us. Jesus shows us divine love in action. As Christians, the cross is a symbol of hope, because it shows how God addressed the problem of sin we couldn't solve.

This week your group will discuss the second theological aspect of the cross—justification. The cross shows us God's grace and how Jesus makes sinners righteous before a holy God. Jesus' death means we no longer stand condemned for our sin; He received our punishment and gives us new life in return.

How did you enjoy the first week of the series? Has it changed the way you view theological terms like 'propitiation'? Why or why not?

What does it mean to be 'justified'? Give examples.



LEARN

Select 2-3 question from this section to answer.

○ Justification defined

Last week you discussed sin and how it is living against God's design for you, which is to worship and serve God in a love relationship with Him. Sin is rebellion against God and deserves punishment. The Bible says that punishment is death, which is eternal separation from God in hell.

Our own merits (or righteousness) cannot justify us before God. We simply cannot offer enough good deeds to cover the offense of our sin. Our only hope is for someone else to stand in our place and take the punishment we deserve.

At the cross, Jesus stood in our place and received our punishment. Because of this, He justifies us before God. The term 'justification' is judicial. To explain this term, think of a courtroom scene where God is the Judge and you are the defendant. God declares you 'guilty' because of your sin. Now, imagine Jesus coming in before the death sentence is carried out and says, "I will take his (or her) punishment." Then God accepts Jesus' request and releases you, declaring you 'not guilty.' That's justification.

Why can our merits not justify us before God?

Read Romans 3:21-26 together. Afterwards, split the group into pairs and take turns explaining what Paul said in your own words. Regroup and discuss the exercise.

LIVE

The cross wasn't Plan B for God. Before time began, God determined that Jesus would be the way of salvation for sinners. The Bible tells us that, for generations, God promised that a Savior would come to deal with the problem of sin.

God wants to be reconciled with sinners. God wants us to live our design: to worship and serve Him in a love relationship. Jesus makes that relationship possible. His justification gives us a new identity. It also gives us a new story.

Select 3-5 questions from this section to answer.

○ Jesus gives you a new identity

Because you're justified, you're no longer defined by your sin. In Jesus, you are righteous. In Jesus, you are a saint. The New Testament regularly refers to believers as 'saints.' This wasn't just a term of endearment. It was a reality. Believers are saints, which means they are holy and have entered a new relationship with God.



☒ LIVE [Cont'd]

In Jesus, you are a child of God. Jesus justified you, so that God would adopt you into His family. In Jesus, you are an heir. As a child of God, you are entitled to an inheritance far beyond your imagination.

How would your life be different if you chose not to be defined by your sin?

Consider your adoption into God's family because of your justification. How does that change your relationship with Him?

○ You don't have to be shackled by guilt and shame

Jesus' justification frees you from the guilt and shame of your past. Jesus exchanged His obedience for your disobedience. When God sees you, He doesn't see your sin. He sees the perfect righteousness of His Son. Some may contend, "How can God forgive someone like me?" The cross shows that God can and does forgive us.

The enemy will remind you of past sin and try to lead you down the path to guilt and shame. But Jesus gives you another path that leads to love and acceptance. In Jesus, God wipes your slate clean. No longer do you have to live under the oppressive power of guilt and shame. You can choose to live as a child of your Heavenly Father.

Who do you know needs to hear the truth of God's justification? How can you share this truth with them?

What are practical things you can do the next time the enemy tries to guilt and shame you because of past sin?

○ Justification begins a new story

Your life is a story. You have a beginning, middle and end. Before you received God's forgiveness in Jesus, your story was marked by sin and condemnation. But God came in at the middle of your story to give you a new one. In Jesus, you begin a new story as a justified child of God. Justification means your story won't end with eternal separation from God, but eternal enjoyment of the relationship with Him you were made for.

Your life story is a fascinating testimony of God's goodness and faithfulness. How do you respond to that statement?

How does knowing the end of your story change the way you live today?



⟳ LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

◦ Living out your justification in the everyday

Again, we must consider how theological truth makes its way into our daily lives. It isn't enough to understand that Jesus justifies sinners. Justification needs to make its way into our thoughts, actions and relationships.

There are three truths to our justification that can be lived out. First, God's justification in Jesus matters most. This frees you from the need to always be justified before others. Second, your justification means you don't have to perform to earn God's love and acceptance. Jesus has already secured that for you at the cross. Third, God's justification in Jesus shows you that the way of the Christian is the way of sacrifice. If God sacrificed so much for, would you not return the favor and sacrifice much for Him?

Why does justification need to make its way into your thoughts, actions and relationships?

Consider the three truths of our justification. Which one stands out to you most? Why?

♥ PRAY

First, give praise to God for His holiness and justice; praise Him that He doesn't sweep sin under the rug. Thank Him for His Son, who took your punishment for sin and justifies you in the sight of a righteous God. Pray and listen for ways to live out your justification.

💬 FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

Memorize Romans 3:23-24 and reflect on how your justification is a gift from God.

Was there a time this week when you felt the need to be justified and decided to respond differently? If so, what did you learn from your experience?



COMMENTARY

○ Romans: Paul's explanation on justification.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul gives his readers the most comprehensive exposition on justification in the Bible. In his letter, Paul explains how the death and resurrection of Jesus can justify sinners and make them righteous before God. John H. P. Reumann draws on five images from Romans to explain justification:

1. Substitution – humanity is guilty before God and deserving of condemnation and eternal punishment; Jesus was sinless and paid the penalty for sinful humanity.

2. Redemption – humanity is a slave to sin, but Jesus' blood paid for our redemption out of slavery.

3. Reconciliation – humanity's unfaithfulness has fractured our relationship with God; as our mediator, Jesus offers His life to reconcile us to God.

4. Atonement – sin must be atoned for; Jesus' death on the cross is the once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin that meets God's righteous demands.

5. Participation – humanity lives under the tyranny of sin and death until they are risen to new life by their union with Christ, participating in His death and, in time, His resurrection (which is symbolized in baptism). [1]

○ Justified by faith alone?

Many have been confused by statements by Paul and James in the Bible concerning justification. In Romans 3:28, Paul says, "one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." However, in James 2:24, James says, "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone." To understand this paradox, it's important to understand Paul and James' perspective on justification. Paul was referring to justification "by faith apart from works" as trusting in Christ alone as the means of being justified before God. James was referring to justification as always being evidenced by good works. That is, if you are justified, it will be shown in how you live. In the words of Martin Luther: "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."

○ Justification and adoption.

To be declared 'righteous' before a holy God is an astounding thought. But to be adopted into God's family as His child is even more astounding. J.I. Packer distinguishes justification and adoption this way: "Justification is a forensic idea, conceived in terms of law, and viewing God as judge...Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as father." [2] Seeing God as Judge and Father are essential to His character. Nevertheless, it's important to understand that we cannot be adopted until we are, first, justified.

1. John H. P. Reumann, "Justification," ed. Mark Allan Powell, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 507.
2. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 20th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 188.