

# Justification: A Full Slate

by John Murray

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing sin and iniquity, having a sense of the forgiving grace of God, and being justified by faith with a full slate of righteousness.*

**Duration:** 43:40

**Scripture:** Psalm 32:1-2, Matthew 6:33, Mark 16:16, Romans 3:24, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 John 1:9

**Topics:** "Justification"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the relevance of the apostle Paul's arguments. He highlights the fundamental question of how we can be accepted and justified by God. The speaker criticizes the belief that one's acceptance with God is based on their own righteousness or the righteousness of their ancestors. Instead, he emphasizes the need for a personal relationship with God and reliance on His grace for justification. The sermon encourages listeners to examine their own beliefs and ensure they are grounded in the truth of God's Word.

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## Transcript

The fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, beginning at verse nine. Come up, great blessedness then, upon the circumcision only, but upon the uncircumcision also. For we say that faith was weakened to Abraham for righteousness.

How was it then weakened? When he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of righteousness of the faith, which he had been, had yet been uncircumcised. The argument of the apostle in this particular chapter, of this particular point, is based upon the fact that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised.

And that is such an obvious fact that it might not seem at all necessary for the apostle to conduct any extended argument concerning it. For the statement with reference to Abraham, which occurs in Genesis 15, 6, and Abraham believed in the Lord and he reckoned it to him for righteousness, is a statement at least fourteen years before the right to circumcision had been instituted. We don't find reference to circumcision until we come to Genesis 17, when Ishmael was thirteen years old, and therefore about thirteen years at least must have elapsed between the time with reference to which it is certain that Abraham believed in the Lord and the time when circumcision had been administered to Abraham and to his seed when he was ninety-nine years old.

So why, why label the point just an obvious fact of history? And yet, you see, the apostle Paul, in this particular chapter, is making great pain to point out that Abraham was justified long before he had been circumcised, just because a great many of the Jews had completely misinterpreted the relation of circumcision to Abraham's justification for Abraham's righteousness. They had completely misunderstood the relationship of circumcision to faith, and consequently it was necessary for the apostle Paul to base an argument on this very simple and obvious historical fact that Abraham believed in the Lord and it was counted to him for righteousness long before there was any institution of circumcision. Now what was the misunderstanding on the part of a great many Jews with reference to whom the apostle Paul had a great deal of concern in this particular epistle? Well, the misunderstanding is that they had in one way or another regarded the circumcision of Abraham as that by which he attained to righteousness.

They had been controlled by this principle. That is, their thinking had been controlled by this principle that a man was justified in the sight of God by what? Justified in the sight of God by what he himself is and by what he himself does. And they had regarded circumcision as definitely pointing to that conclusion because after all, circumcision is a certain work that is performed.

It is something which Abraham did. He did indeed in obedience to the divine command, but nevertheless, and which in that respect is in the category of a work. And they had regarded circumcision, therefore, as an index to that kind of working on the basis of which Abraham was accepted with God and was justified.

And they had applied that misunderstanding of the relation of circumcision to justification, to the justification of Abraham, to the whole of their own thinking. And the great fundamental error in the sight of God himself is all by reason of what he himself does. And the argument of the apostle in this particular chapter is directed very definitely to the correction of that fundamental error.

There is no more basis of fundamental error in the whole realm of what we call religion than to think that a man is accepted in the sight of God, is justified by God on the basis of what he himself is or on the basis of what he himself does. And therefore it was not at all to come to a very effective way, and you can see therefore the relevance and the effectiveness of his appeal to certain simple historical facts that Abraham was justified before God and had been righteous in the sight of God long before he had been circumcised. And therefore circumcision could have had absolutely nothing to do with his actual... had its own right to it, had its own place, but it was not anything on the basis of which he could have been accepted with God as righteous because he had been accepted with God as righteous.

So we might well ask the question, is this of any consequence to us? The simple historical facts to which the apostle Paul appeals here are well known to us, and therefore surely it isn't necessary for us now... Well that is very, very far from being the case. It is just as relevant to us in our certain situation here in the year of our Lord, 1958, to base an argument upon these simple historical facts as it was for the apostle Paul himself at the beginning of this Christian era. Just as there are just approximately 1900 years since the apostle Paul sent, according to all evidence, according to most reasonable evidence, this epistle was written in 58 AD.

That's just exactly 1900 years ago and a few months. And the last of 1900 years does not make in the least degree irrelevant this particular argument that he has made. We don't know.

Why is it not irrelevant for us? Why is it just as necessary for us today to take a stance of simple historical facts as it was for the apostle 1900 years ago? Just for this very reason. I said a moment ago that the fundamental error of all what we call religion is to think that we are accepted in the sight of God on the

basis of what we ourselves are or on the basis of what we ourselves do. That's the fundamental religious error.

And there is nothing that is more in direct contradiction to the faith of God's people. There is nothing that is more temporary in contradiction to the revelation which God has given us. Nothing that is more directly in contradiction to the gospel of the grace of God than that particular tenet.

We are accepted in God's sight on the basis of what we are us and on the basis of what we do. And yet, the native bent and tendency of our minds and I mean the native bent and tendency of the hearts and minds of every one of us is just that fundamental religious error. There is nothing that is more characteristic of us naturally than just to think along that very pattern, to think after that very pattern of thought.

Let me give you just a few examples. I suppose you know just as well as I do that when a great many people are confronted with the question of their relationship to God and their hope for eternity the spontaneous natural response of their hearts and minds is as if this is power. Well, I don't speak.

I don't lie. I don't commit adultery. I don't murder.

I live a very honest, upright life. I'm very decent in my behavior. I'm a good neighbor.

I don't want to do harm to anybody. Who begins to talk to you about their way of behavior? And then they will perhaps say, whether they will say it or not it's the implication of their thinking Well, since I'm such a decent person, I don't believe that the Lord will have me. It's a grand thing for people to be decent.

It's a grand thing for people not to be notorious and to live outwardly an upright life in society. We are always very thankful for people who are decent, who are good neighbors who are good, helpful members of society. But don't you see that in... How do I expect to be justified in the sight of God? How do I accept God as righteous? Don't you see that that's a response of hearts justified by Him on the basis of what we are and on the basis of... Well, take another person.

He or she is confronting with this to God. How do you expect to stand before God in the day of his death? And perhaps you'll get an answer. Well, I was baptized.

I'm a member of the church. And I go to the Lord's table. And I'm aware of many things that are connected with the church of Christ.

There's nothing necessarily objectionable about any of these things. Baptism is a divine ordinance. The Lord's Supper is a divine ordinance.

Attendance upon the means of grace is a divine... is an obligation which He has pronounced, yes. And more besides, a person who has had past tally has personally scored from these institutions of God's appointments. But don't you see again that that is just that sort of pattern of the basic religion of error of which we are speaking? That a person is going to be accepted in the sight of God on the basis of what he does? And particularly in this case, on the basis of what he does in connection with the church of God.

Take another instance. I suppose you find such people too, I have. And you confront them with the great basic question of their relationship to God.

And the kind of answer you'll get is this, well, I had a very godly mother. I had a very godly father. And you get a rare chance... you get a long story about the godly forebears that that particular person had.

And your only inference can be, is this, that as related to this fundamental religious question of our acceptance with God as righteous, they're really basing their expectation of acceptance with God on their godly ancestors. And it almost amounts to ancestor worship. Very close to it.

I began then to have a godly parent. And woe betide the person who despises the godliness of his parents or the godliness of his ancestry. It's an inestimable privilege.

And the grace of God normally flows along the line of heaven and darkness. The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, and from them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do. I say again, woe betide the person that despises her godly ancestors.

And woe betide still more the person who contradicts and runs counter to that great authority that is his, by means of his godly parents. But again, you see, that in relation to the central question, you have the same fundamental religious errors. Because it all comes back to this, that we are going to be accepted with God in one way or another on the basis of some particular relationship, on the basis of some particular human relationship.

And it was just precisely that pattern of thought coming to expression in various ways that the Apostle Paul was dealing with in this particular time. And that is why he takes such a so simple, obvious religion, which is to be derived from the fact that Abraham was justified long before he was born, and that that confession was not the ground of his justification, but simply the seed, the final seed of that justification which he had in his body on an entirely different day. And the Apostle Paul is giving us here in this particular chapter the gospel of the grace of God.

And he's proclaiming for us that in which the blessedness of the righteous man consists. In other words, he's giving us the mind for that blessedness to consist in our acceptance with God. Is that all right? Well, I'm going to mention that.

God has shown how necessary it was for the Apostle Paul to provide us with his arguments, and how necessary it is for us to take ourselves from the relevance of his arguments on the question that is the great, basic and fundamental question in which our acceptance with God is so justification by him. And the first thing that is to be noted, or at least the first thing I shall mention, as the criterion of the blessed man, I'll remember that the first time talking, we're talking now of the blessed man and the criteria by which a blessed man is to be known and the first thing that the truly blessed man, the man who enjoys the favor of God, is the very man who, when he is confronted with this basic of his relationship with God and of his standing before God, the first thing that brings up for his arisen is not at all invitedness, not at all his decency, not at all his relationship particularly fellow man in the social structure of society, but the thing that brings up first of all and on the horizon of the truly blessed man is that, in other words, he doesn't think first of all spontaneously and immediately for his goodness, but of his wickedness, of his iniquity. That seems very strange indeed, doesn't it? But it's the only thing of the situation that belongs to us as sinners before God.

And I tell you this, that there is no blessedness below true and final blessedness belonging to a person unless the first thing of which that person thinks when he is confronted with this question is his sin, his

iniquity. The only blessed man is the man who is overcome first of all with sin, with all wickedness, with all iniquity, and that he has no standing with God at all on the basis of what he is. On the basis of what he has done except the standing of condemnation.

That's the first criteria. The person who recognizes that the only thing he deserves on the basis of what he did or on the basis of what he has done is not acceptance with God, it's not justification before God, but condemnation. And this is the thing we've got to discuss about this.

It's easy for you to listen perhaps and it's easy for you to trust. But it's another thing for us to stretch our hearts and see if that is really the spontaneous response and reaction of our own. When we are confronted with this vague and religious question of our relationship to God.

Now second. The second criterion of the blessed man is that his hands have been forsworn. You see the emphasis that the Apostle Paul places on that in this particular instance because he appeals to David to what we find in the 32nd Psalm even as David also describes the blessedness of the man and for whom God this thing without worth saying blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not receive.

And remember this my friends that the blessed man is not simply the man. He's not simply the man in whom Christ Jesus Christ laid up the stress of his own iniquities of his own lust of his own wickedness of his own guilt of his worthiness of damnation but the blessed man is also that this and the man is into whom his consciousness has come the efficacy of the forgiving grace of God. He is at least the person who is not content to have a sense of his own sinfulness but he must reach there before God then flee before he may receive the full remission of his conscience.

Oh my friends if we have a sense of our own unworthiness of our own sinfulness of our own ungodliness there is nothing that is more indispensable to our peace of mind to our peace of conscience than some sense of the forgiving grace of God. How marvelous is that God can forgive that if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness that he won't block us as a thick cloud out of flesh and blood that they will be cast forever into the sea of hate, forgetfulness and that is the blessed man that is the man of whom the promise is made that the man that is the man who David was the man who tended to Christ's cross and who breathed the atmosphere of divine forgiveness blocked out my transgressions, washed me truly from my iniquities and cleansed me from my sins. Now that's the man of the blessed man whom I ask you just to very frankly to interrogate yourself.

I don't suppose it's humanly possible at least under all normal circumstances for a person to remember all his sins at any one particular time. I don't suppose it's humanly possible. It might be I don't know what will be at the judgment seat of Christ, what may happen under very abnormal circumstances, but under normal circumstances it's just not humanly possible for us to think of all our sins at any one particular time.

But I tell you that if you are among the blessed of the Lord there comes to your mind again and again particular situations, particular particular particular instances, particular particular exigencies in which in connection with your own life and you have an overwhelming sense of the iniquity perhaps you have completely forgotten something. You just didn't think that it would ever loom upon your consciousness at all. And perhaps sometime when you least expect it there comes across the threshold of your memory and you remember your sins are brought to remembrance in your own consciousness and you are overwhelmed with the enormity, with the iniquity of that particular expression of the depravity of your own heart.

And you are simply overwhelmed. You never thought that it would ever invade your consciousness but there it is. And it's there in your memory and it's there in your heart.

That must inevitably be the way that a person who is a blessed man may possibly be I just promised this expression to it in that very psalm we were singing. Let not the errors of my guilt nor sins remember thee and bless thee for thy goodness sake. O Lord, remember me and in order to pass on from this point make to what extent is the need of forgiveness and the blessing of forgiveness occupying your consciousness.

To what extent does it enter into your supplication before God that he prosper his house. Does this matter of forgiveness, of pardon enter into you? What kind of place does it occupy in you? If it isn't central in your interest, if it isn't central in your prayer, you're not a blessed man. Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven.

Now, the third criterion of the blessed man, according to the argument of the apostle in this particular chapter, is that he is in the same category as Abram, that Abram believed in the Lord and it was second to him for life. And that very simplicity is the blessed man is the man who is justified to fight. He is not only the person in whose consciousness, he is not only the person in whose consciousness looms up the blessing of forgiveness, but he is also the person in whose consciousness remains out.

The grandeur of that article of justification I say. Justification by God the free great on the pages of all righteousness. Now, what does justification mean? It's a very great mistake to equate justification with the forgiveness of sin.

Forgiveness of sin is a very important element in justification. All important and it's central in our justification, because there cannot be any justification with God or acceptance with God unless our sins are blotted out as a faith. Don't equate justification with the forgiveness of sin, because justification includes much more than the forgiveness of sin.

What is the central idea? What is the central meaning of justification? It is that we are accepted with God. And the blessed man is the man who realizes that forgiveness of sin is not sufficient. Yes, forgiveness of sin will, as it were, give you a clean slate.

It will blot out your transgressions. But that's not sufficient for acceptance with God. If we have any sense of God's justice, of God's holiness, we shall not be satisfied simply with the forgiveness of sin.

There must be something very much more positive. The positive thing is that we must be accepted in his sight. But there must be a positive righteousness to our account.

God cannot be satisfied with a clean slate. If I may use that figure, God will not be satisfied with a slate from which all sins are blotted out. God can only be satisfied with a full slate.

A full slate holds the credit of righteousness. To put it in other terms, God cannot be satisfied simply in order to accept them to his kingdom and credit. What is that full slate? What is that full quarter of righteousness? Oh, here is the grandeur of the article of justice.

Oh, how grand. And it is expressed in this text. In terms of the righteousness of God.

In Romans 1, 17, he says therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith. In the third chapter of this epistle, he says, Now a righteousness of God without the Lord manifested, being witnessed

by... In the tenth chapter of this epistle, he says, they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, referring to these Jews, they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. This I can be signaled to the Corinthians.

He says, He made to be sin for us that we might be made to righteousness of the Philippians. The third chapter states, Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the face of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. You see, that is what is central.

The righteousness of God. Now that doesn't mean the attribute of God's righteousness. The righteousness of God sometimes, of course, frequently refers to the attribute of activity in God, but that is not the righteousness of God.

Because it is a righteousness that is that is that is available for us. It's a righteousness in which we come to have property. Not having mine own righteousness, but that which is through the face of Christ, the righteousness in which we come to have property.

Do we not come to have property in the essential righteousness of God? Of course not. But we call the attribute of justice. But there is this righteousness of God in which we come to have property.

I'll come to that in the morning. But I want us to emphasize first of all that the only righteousness that is adequate to our situation of sinning, the only righteousness that measures up to the gravity, to the desperateness of our divine quality, that's the wickedness of our work. You see our righteousness, however good it may be, is human after all.

If I am justified on the basis of what I am, or on the basis of what I do, then after all my righteousness is human. And that measure up to the gravity, to the desperateness, and the grandeur of the great article of justification, is that we are justified by our righteousness, our divine righteousness. And that's what our righteousness that measures up to all the excesses of the blessed man.

And that righteousness of course is the apostle Paul in the first chapter of his epistle is the righteousness of his obedience. And because it is his righteousness, it's a divine righteousness. A righteousness that's not only one, but a righteousness that we can say with all reverence that wherever this righteousness is present, there cannot but be, there cannot but be acceptance of God, the righteousness of God.

And it is a righteousness that is onlyifiable and unifiable. And a righteousness that's not only, that's not only worth eternal life, but a righteousness that must accord to every person who is the beneficiary of it, eternal life in the presence and in the fellowship of God. Great reign through righteousness unto eternal life.

Now we have been dealing with the great fundamental question of religion, the basic religious question. It's not the only question within us. But it's the basic religious question of our acceptance of God.

And we cannot build for eternity. We cannot build except we stand honestly, firmly upon this one foundation. As this particular question is strong will be our that is answered according to that which then there is nothing for us but the blackness of darkness.

If it is answered in terms of the eye then there is for us the hope of eternal life. We stand upon that foundation that hell was not today. Here, my friends, is the blessing.

Here are answered by the apostles. We examine ourselves to the foundation in which we lay. That we examine ourselves as to the answer which we give to all ourselves as individuals to the great fundamental question.

Namely, our acceptance with God of life and our justification by Him. Do we meet the standard? Do we meet the criteria that the apostle enunciates in this chapter? These are the pertinent to the basic religious questions. They are questions which cannot be evaded.

They are questions which we must answer each one for himself as in the presence of God. They are at the tribunal of God. In the tribunal of our own heart of acceptance in God's presence.

O Lord, our God, we pray that Thou wouldst bless to us our meditation upon Thy Word. May it be mixed with faith in our hearts. May we receive it in faith and love.

Lay it up in our hearts and practice it in our lives. And may we be brought, each one of us, out of this boredom of sin and iniquity into the liberty and the glory of Thy children. That we may walk in the light.

That Thou art in the light. That the blood of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, we may be washed to cleanse. That we may give the evidence that we are not our own.

That we have been bought with a price. And that we may be glorified in Your

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