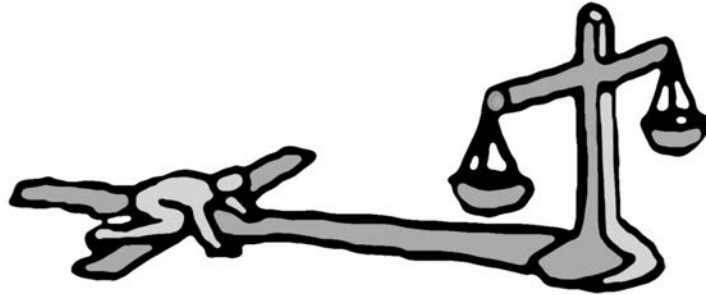


God Makes Us Right by Faith



SABBATH—OCTOBER 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 3:19–28.

MEMORY VERSE: “A man is made right with God by putting his trust in Christ. It is not by his doing what the Law says” (Romans 3:28, NLV).

NOW we come to the most important topic in Romans: justification by faith. Justification by faith means God makes us right with Him by our faith in Jesus. Martin Luther's teaching about this wonderful truth led to the start of the Protestant churches. The Catholic Church tried to stop Luther. In 1520, Pope Leo sent out a letter that showed he disapproved of Luther and his teachings. Luther burned a copy of the letter. He never could give up his belief in justification by faith.

How does “justification by faith” work? Here is a picture story that helps explain how this truth works. A person who breaks the law comes before a judge. The judge sentences this person to death. But a substitute appears and takes this person's guilt on himself. The person who broke the law is now no longer guilty. The judge now views this person as someone who never broke the law. All because the substitute has a perfect record of obeying the law. The substitute offers this perfect record to the guilty person who accepts it and then goes free.

In God's plan to save us, everyone of us is the guilty person. Jesus is our Substitute. Jesus has a perfect record. He stands in the court of heaven in our place. God accepts Jesus' perfect life in place of our record. Then we are made right with God.



Luther burned a copy of the pope's letter. Luther never could give up his belief in justification by faith.

THE WORKS OF THE LAW (Romans 3:19, 20)

Read Romans 3:19, 20. What is Paul saying here about the law? What does the law do? And what can the law *not* do? Why is this truth about the law so important for every Christian to understand?



The law cannot save us from the sickness of sin.

Paul uses the word “law” to mean the moral law. The moral law is another name for the God’s Ten Commandments. The moral law is explained in the judgments and statutes. Statutes are written rules and laws. The judgments and statutes give examples that show us how the Ten Commandments can be useful in everyday life. Another part of the Old Testament laws is the ceremonial law. The ceremonial law explained the use of animals in the Jewish plan of worship. All these different laws together made up the plan of the Jewish religion.

What does it mean to be “under the Law” (Romans 3:19, NLV)? The wording “under the law” means to be under the control of the law’s legal power. The law shows a person’s faults and guilt in God’s eyes. But the law cannot remove a sinner’s guilt. What the law can do is lead the sinner to God. God can free the sinner from guilt.

Now, let us put to use this idea about the law found in Romans. Today, we are no longer under the control of the law that explained the use of animals in the Jewish plan of worship. So, for us, the word “law” means the moral law, or the Ten Commandments. The moral law cannot save us any more than the plan of the Jewish religion could save the Jews. But saving the sinner is not what the moral law is meant to do. Instead, the moral law is meant to show us how perfect, holy, and good God is. The moral law also is meant to point out to people where they fail to show God’s perfect love in their lives.

No part of the law will make a person right with God. In fact, the law never was meant to do that. The law was made to do a completely different task. The law was meant to point out our faults and lead us to Jesus.

The law cannot save us from the sickness of sin. Instead, God made the law to point to our need for healing. That healing comes only from Jesus.

Do you have a perfect record of obeying the law? What should that answer tell you about how useless it is to try to save yourself by obeying the law?

THE SAVING POWER OF GOD (Romans 3:21)

“But now God has made another way to make men right with Himself. It is not by the Law. The Law and the early preachers tell about it” (Romans 3:21, NLV). What does this verse mean?

In Romans 3:21, Paul talks about God’s saving power, or righteousness. Righteousness is God’s power to make us obedient to His law. Paul says this new saving power is different from the law’s power. Then Paul tells us more about this new saving power. First, this new saving power is named “the righteousness of God” (NIV). So, its name tells us that it is a power that comes only from God. Second, it is the only power that God accepts as true saving power.

This power is the same saving power Jesus showed in His life while He was on this earth. Jesus offers this same power to all who accept it by faith. We do not get this saving power because we are worthy of it. No, God gives us this wonderful saving power because we need it. God uses this saving power to make us right with Him.

“ ‘God’s saving power’ means obedience to the law. The law asks for perfect obedience from everyone. The sinner owes the law this obedience. But the sinner cannot obey the law on his own. The only way the sinner can do all that the law asks is by faith. By faith, the sinner can bring to God Jesus’ holy life. Then God accepts Jesus’ perfect life in place of the sinner’s life. Now God can accept the believing soul as His child. God can forgive and make the sinner right with Him. God treats the sinner as if the sinner were holy. And God loves the sinner as He loves His Son.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 367, adapted. How can you learn to accept this wonderful truth for yourself? Read also Romans 3:22 for a hint.

Faith in Jesus includes much more than belief in a teaching. Faith in Jesus includes more than accepting facts about Jesus’ life and death as true. Instead, true faith in Jesus means accepting Him as Savior, Substitute, and Lord. True faith means choosing Jesus’ way of life. It means trusting Him and following His Ten Commandments.



“Righteousness means obedience to the law. The law asks for perfect obedience from everyone.”
—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 367, adapted.

ACCEPTED BY GOD (Romans 3:24)

What is Paul saying in Romans 3:24? What does it mean that “Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free” (NirV)?

Romans 3:24 says that God makes us right with Him by His grace. Grace is God’s gift to us of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin. So, what does this idea about “God’s grace mak[ing] us right” (NirV) with Him mean? The wording “makes us right” in Romans 3:24 comes from the Greek word *dikaioo*. *Dikaioo* means to “make a person right” with God. *Dikaioo* also can be written as “make holy,” “make known that a person is holy,” or “to think of someone as holy.” The word *dikaioo* comes from the same Greek word as two other Greek words: (1) *dikaiosune*, a word that means “being holy” and (2) *dikaion*, a word that means “holy thing that is needed.” So, these words show us the close connection between “being made right with God” and “being made holy.” Another name for “being made right with God” is justification. And another name for “being made holy” is righteousness. Some Bibles do not show clearly this connection between our being made right with God and our being made holy. But Paul wants us to understand we are made right with God when God says we are holy.



Grace means gift.

Before we are made right with God, we are full of sin. So, God cannot accept us. But after God makes us right with Himself, then God thinks of us as holy, and He accepts us.

Our being made right with God and our becoming holy happen only by grace. Grace means gift. What happens when a sinner accepts God’s gift of grace and turns to God to be saved? Then grace allows God to say that this person is holy. We can do nothing to earn this grace. We are not worthy of grace. Our own good behavior cannot make us right with God. Instead, God gives us grace because of our big need. We are helpless to save ourselves. So, we must be made right with God by our faith in Jesus. Jesus paid the price to free us from sin.

God makes us right in an instant. One minute we are not holy or accepted by God. But the next minute, God makes us right with Him, and we are made holy.

What happens when we fall away from God and then come back to Him? Then we must be made right with God all over again. Also, our being made right with God is something that happens again and again every day of our Christian lives.

“NOT SAVED BY OBEYING THE LAW” (Romans 3:28)

Romans 3:28 says “a person is made right with God” (NirV) because of his or her faith. No one is “saved by obeying the law” (NirV). But does this verse also mean we do not need to obey the law? Explain.

Let us be clear: “the law” that Paul talks about in Romans 3:28 means all of the Old Testament laws. Now, picture in your mind a Jew who tried very hard to obey all those laws. In the end, his obedience would make no difference. Why? Because he could not be made right with God without first accepting Jesus as the Messiah. The Messiah was the One God chose to take away our sins.

In Romans 3:28, Paul says that, because of the Messiah, we have nothing to brag about. We are saved by faith alone. What if we could be made right with God by doing good? Then we could brag. But we are made right with God by our faith in Jesus. So, all the praise belongs to God. God alone makes the sinner right with Him.

Ellen G. White gives an interesting answer to the question, “What does it mean for humans to be made right with God?” She writes: “It is God’s work to put the glory of man in the dust. God does for man the things that man cannot do for himself.” —*Testimonies [Messages] to Ministers [Pastors] and Gospel [Good News] Workers*, page 456, adapted.

Our obeying the law cannot get rid of our past sins. We cannot earn the gift of being made right with God either. God gives this gift to us only by our faith in Jesus’ death. So, we can say that our obeying the law has nothing to do with our being made right with God. Our being made right with God by faith means we are justified—or made right—without our having done anything to earn that gift. Nothing we do makes us worthy of that gift either.

But many Christians misunderstand Paul’s words in Romans 3:28. These Christians say the only thing a person must do to be saved is believe. These Christians completely misread Paul. In Romans and in other places in the Bible, Paul puts a lot of importance on obeying the Ten Commandments. Jesus does too. So do James and John (Matthew 19:17; Romans 2:13; James 2:10, 11; Revelation 14:12). True, our obedience to the law does not make us right with God. But Paul wants us to understand that the person who is made right with God obeys God’s law. In fact, this person is the only one who can obey the law.



We are made right with God only by our faith in Jesus’ death on the cross.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “The law cannot get rid of our penalty for breaking it. Instead, the law points to the sinner’s guilt. But Jesus promises to pardon all people who turn away from sin. They must believe in Jesus’ mercy. God freely offers His love to those believing souls who feel sorry for the sins they did. Sin can be washed away from the soul only by the blood of Jesus’ death on the cross. Jesus was equal with God the Father. But He died for us anyway. The work of Jesus includes His life, His suffering, His death, and His work as a go-between for us with God. All this work brings great praise and honor to the law.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 371, adapted.

“God puts Jesus’ holy life in place of your past sins. Then God accepts you as if you never sinned.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 62, adapted.

“Paul says we ‘are not saved by obeying the law’ [Romans 3:28, NIV]. Instead, in that same verse, Paul says believers are ‘made right with God because of their faith.’ Notice Paul does not say ‘their works of faith or mercy.’ The person who does good works does not believe doing them makes him right with God. But while he does them, he wants to be made right with God by faith. Now, what does Paul mean by ‘obeying the law’? Paul means those things that certain people do to make themselves right with God. These people feel they are holy because of the things they do. They do not want to be made holy by God. Instead, they want to brag about how they have been made holy by their own works.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary [Explanation] on Romans*, page 80, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Read the verses again for this week. In your own words, write a paragraph that explains what these verses mean to you. Share what you wrote with the class.
- 2 Read the quotation from Martin Luther again. Why did the truth about being made right with God lead Luther to do the things he did? Why are Luther’s words so important for us to understand today?
- 3 Today, how are we the “owners” of the important truths taught by Paul and Martin Luther? These truths include: (1) God makes us right with Himself. (2) God’s loving-favor saves us by faith alone.



“God puts Jesus’ holy life in place of your past sins. And God accepts you as if you never sinned.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 371, adapted.