

*Justified by*  
**Faith**

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*“We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works  
prescribed by the law” (Rom. 3:28, NRSV).*



Introduction  
*Following  
the Rules*

Rom. 4:3–8

A few years ago, A. J. Jacobs, a self-declared agnostic, decided to “live the Bible for a year.” For 381 days, he tried his best to literally follow every law written in Scripture. This included refusing to shave his beard and wearing only single-fibered, biblical-style robes. Once, he even “stoned” an adulterer by throwing a pebble at a man he met in the park.

When asked why he tried this experiment, he answered, “[I wanted to] see

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**There are times when we all grow tired of trying to follow the rules.**

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what—if anything—I was missing by having no religion in my life.”\* As he progressed through the year, he found it difficult to follow all the rules all the time. Sure, there was value in some of the principles, but there was no way he could ever become perfect. In the end, although he developed a certain regard for people who do try to follow biblical law, Jacobs concluded that he wasn’t missing out by not being religious and returned to his former life. There was no point in trying the impossible.

There are times when we all grow tired of trying to follow the rules. Why bother? It’s so difficult. Isn’t there another way to achieve righteousness? The answer lies in a crucial point that Jacobs failed to include in his experiment: God’s great love for us. Knowing that we could never achieve righteousness through the law because of our sinful natures, God loves us enough to have provided another way for us to attain righteousness. He sent His Son Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice, so that through faith in Him, we might be saved.

This week’s lesson will focus on the fact that, although the law has its place in our lives, righteousness is obtained only through faith in Christ’s sacrifice. We cannot hope to save ourselves unless we live a life of faith in the power of the Cross.

We all have days when we feel that we can’t do anything right. But don’t give up trying to be a righteous person, like Jacobs did. As you ponder the daily lessons presented this week, think about how you can exercise your faith in Jesus Christ. Then you will be on your way to becoming a truly righteous person.

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\* “A Conversation with A. J. Jacobs,” <http://www.ajjacobs.com/books/yolb.asp?id=guide#conversation> (accessed April 22, 2009).

Rom. 3:28

## Evidence *Is It Fake or the Real Thing?*

The Jews prided themselves as being The Chosen. They had the Law of Moses, and they were proud of their magnificent temple. They developed a vibrant economy based on their sacrificial system. However, just like any other group of people, they continued breaking the law. This resulted in hardships, captivity, and the Diaspora. So they created even more stringent laws to safeguard the original ones. Still they fell short. So they eagerly anticipated Messiah to deliver them from bondage.

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### **He was just an ordinary man, from Nazareth, of all places.**

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But Jesus came instead. He was just an ordinary man, from Nazareth, of all places. He had no formal education, yet He astounded religious leaders with His authoritative interpretation of Scriptures. He never condemned anyone but forgave freely. He respected authority but had the audacity to chase from the temple those who had turned it into a marketplace (John 2:16).

Eventually the high priests collaborated with the Roman authorities to charge Jesus with blasphemy. But He died, rose again, and ascended into heaven after giving the command to share the good news and the promise that He would return to take us home.

From then on, all of His disciples have experienced life transformation, even when facing opposition. Saul, the zealous Pharisee who opposed the new Christian movement, terrorized believers. But a personal encounter with Jesus changed everything about him, even his name. And the same Saul, now Paul, began preaching the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike.

The good news spread like wildfire—just by “word of mouth” and letters that took days or weeks to be delivered. There was no telephone or e-mail to verify the credibility of the message or its source. It was in this environment that Paul wrote to the Jews in Rome, to a people still wondering whether to believe that Jesus, who had been crucified, arose from the grave and ascended into heaven. To them, Paul’s message was revolutionary: “We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (Rom. 3:28, NRSV). To accept God’s grace was to upset the entire Jewish economy and open the door for the Gentiles!

### **REACT**

How would you respond to a message from an unofficial source that challenges the traditional teaching of many centuries?

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Logos  
“An Unmerited Favor”

Rom. 3:19–28

The church in Rome comprised opposing groups of people—Jews and Gentiles. This put Paul in the precarious position of presenting the gospel in a winsome way to a split congregation. Another difficulty was that he didn't have the luxury of meeting with them face to face. He couldn't take questions, divert arguments, or fully engage the young church in meaningful discourse. All he had was parchment and quill. Yet with these, he created the most comprehensive exposition of the gospel. To the Gentiles, he painted a picture of an inclusive, impartial God. To the Jews, he highlighted the futility in seeking salvation through works.

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God offers us a second chance.

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**We Are All Sinners (Rom. 3:23)**

Before addressing the Roman church as a cohesive congregation, Paul had to unite the fragmented groups. So he pointed out their common bond—their inherent sinfulness. This commonality became the basis of his argument for justification by faith—the assertion that we are all sinners, all guilty under the law. He supports this in Romans 3:10–12 by quoting Psalms 14:1–3; 53:1–3; and Ecclesiastes 7:20.

He underscores our sinfulness again in Romans 3:23—“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (NIV). It becomes clear that, as sinners, we cannot on our own reflect His image. On our own, we will never fulfill the requirements of the law. Paul illustrates this in its most basic sense—“the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

This can be a disheartening realization—no matter what we do, no matter how hard we try, we will always fall short of God's glory.

**Hope Through Faith (Rom. 3:21, 22)**

God, in His infinite mercy, offers us another way, “the righteousness from God, apart from the law” (verse 21, NIV). He offers us a second chance. He offers us grace. By accepting Jesus' selfless sacrifice, we are judged not by our sinful nature, but by the perfection of Christ. He is our only true path to righteousness, the way to be justified in spite of our intrinsic sin.

**What Is Justification? (Rom. 3:24–26)**

“The Greek word that is translated ‘to justify’ is *diakioun*. All Greek verbs that end in *-oun* mean, not to *make* someone something, but to *treat*, to *reckon*, to *account* him as something. If an innocent man appears before a judge, to

treat him as innocent is to *acquit* him. But the point about a man's relationship to God is that he is utterly guilty, and yet God, in his amazing mercy, treats him, reckons him, accounts him as if he were innocent. That is what justification means."<sup>1</sup>

This leaves no room to boast about our works. We are justified only by the grace of God; we are justified by what E. G. White calls an "unmerited favor."<sup>2</sup>

"Paul is insisting that nothing we can ever do can win for us the forgiveness of God; only what God has done for us can win that; therefore the way to a right relationship with God lies, not in a frenzied, desperate, doomed attempt to win acquittal by our performance; it lies in the humble, penitent acceptance of the love and the grace which God offers us in Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

### **Live Accordingly (Rom. 3:19, 20, 27, 28)**

So how can the knowledge of our justification transform our lives? It is crucial that we fully realize that there is absolutely no way for us to achieve freedom from sin on our own. The penalty of sin, what the law demands, can be fulfilled only through God and the gift of His Son. Paul, having personally experienced and accepted this gift, assures us that though we may stumble in our walk with Christ, we're still saved. It is only through His infinite grace that we are saved (Eph. 1:7).

What are the implications of God's grace in our Christian walk? James 1:22 urges us: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (NKJV). Being Christian doesn't mean receiving a free ticket to heaven. The gift of grace is a wonderful, beautiful thing, yet it is just one part of Christianity. Christianity is more than an acceptance of God's Word; it is a lifestyle that strives to reflect Christ. Jesus has commanded us to share the good news of His grace, to go make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:19). Paul tells us to "be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you" (Eph. 5:1, 2, NASB).

### **REACT**

The theme of justification by grace is prevalent throughout Romans. Paul says we are "free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2) and "not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). If we are saved by grace alone, what does it mean to be a Christian? Why strive to be more like Jesus? Are we still saved, despite our complacency?

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1. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, Penn.: Westminster Press), p. 57.

2. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 331.

3. Barclay, p. 59.

# Testimony

## The Mystic Ladder

John 3:16

“God is the life-giver. From the beginning, all His laws were ordained to life. But sin broke in upon the order that God had established, and discord followed. So long as sin exists, suffering and death are inevitable. It is only because the Redeemer has borne the curse of sin in our behalf, that man can hope to escape, in his own person, its dire results.”<sup>1</sup>

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### “The vilest sinner . . . may have the attributes of the Saviour.”

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“After the enemy had betrayed Adam and Eve into sin, the connection between heaven and earth was severed, and had it not been for Christ, the way to heaven would never have been known by the fallen race. . . . Christ is the mystic ladder, the base of which rests upon the earth, and whose topmost round reaches to the throne of the Infinite. The children of Adam are not left desolate and alienated from God, for through Christ’s righteousness we have access unto the Father.”<sup>2</sup>

“When the sinner comes to him [Jesus] he takes his load of sin, and gives him his righteousness. The vilest sinner may claim all that was provided in the plan of salvation through the merits of Christ. He may have the attributes of the Saviour. He may go forth to tell of a living Saviour, and to win men to the truth; for he knows what it is to lay hold of Christ by living faith. He has taken the requisite steps in repentance, confession, and restitution, and he can teach others the way of salvation. He can present Christ as one who left his royal throne, who clothed his divinity with humanity that he might save fallen man. He can present him as one who was rich and yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.”<sup>3</sup>

### REACT

1. God’s plan of salvation was uniquely designed for the human race; it is a plan that even the angels will never be able to fully comprehend. How can this truth enable you to overcome the stress and difficulty of real-life scenarios (for example, learning that you have a terminal illness)?

2. Ellen. G. White calls Christ “the mystic ladder” connecting us to the glory of heaven above. How does this connection stretch beyond our salvation to affect the choices we make today? How can you fully utilize this connection in your life?

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1. *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 73.

2. *That I May Know Him*, p. 82.

3. “The Christian’s Commission,” *Signs of the Times*, September 2, 1889.

Rom. 3:19–28

## How-to How to De-Funkify the Funk

*BBBBBBBBBBBBBB!* I fell out of bed, threw on my sweatshirt, slid into my shoes, and shuffled outside. Fire alarms and the joy of living in the dorm! As I stood under the stars, I looked at the other girls. Half of them I barely recognized! Some of the most put-together girls by day were the biggest wrecks by night. So I began to think about the irony of the beauty they promote all day and the disaster they hide at night. Their sneaky way of being beautiful is to pile on the makeup until they have no “them” left. The reality is, wash your face, take care of your skin . . . and you will be more than superficially beautiful. You will be real.

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### Don't chase the dirt down the sink.

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Here's how you can be real with God:

*Look in the mirror (the law/character of God).* The law shows us what we really look like. So acknowledge that you are dirty. Read Romans 3:20.

*Ask for help (grace).* Rubbing your reflection in the mirror will not make it clean or more beautiful. The only way to qualify for grace is to recognize that we can't save ourselves, and that we don't deserve it. Read Romans 3:23.

*Reach for the water and soap (faith and righteousness).* Accept that the only way your face is going to get clean is if you wash it. Faith is more than saying, “That's nice.” Faith is saying, “That's for me!” Christ's righteousness is our soap and water—it wipes away the grime of sin. We need to remember not to let our soap and water get too far away from us. Read Romans 3:22.

*Realize that your face will get dirty again.* However, there's plenty of soap and water for the next wash. Don't chase the dirt down the sink. We have to walk away from the sin that we hand over to God. If we keep trying to hold on to all of our dirt, we just get grossed out. But if we give it to God and let Him hold it, He will clear us up. Read Romans 8:1, 2.

*Learn to be comfortable being clean.* Christ has wiped away our impurities. This is true justification. “When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.”\*

### REACT

Why is it so difficult to reach out and admit that we need help?

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\**The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

# Breaking the Law, Getting the Reward

Rom. 3:19–28

If you're a "good" person, it's easy to avoid breaking laws established by your government. However, all of us have, at one time or another, weighed our salvation with our sinful behavior and thoughts (Rom. 3:23). It may almost be impossible to go an entire day following each of God's laws without sinning in the slightest. Fortunately, He understands that humans are going to struggle with sin on a daily basis. Some personal worries I've had myself include questioning my own "goodness." I find myself wondering if the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the right church, if there is such a thing as the right religion, if I really am a "good enough" Christian, and if that's enough for God on judgment day.

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## I find myself wondering if the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the right church.

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Martin Luther did all he could to abide by the law, and even he was unsure of his salvation. When I shared my fear of falling short of God's grace with my husband, he directed me to Romans and the same text that brought relief to Luther. I felt a peace sweep through me as I read, "We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law" (Rom. 3:28, NRSV).

However, righteousness by faith is not an excuse to live the way we want to. As we become more like Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we will become examples to the world around us. As this growth occurs, be prepared for your faith to be tested. Your faith may waiver, but with the Holy Spirit's guidance, your relationship with Christ will grow stronger.

One thing I know for sure—Jesus Christ is my Savior. He died for my sins. This certainty of faith brings me peace that on my dying day I will sleep in Jesus until He returns. Those who are repentant and believe in Him can be assured of their salvation. They can be assured that as they grow in Christ, they will become more like Him.

"Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24, NKJV).

### **REACT**

1. Obedience does not save us. So, what role does obedience play in the Christian life?
2. What do you think will happen to those who may not believe in God but who lead a life of service and good will? Will there be room for them in heaven?

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*Candice Qualls, Pleasant Hill, California, U.S.A.*

Rom. 3:19–28

## Exploration

# *Justification by Faith Is Just the Beginning*

### **CONCLUDE**

All of us have sinned. Therefore, none of us on our own can fulfill the requirements of God's righteous law. However, when by faith we accept the righteousness of Christ and the sacrifice He made on our behalf, we will be washed clean of sin. Then we can start, also through faith, the transformation process of developing a loving character like His. This is how we become "imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1, NIV), so that when others see Him in us, they also will desire to be justified and made right by Him.

### **CONSIDER**

- Searching for ways the Internet is helping to spread like wildfire the good news of justification by faith. Which sites seem to be the most effective, and why? Develop your own Web site the way you think the apostle Paul might have if he had had this technology available to him.
- Creating a mathematical equation that would explain Romans 3:28.
- Writing a modern-day scenario depicting what today's world economy might look like if God's grace were to upset the current status quo. (Review Sunday's lesson.)
- Comparing the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly to what happens to people when they are justified by faith.
- Drawing or sculpting the concept of Christ as the mystic ladder, which appears in the second paragraph of Tuesday's lesson.
- Asking some of your friends how being justified by God's grace (and not their own works) could transform their life.

### **CONNECT**

*Steps to Christ*, "Faith and Acceptance," pp. 49–55.

*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 2nd ed. (Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), pp. 136–144.