

# Romans 1:2-3

Meditation

J.I. Packer

## Heart of the Gospel

### **JUSTIFICATION SALVATION IS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH**

*Clearly no one is justified before God  
by the law, because,  
“The righteous will live by faith.”*

GALATIANS 3:11

The doctrine of justification, the storm center of the Reformation, was a major concern of the apostle Paul. For him it was the heart of the gospel (Rom. 1:17; 3:21–5:21; Gal. 2:15–5:1) shaping both his message (Acts 13:38-39) and his devotion and spiritual life (2 Cor. 5:13-21; Phil. 3:4-14). Though other New Testament writers affirm the same doctrine in substance, the terms in which Protestants have affirmed and defended it for almost five centuries are drawn primarily from Paul.

Justification is a judicial act of God pardoning sinners (wicked and ungodly persons, Rom. 4:5; 3:9-24), accepting them as just, and so putting permanently right their previously estranged relationship with himself. This justifying sentence is God’s gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:15-17), his bestowal of a status of acceptance for Jesus’ sake (2 Cor. 5:21).

God’s justifying judgment seems strange, for pronouncing sinners righteous may appear to be precisely the unjust action on the judge’s part that God’s own law forbade (Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15). Yet it is in fact a just judgment, for its basis is the righteousness of Jesus Christ who as “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45), our representative head acting on our behalf, obeyed the law that bound us and endured the retribution for lawlessness that was our due and so (to use a medieval technical term) “merited” our justification. So we are justified justly, on the basis of justice done (Rom. 3:25-26) and Christ’s righteousness reckoned to our account (Rom. 5:18-19).

God’s justifying decision is the judgment of the Last Day, declaring where we shall spend eternity, brought forward into the present and pronounced here and now. It is the last judgment that will ever be passed on our destiny; God will never go back on it, however much Satan may appeal against God’s verdict (Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10; Rom. 8:33-34). To be justified is to be eternally secure (Rom. 5:1-5; 8:30).

The necessary means, or instrumental cause, of justification is personal faith in Jesus Christ as crucified Savior and risen Lord (Rom. 4:23-25; 10:8-13). This is because the meritorious ground of our justification is entirely in Christ. As we give ourselves in faith to Jesus, Jesus gives us his gift of righteousness, so that in the very act of “closing with

Christ,” as older Reformed teachers put it, we receive divine pardon and acceptance which we could not otherwise have (Gal. 2:15-16; 3:24). Official Roman Catholic theology includes sanctification in the definition of justification, which it sees as a process rather than a single decisive event, and affirms that while faith contributes to our acceptance with God, our works of satisfaction and merit contribute too. Rome sees baptism, viewed as a channel of sanctifying grace, as the primary instrumental cause of justification, and the sacrament of penance, whereby congruous merit is achieved through works of satisfaction, as the supplementary restorative cause whenever the grace of God’s initial acceptance is lost through mortal sin. Congruous, as distinct from condign, merit means merit that it is fitting, though not absolutely necessary, for God to reward by a fresh flow of sanctifying grace. On the Roman Catholic view, therefore, believers save themselves with the help of the grace that flows from Christ through the church’s sacramental system, and in this life no sense of confidence in God’s grace can ordinarily be had. Such teaching is a far cry from that of Paul.

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## **Romans 1:2**

which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,<sup>2</sup>

Observations:

Paul declares the gospel = power of God (1:16)

Christ declares the scriptures to be the power of God (Matthew 22:29)

Using the inductive method

If a = gospel

If b = scriptures

If c = "power of God"

Then the gospel = the scriptures.

Therefore the central message of all scripture is the gospel. You can read and study the Old Testament your whole life and should you fail to understand that the Old Testament contains the gospel, you have not come to understand the truth.

39 “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me;<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Packer, J. I., *Concise Theology*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1993.

<sup>2</sup>*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

### Galatians 3:7

7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. 10 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.” 11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” 12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE” — 14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.<sup>4</sup>

Read Knowing God by J.I. Packer "The Heart of the Gospel"

### **Propitiation in the Bible**

In the Old Testament, it underlies the prescribed rituals of the sin offering, the guilt offering (“trespass-offering” in the KJV), and the day of atonement (Lev 4:1—6:7; 16:1–34); also, it finds clear expression in such narratives as that of Numbers 16:41–50, where God threatens to destroy the people for maligning his judgment on Korah, Dathan and Abiram: “Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the LORD; the plague has started.’ . . . So Aaron . . . made atonement for them. . . . And the plague stopped” (vv. 46–48).

In the New Testament, the *propitiation* word group appears in four passages of such transcendent importance that we may well pause to set them out in full.

The first is Paul’s classic statement of *the rationale of God’s justification of sinners*.

“But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested . . . even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a

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<sup>3</sup>*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

<sup>4</sup>*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

*propitiation*, through faith, by his blood, to show his righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the shewing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:21–26 RV).<sup>5</sup>

To deny or distort the truth about the **resurrection** is to deny and distort the heart of the gospel. It is therefore a tragic and damnable thing to teach falsehood about that doctrine. Not only does it blaspheme God and denigrate His Word but inevitably it will **upset the faith of some**.<sup>6</sup>

- John MacArthur

Hebrews 2:3

how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? <sup>7</sup>

(... under the Old Testament) There the word was spoken, with its threatening, was steadfast, and every transgression was punished. The gospel does not, as so many think, lessen it. It does not diminish, but terribly intensifies the soreness of those who neglect it.

- Andrew Murray

Romans 1:3

concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, <sup>8</sup>  
Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; <sup>9</sup>

Observations:

NIV and NASB have shortened statements

*Concerning His Son:*

The Son is the Lord, God and Creator. Jesus Christ is God.

Hebrews 1:8 But of the **Son** *He says*,

“THY THRONE, **O GOD**, IS FOREVER AND EVER,<sup>10</sup>

The author of Hebrews declares the Son to be God.

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<sup>5</sup>J. I. Packer, *Knowing God—20th Anniversary Edition*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press) 1993.

<sup>6</sup>MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

<sup>7</sup>*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

<sup>8</sup>*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

<sup>9</sup>*The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

<sup>10</sup>*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

Hebrews 1:10

“THOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING DIDST LAY THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH,

AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF THY HANDS;<sup>11</sup>

The author of Hebrew declares the Lord to be the Creator.

Paul declares Jesus Christ to be the Lord. (I:3 KJV)

Isaiah declares the Lord to be God.

Isaiah 49:5

And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,

To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him

(For I am honored in the sight of the **LORD**,

**And My God** is My strength),<sup>12</sup>

John declares the Lord to be God and Creator

Revelation 4:11 (NIV)

You are worthy, our Lord and God,

to receive glory and honor and power,

for you created all things, <sup>13</sup>

*which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh:*

The Old Testament promise that the Messiah would be a descendant of David:(Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5).

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<sup>11</sup>*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

<sup>12</sup>*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

<sup>13</sup>*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.