

Study Guide #5: Righteousness by Faith Alone

Introduction

If Jesus is our Substitute who lived a perfect life in our place and died the death we deserve in our place (see Explorer II, Study Guide #4), the question naturally arises as to how a person can make certain that Jesus did these things for him personally. This Study Guide seeks to answer that question.

Question #1: What do the terms *justification*, *grace*, and *gospel* mean?

Answer: *Justification* is a courtroom term in which a person is *declared* “not guilty,” according to Deuteronomy 25:1. In terms of salvation, justification also involves both (a) the removal of sin from one’s record *and* (b) the declaration that he is perfectly righteous (because Jesus’ life stands in his place). The Greek word for *grace* essentially means a “gift” or the act of being “gracious,” as in giving someone a compliment as a gift. Sometimes it’s the gift of God’s power to endure something (II Corinthians 12:9). Regarding righteousness or salvation, it is said to come by grace because no one can earn it (Romans 3:23; 4:16; Ephesians 2:5, 8). The Greek word for *gospel* means “good news” or a “good message.” In one sense, all of God’s truths are good news. But the New Testament particularly uses this word to describe the “good news” that Jesus has come and brought salvation to all who will accept it. In this sense, the gospel brings salvation (Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13).

Question #2: If righteousness is a gift from God, how does one receive it?

Answer: There are 2 fundamentally different answers to this question. Non-Protestant Christians (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, etc.) teach that God must make the believer perfectly righteous before He can declare him to be so, or otherwise God would be a liar. At the same time, they teach that righteousness is a gift from God. The idea is that it comes from God through the sacraments of the church, especially the sacrament of penance (the confessional) and the sacrament of Holy Communion. This is the reason these churches teach that the bread and wine of the Communion service become the actual, albeit mystical, body and blood of Jesus. By partaking of Jesus’ body and blood, the person is increasingly made more and more righteous.



Communion Emblems

This view of grace is called *infused* grace because it’s infused into the believer by his participation in the sacraments of the church, making the church the official channel of God’s grace. Then one receives the Holy Spirit through the sacraments, and his good works have meritorious value, also giving him more and more righteousness. [NOTE: They teach that good works outside the communion of the church are worthless.] However, since it’s recognized that almost no one is ever made perfectly righteous in this life,

purgatory (or something like it) must exist as the place where the soul goes after death, in which all remaining sins are eventually purged from the believer. When his sins are completely purged, his soul will enter heaven.

Question #3: What is the other fundamental view of how one receives righteousness as a gift from God?

Answer: The Protestant Christian view of grace is often called *relational* grace. In this view, when a person has a positive relationship with Jesus, His perfect righteousness is *imputed* to the believer—that is, it's put to his account. The believer is credited with perfect righteousness even though he doesn't internally possess it. This view says that this doesn't make God a liar because it's based on the timeless nature of God. As such, He knows that as long as we are faithful to Him, He will give us perfect righteousness (remove our sinful nature) at the Second Coming of Jesus (Philippians 3:20-21). In this sense, Romans 4:17 declares that God “**gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did**” (NKJV). Therefore, at any moment, a faithful believer is as good as already perfectly righteous in God's sight. This concept in relational grace is the reason that Protestant Christians generally don't view the church as the channel of God's grace, but only as the proclaimer and reflector of that grace. It's also the reason they deny the existence of purgatory.



Second Coming of Jesus

Question #4: Which of these 2 views (see Q. #2 & #3) is the correct one?

Answer: We accept the Protestant view of relational grace for 3 primary reasons. *First*, infused grace violates the principle of Jesus as our Substitute, because you don't need a Substitute if God is going to make you internally righteous before He saves you. *Second*, the existence of our sinful nature makes any effort, even those inspired, motivated, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to make a person perfectly righteous in this life impossible. Perfect righteousness requires absolute awareness at all times, and our sinful nature means we don't always have that. *Finally*, even when good works do come from the Holy Spirit's motivation and empowerment, the sinful nature contaminates them so that the Christian life does not make a believer more and more righteous. [NOTE: His character changes for the better, but that is not the righteousness necessary for salvation.] See Explorer II, Study Guide #3 to review the effects of the sinful nature.

Question #5: Do the Scriptures directly teach that righteousness (justification) is given as a gift apart from even sanctified good works—that it's imputed?

Answer: Yes. Below is just a representative sample of New Testament passages that teach this truth that righteousness or justification is a gift that's imputed (put to our account) apart from our good works:

- “...by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20, NKJV).
- “...the righteousness of God [is] apart from the law” (Romans 3:21-22, NKJV).
- “...a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28, NKJV).
- Righteousness is “imputed” to all “who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Romans 4:22-25, NKJV). [NOTE: *Imputed* means that which is credited to one’s account.]
- We are justified “by faith in Jesus Christ...and not by the works of the law” (Galatians 2:16, NKJV).
- “...no one is justified by the law” (Galatians 3:11, NKJV).
- “For He made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:21, NKJV). [NOTE: This is the Great Exchange in which Jesus takes our sin, and we take His righteousness.]

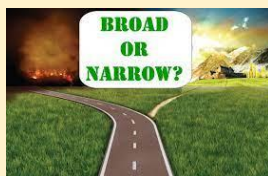
The overwhelming testimony of the New Testament is that relational grace best fits the evidence of how we receive God’s gift of righteousness and are justified before Him.

Question #6: Doesn’t James 2:24 contradict Paul when it says we are “justified by works, and not by faith alone” (NKJV)?

Answer: The book of James is not a theological treatise as are Romans and Galatians. Instead, James is exhorting believers to apply Christian principles to everyday practical life. This can be seen easily by reading the entire small book of James. His emphasis in chapter 2 is on the fact that good works always accompanies genuine faith. Thus, he declared that “**I will show you my faith by my works**” (v. 18, NKJV) and “**faith without works is dead**” (v. 26, NKJV). In other words, good works are the evidence that a person’s faith is genuine. Therefore, there is no conflict between James and Paul.

Question #7: Does the Bible teach that God will save everyone in the end?

Answer: The idea that God will eventually save everyone is called *universalism* and is definitely *not* taught in Scripture. The basic reason why universalism is false theology is that God is Love and Just (I John 4:8, 16; Job 4:17; Isaiah 45:21; Zephaniah 3:5; Zechariah 9:9; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; Revelation 15:3). He would be *neither* love *nor* just if He saved those who don’t want to be saved. It will be an act of justice *and* love to finally put an end to sin once for all, including those who insist on clinging to sin, because such persons wouldn’t be happy in heaven and the new earth. It will also be an act of justice to do so on behalf of those who don’t wish to live in a universe where sinners continue to live and bother the saints. The cancer of sin must eventually be eradicated, and that eradication will be both an act of love and justice. God’s character requires that conclusion.



Broad or Narrow Road?

The Scriptures plainly and sadly indicate that the large majority of people who have ever lived will be eternally lost. For example, Jesus declared that the gate that leads to eternal life is narrow and “**there are few who find it**” while the gate and road that leads to destruction is broad (Matthew 7:13-14, NKJV; cf. Luke 13:24). In another place, Jesus said that “**many are called, but few are chosen**” (Matthew 22:14, NKJV).

Question #8: Is it easier to be lost or to be saved?

Answer: On the one hand, it's easier to follow the natural inclinations of one's heart than to go against them. In that sense, it's easier to be lost. On the other hand, Jesus said that when He is lifted up (on the cross), **"He will draw all peoples to Myself"** (John 12:32, NKJV). In other words, the cross is a magnet that will draw everyone to Him unless they resist it. On the road to Damascus, Jesus told Paul that **"It is hard for you to kick against the goads"** (Acts 26:14, NKJV). People used an iron goad to prod oxen to speed up their walk. Kicking against the goads was a proverb that indicated that it's difficult to keep going against the stings in your conscience. Thus, one can say that it's harder to be lost than to be saved.

Question #9: How can babies and the mentally incapacitated be saved?

Answer: Since salvation obviously involves a conscious decision to enter into a relationship with Jesus your Substitute-Savior, babies, the very young, and those who are mentally incapacitated cannot do this. However, that doesn't necessarily preclude them from salvation. Perhaps God will make His decision on His foreknowledge of what decision each would make if he were able to make a decision. Perhaps He will mercifully choose to save all such persons. We just don't know. All we can say is that the Bible was given for normal people capable of making a spiritual decision. In this context, the Bible shows that God is extremely fair. Therefore, we must trust Him that He will make the decisions regarding these other individuals in the same spirit of fairness.



Baby

Question #10: Will those who have never heard the name of Jesus automatically be lost for an eternity?

Answer: According to the apostle Paul, every honest person has sufficient evidence both from the physical creation (Romans 1:19-20) and in their consciences (Romans 2:15) to know that there's a God and what is basic right and wrong. He also states that God will judge those, even if they don't know anything *specific* about God, according to the evidence they *do* have (Romans 2:14-15). Moreover, the apostle John states that Jesus is the **"Light which gives light to every man coming into the world"** (John 1:9, 14, NKJV). This means that anyone who lives up to the spiritual light that he has, no matter how little, is credited with following Jesus and will be saved. Therefore, the answer to the above question is "No," those who have never heard the name of Jesus or had the gospel proclaimed to them will *not* be automatically lost. At the same time, given human nature, it's not likely that many people who have never heard the name of Jesus will have chosen to live up to the little light that they had. Therefore, (1) we would expect that most such people will be lost, and (2) that's an important reason to proclaim the gospel around the globe.

Concluding Thought

The bottom line is that Righteousness (Salvation) is by Grace (a gift) Alone through Faith Alone in Jesus Alone to the glory of God Alone!