

When Are We Justified?

Can We Loose Our Justification?

A Study on Romans 3:20-31

Romans 3:19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Romans 3:20

Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

What is the word “therefore” there for? Is it not to connect with the verse or verses before it? What are “the deeds of the law”? What is justification? What is the purpose of the law? Why can’t we be justified by “the deeds of the law”? Let’s answer these questions.

What are “the deeds of the law”?

In the following verse, Paul reiterates that a man cannot be justified by “the deeds of the law”. He concludes this truth based on the verses 20 through 28. But he also identifies an essential condition for justification, and that is by faith. So we see that he is comparing justified by “the deeds of the law” with “justified by faith”. We will discover as we examine those verses between 20 and 28, just why Paul comes to this conclusion.

Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Let’s look at some other of Paul’s writings regarding justification and see if we can answer the question, “What are ‘the deeds of the law’”. In the following verses, we find Paul saying that by “the works of the law” no man shall be justified. So we can conclude that “deeds of the law” and “works of the law” are the same thing.

Galatians 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

What is justification?

Justification is “counted” (Romans 4:5), imputed, (Romans 4:22), reckoned (Romans 4:9) as righteous, clean, cleared in judgment.

Job 25:4 How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?

Psalms 51:4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

Romans 3:4 God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

Romans 2:13 (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

We are “justified”, “reconciled” by His sacrifice of love, yet His work is not finished, “much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life”.

Romans 5:9 Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10) For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Hebrews 9:22 And almost all things are by the law [of Moses] purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission [pardon, freedom] or justification.

How then are we saved by His life?

Hebrews 7:25 Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.

1John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

Romans 11:27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

We understand that “the wages of sin is death”, (Romans 6:23), and death refers to the wrath, to be saved from wrath is to be saved from sin.

What is the purpose of the law?

Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

Romans 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

Galatians 3:24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Acts 13:39 And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Why can't we be justified by “the deeds of the law”?

Romans 3:24 Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

Galatians 5:4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

Romans 5:9 Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

Galatians 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

We are under the curse because the flesh cannot attain to righteousness by keeping the law.

Romans 8:13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

Romans 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: 4) That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

NLT translation

Romans 8:3 The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful [fleshly] nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent His own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving His Son as a sacrifice for our sins. 4) He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us [in us], who no longer follow our sinful [fleshly] nature but instead follow the Spirit.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal [fleshly] mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. 8) So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. 9) But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.

NLT translation

Romans 8:7 For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will [neither indeed can be]. 8) That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful [fleshly] nature can never please God.

Romans 7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

What does justified by faith mean?

What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself. When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

As the penitent sinner, contrite before God, discerns Christ's atonement in his behalf and accepts this atonement as his only hope in this life and the future life, his sins are pardoned. This is justification by faith. Every believing soul is to conform his will entirely to God's will and keep in a state of repentance and contrition, exercising faith in the atoning merits of the Redeemer and advancing from strength to strength, from glory to glory.

In the following verse Paul compares "the works of the law" with "the hearing of faith".

Galatians 3:2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Galatians 3:5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Galatians 3:11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

Romans 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace is unmerited favor, and the believer is justified without any merit of his own, without any claim to offer to God. He is justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who stands in the courts of heaven as the sinner's substitute and surety. But while he is justified because of the merit of Christ, he is not free to work unrighteousness. Faith works by love and purifies the soul.

Romans 3:21

Romans 3:21 But now the righteousness of God without the law [of works] is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken.

None of the apostles or prophets ever claimed to be without sin. Men who have lived nearest to God, men who would sacrifice life itself rather than knowingly commit a wrong act, men whom God had honored with divine light and power, have confessed the sinfulness of their own nature. They have put no confidence in the flesh, have claimed no righteousness of their own, but have trusted wholly in the righteousness of Christ.

Let's look at a couple of witnesses in the prophets. There is no record of Daniel sinning, yet in his prayer to God regarding the decree to restore the temple in Jerusalem, Daniel prayed, confessing to God of their [Israel's] sin, including himself. He did not claim himself to be righteous and meriting the answer to his prayer, but counted on the righteousness of God's faithfulness to answer his prayer.

Daniel 9:4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love Him, and to them that keep His commandments; 5) We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: ... 9) To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him; ... 16) O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. ... 18) O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.

Isaiah as well, confessed his sin, recognizing the righteousness of God.

Isaiah 6:1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. ... 5) Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

Romans 3:22, 23

Romans 3:22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23) For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

The righteousness of God is revealed by His love in that He was willing to give His Son to a world lost in sin, “for all have sinned”. Just think of the sacrifice and agony He suffered watching His Son pleading, “Father, isn’t there some other way to save man from sin”? “Not my will but thine will be done”. (Luke 22:42) It was by grace that Christ was able to do His Father’s will.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

We must not only have faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, but we must have the faith of Jesus which He had in the righteousness of God, and which He revealed in His life, death and resurrection. This is the only solution, the only power that will ever save us from sin.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17) For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

It was by grace through faith in His Father, that Christ was able to perfect righteousness that we might be saved from the sin that besets us.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Christ perfected righteousness by being “tempted in all points”, “yet without sin”, thereby “condemning sin in the flesh”, “in the likeness of sinful flesh”, so “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us”.

Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16) Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Romans 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: 4) That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

We too must not only have the faith of Christ, but “the just shall live by faith”. We must keep the faith of Jesus which will result in keeping the commandments.

Revelation 14:12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

Romans 2:13 (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

Romans 3:24

Romans 3:24 Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

Justification is a gift but at a great price. Not only is justification a gift, but so is repentance, grace, faith and righteousness. There is only one way to be redeemed and that is through faith that Christ is “able to keep us from falling”, by our yielding our will to Him.

Romans 6:16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

Romans 5:15 But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. 16) And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. 17) For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) 18) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Romans 3:25

Romans 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

Christ has been set forth to be a propitiation, a merciful intervention and provision to those who have faith in His sacrifice and His righteousness, justifying, [forgiving] us of our past sins through His forbearance, or His grace which is unmerited.

Romans 4:20 He (Abraham) staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 21) And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform. 22) And therefore it was imputed to him (Abraham) for righteousness.

But grace is also the power to sanctify us by saving us from sinning.

Acts 20:32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

Romans 3:26

Romans 3:26 To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Romans 3:4 God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

Psalm 51:4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

There will be a “revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Romans 2:5), He will be justified and cleared in that He honoured the liberty of all and was able to justify those who chose to believe in Him.

Romans 3:27

Romans 3:27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

Can we boast when we consider that salvation comes to us through the gifts of repentance, justification, grace, faith and righteousness? Not at all. It is only by the “law of faith” that we can produce righteousness and not by the “law of works”, also termed by Paul as the “deeds of the law” or the “works of the flesh”.

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

Romans 7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

Within every law is found the property of cause and effect. So it is with the “law of works” and the “law of faith”. They both produce works. The “law of works” or the “works of the flesh” “brings forth fruit unto death”.

Romans 6:20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. 21) What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

Romans 8:13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body [works of the law] , ye shall live.

But the “law of faith” produces works of righteousness unto eternal life.

Romans 3:22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

Romans 6:22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

Romans 9:30 What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. 31) But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. 32) Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; 33) As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.

Are we “being made free from sin” attaining to “the righteousness which is of faith?” If so, then we are “justified by faith”.

Romans 3:28

Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

This is the conclusion, we can only be justified, [cleared as innocent through faith] if we believe the gospel promise and gift that Christ can save us from sin and that we cannot earn justification by any works which we have done. We have no righteousness of our own that can merit salvation.

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Romans 3:29

Romans 3:29 Is He the God of the Jews only? is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:

Romans 2:11 For there is no respect of persons with God.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17) For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Romans 3:30

Romans 3:30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision [the Jew] by faith, and uncircumcision [the Gentiles] through faith.

Romans 3:31

Romans 3:31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

So then, what shall we say about the law, shall we cancel it so we don't have to worry about sin anymore? No, it definitely has its purpose in that it reveals to us our need of a Saviour. Well what need have we for the law if we are saved by faith? But "faith without works is dead". Just like any law, the "law of faith" has an effect, and that effect is works of love and not "works of the law" which leads to death because it claims to be meritorious of salvation instead of faith in the gift of salvation.

James 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15) If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16) And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? 17) Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

James 2:18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 19) Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20) But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

We are not justified by works. We are not justified without works. We are justified by faith that works by love.

Cause and effect are inherent in the nature of law. No matter what the law is, it will produce an effect. Just as we do, the Bible as well as Paul, will often use different terms that are equivalent in meaning. The following chart contrasts equivalent expressions of the law of works with equivalent expressions of the law of faith.

The Law of Works	The Law of Faith
Circumcision of the flesh, Rom 2:29; 4:9-12;	Circumcision of the heart, Rom 2:29; Phil 3:3; Gal 5:6
The letter of the law, Rom 2:29; 2Cor 3:6; Matt 5: 21, 22; 5:27, 28; etc.;	The spirit of the law, Rom 2:29; 2Cor 3:6 Matt 5: 21, 22; 5:27, 28; etc.
Not justified by works of the law, Rom 4:2; 3:20, 28; 8:13; Gal 2:16, 3:2, 5, 10, 19; Eph 2:9; 2Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5; Heb 4:10; 6:1; 9:14	Justified by works of faith, Rom 4:6, 11, 12; 5:1: Eph 2:8-10; James 2:14-26
Under the law, slavery to sin, Rom 6:14, 16, 20, 21; 7:23-25; 8:2	Under grace, the power to save from sin, Rom 1:16, 17, 6:14, 18, 22;
Under the law of sin & death, being carnally or fleshly minded is death, Rom 7:5, 20-25; 8:1, 4-8, 12, 13	Under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, being spiritually minded is life, Rom 8:1,2, 5, 9-13, Eph 4:23; Col 3:9
The law of righteousness sought by the works of the law, Rom 9:31, 32; 10:1-5; 11:6;	The law of righteousness sought by faith, Rom 9:30; 10:6-10; 11:6;
The old covenant—Hagar & Ishmael, Gal 4:21-26	The new covenant—Abraham & Sarah, Gal 4:21-26

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