

SERMON: Justification: Maturity & The Family of God

GOOD Morning OIC,

JUSTIFICATION is the declaration by God that we are no longer guilty but we are made righteous on the basis of Jesus' death on The Cross to buy OUR eternal forgiveness. Today, we will see more details of how Paul describes that Christians who are Justified by Faith are given God's power to finish their lives with confidence in His plan; but also, a mutual love and a mutual dependence on the Family of God.

Let us start reviewing my last comment from my Message from **(Romans 15.15-39)** last week on June 9th titled **Justification: Maturity & Perseverance**. Paul's life of **Perseverance** itself is the main theme or focus for **Justification: Maturity & Perseverance**. That is why I attempted to bring out Paul's perseverance in Chapter 15 of Romans, and from the historical events in Paul's life around it in Chapters 21-28 in the Book of Acts. He persevered when God seemed to desert him to his enemies. He witnessed and preached everywhere even as a prisoner of Rome. He took whatever opportunity remained to him and shared Christ in Word and in deed. Paul kept working at his calling and God gave him the desires of his heart in God's way and time, as a prisoner in chains taken to Rome. I believe it is true that God puts, or gives into our hearts, the desires that He is determined to fulfill if we persevere and as Paul instructed in **(Acts 14.22)** ***“Continue in the Faith.”***

29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. Here Paul confidently expresses the anointing of the Holy Spirit that God gave him and that he knew was needed to fulfill his calling, *the fullness of the blessing of Christ.*

30 *Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,* This Apostle of Christ with a grand and great ministry that covered much of the civilized world of the 1st Century humbled himself, asking for intense prayer as he knew the power of corporate prayer. He was humble to admit that ***mutual dependence on the Family of God.*** For as Jesus said in **(Matthew 18.19-20):**

19 *“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 For where two or three have gathered together*

*in My name, I am there in their midst.” Then asking for than two to agree to a prayer request brings confidence to Our Father in heaven answering the prayer with a **YES**.*

(Romans 15.31-32) *that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; 32 so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.*

So Paul asks the Christians receiving his letter to pray in agreement with Paul, that is, *to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me*, regarding being *rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea*, that was the Anti-Christ violent Jewish sects in Judea. At first reading, it seems that the Father said NO to Paul! This is because we assumed God's YES would be Paul's untouched and unmolested passage through Judea. So you might say, “Pastor Bruce, Jesus promised that the Father in Heaven would say YES; but, Paul was not protected from the *disobedient in Judea?*” It is true, as I showed last week from the Book of Acts, Paul was beaten and manhandled by the Jews in Jerusalem. But God the Father did say YES! For God **rescued Paul from the violent Jews**.

God's means was not angels, or quieting a violent crowd of angry Jews; but with the Roman cohort of soldiers stationed in Jerusalem. As described in **(Acts 21. 31-34)** *31 While they {the angry Jews} were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. 32 At once he took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. 33 Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done. 34 But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.* So God did rescue Paul! God's sovereign plan including the promise about Paul to Ananias as we saw in **(Acts 9.15): 15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; Therefore to witness to Kings** was to be accomplished via travel as a prisoner and in particular to King Agrippa during Paul's trial in Caesarea.

32 so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.

What we say is sometimes just as important as what we do! Jesus said in **(Matthew 12.36-37)** *36 But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”* Paul never just wanted to fulfill “his” mission in “his own way.” I spoke last week about the freedom God gives His ministers, especially pioneer pastors and missionaries such as Paul,

who need creativity to bring the Gospel of Christ into different cultures. But, the main desire must be as Paul said in **(Romans 15.32)** *in joy by the will of God*. Hearing Jesus' voice, the Father's encouragements and the Holy Spirit's empowerment are more important than what might be called being **SUCCESSFUL**. **(Romans 15.33)** *Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen*. The Apostle Paul puts the Amen upon his prayer for the Roman Sheep of Jesus that he has been feeding in his long letter, later to be called a Bible Book of sixteen chapters.

As we end our weekly messages on the Book of Romans I would like to quote the *King James Study Bible (KJSB/Notes)* **“Romans has been called “The Constitution of Christianity,” “The Christian Manifesto,” and “The Cathedral of the Christian Faith.” It is noteworthy for being the most complete compendium of Christian doctrine.”** This is a good declaration of the importance to this Holy Spirit inspired Letter by Paul to the several churches in Rome in 57A.D. But the Lord Jesus wants me to add to this correct comment that the book of Romans is the most accurate description of the Knowledge of God, or Theology, for Christians. But it is so much **more than that!** It is the most knowledge in the Bible yet also filled with God's emotional communication, a ***Love Letter to Christians***. We know that knowledge alone *“puffs up”* into pride. As written in **(1 Corinthians 8.1)**: *we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant {puffs up}, but love edifies {builds up}*. Paul has given great emphasis on the Christian's need for Holy Spirit to empower and illuminate and actually cause Christians to overwhelmingly conquer the Devil and their own Flesh. Paul states over and over with the best accurate *knowledge of God, or Theology*, that the power, the power of Love, which causes knowledge to work or have affect for good is the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. In this *Love Letter* (this epistle to the Romans) the human author, aided by the Heavenly Author, “crossed every “t” and dotted every “i.” This may be like saying *no small mark (no stroke) in a Kanji character was omitted*, as some of my good Japanese friends might do when writing in a hurry. In the Book of Romans Paul has proclaimed **Justification: The Cross of Christ and the Christian Life: The WORD and The SPIRIT**.

Again from **(KJSB/Notes)** on **(Romans 15.33)** **“Amen brings the formal part of the epistle to a conclusion. All that remain are personal greetings and a word of warning.”** Again, this is a good note; but Paul was a man who had already counted himself dead for the sake of the Gospel, and, to be alive in Christ. He was sold out as a *love slave* to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit power given for everyday life. He could not separate who he was from what he believed, his *doctrine or theology*. We clearly see this in the following verses to both the Sheep of Jesus and his disciples for Jesus that he loved, and his unplanned comments from his heart to them. Paul's life was much more than doctrine.

The heading above this part of the Letter in the (NASB1995), **Greetings and Love Expressed**, is appropriate. **(Romans 16.1-3)** says: *1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; 2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.* Paul is giving his approval of several fellow ministers, co-laborers and evangelistic missionaries who he was sending to Rome, including Phoebe.

No exegesis or analysis is needed for these verses they are what they simply say; so I will simply read the Letter from **(Romans 16.3-16)**: *3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; 5 also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. 6 Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. 10 Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord. 12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. 15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.* A modern 20th Century paraphrased translation by a British Bible scholar reads **(Romans 16.16/JBP)** *Give each other a hearty handshake all round for my sake. The greetings of all the churches I am in touch with come to you with this letter.*

We who have spent much of our lives studying cultures of the Bible and the world, feel a touch of sadness for the loss of physical affection appropriate to friends and family. In the Ancient and Modern Jewish Culture children into adulthood continued to kiss their parents until separated by death. Many mid-eastern cultures have actually kept this Israelite/Oriental affection practice alive. Sadly, the parts of the Western World most affected by Christianity have lost this. Well, dear OIC Saints, I am not asking you to change too much, I hope; but I appreciate that many OIC Saints give pure and holy *hugs and handshakes*.

Now Paul shows he can't hide who he is or his calling as he expresses his love to old friends. **(Romans 16.17-20)** *17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. 18 For such men*

*are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. 19 For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. 20 **The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.***

This phrase, **in verse 17:** *those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned*, requires closer inspection. There are two points I see that may help us heed this teaching to *react* and not over-react from it.

For the 1st point, I have chosen this paraphrase from **(Romans 16.17-18/JBP)** *17 Now I urge you, brethren, **keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned**, and turn away from them. 18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.*

Dissension and Contrariness hinder and often destroy the Work of the Holy Spirit in the Churches of Jesus. A Christian's flesh is always fighting against the Holy Spirit inside of him, and too often against Jesus' Spirit in other Christians, especially if we are immature. As written in **(Galatians 5.17)** *For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.* Disagreement on what the Bible, thus the Lord Jesus, really has taught us may be the source of this. Many Christians have never put their whole life under the authority of the Bible as Paul instructed his disciple Timothy in **(2 Timothy 3.16)** *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; **Now there is a danger having one Bible Verse compete against another, but Holy Spirit wisdom from Christ, is needed in cases of Christians who consistently** cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned.* Thus, I refer to another Bible Verse.

The 2nd point, which could weaken the warning, but need not is as I preached from **(Romans 14.1)** regarding principles of conscience in the sermon titled **Justification: Maturity and Self-Denial:** *Now accept the one who is **weak** in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.* I also quoted *forbearing one another in love* from **(Ephesians 4.2/KJ21)**. I concluded one paragraph in my Message with: **“Of course, it is imperative in a permissive world, to know if either an *immature or mature Christian* acts abusively in sinning against another Christian or against the Church. In this case we must not be “passive” and “permit” {this behaviour},**

or be *forbearing one another in love*. Loving God's Word, Jesus, means there must be “action in love,” such as in the “active” voice verbs, to confront or rebuke, to bring such a Christian to repentance. But most *weak Christians* are those without strength in the Faith; but not without conscience or desire to live a holy life for Jesus.”

Pastor Bruce, how can we know if the person causing division should be *turned away from*? I will try to answer that question without canceling Paul's warning against a churchgoer who *cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned*. But also considering a *weak in Faith Christian* who does require patient instruction. The next verse in Paul's warning helps this exegesis and applied theology as it says in **(Romans 16.18)** *18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting*. The most dangerous divisive person displays a selfishness and also a charm like that of the Serpent himself, for Satan often appears in his children as an angel of light. This is from **(2 Corinthians 11.13-15)** *13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds*.

In my years of pastoral ministry, as a pioneer Home Missionary and Assistant Pastor in America and later as a missionary in Japan, I have had experiences with mentally unhealthy Christians. I have learned from experience and from my mentors in Ministry that *mental health* issues can hide the heart of a sincere follower of Jesus. The *angel of light “Christian”* shows no remorse upon hurting those around him. His heart is full of self and hate and bitterness. A Christian whose mental health, often emotional health only, has caused divisions often regrets their actions. As your pastor, I want to encourage you that I have many years of counseling experience including psychiatric issues. I also intend to encourage beloved OIC Saints not to be too proud against seeking such medical help from professionals. The human brain is a physical, not only a spiritual, creation by God. I often remind myself knowing my own frailties, from **(1 Corinthians 4.7/JBP)**. *For who makes you different from somebody else, and what have you got that was not given to you? And if anything has been given to you, why boast of it as if it were something you had achieved yourself?* **Again, the Holy Spirit anointing causes in even the most difficult situations God's fulfillment of (1 Corinthians 1.30)** *But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,*

(Romans 16.19-20) *For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. 20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.*

Paul again displays his confidence in these Roman Believers. In fact, they had a good reputation in far-away churches. Yet he gently reminds them of wisdom based on focusing on the goodness of God and His Word. Then, Paul being Paul, shows his hate of the Enemy who harassed and hindered Paul. Paul knew that Christians need to know that the day is coming when the bruised Serpent will be the crushed Serpent. Living by Faith makes the Day when Jesus returns to Judge the People and the Devil feel closer than the motion of a clock or timepiece. It is the Glory of Eternity just a *heartbeat away....20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.* Paul knew that the Enemy of the Church would have many defeats as Jesus will build His Church. Dear OIC Saints, there will be current victories of temporal crushing of Satan under our feet. Yet our knowing of the final victory, and *telling Satan* that it is coming, was one way that we *fight the good fight against him*. Living in the light of Eternity gives us inner strength when we know as in **(Habakkuk 2.14)** *For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* Paul didn't hide his heart and the battles in his spiritual life as he said farewell to his beloved friends in Rome.

I will read the following greetings which are clearly Paul's love and Pastoral Prayers and Amens interposed with his farewells.

(Romans 16.21-24) *The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*

21 Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

22 I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.

23 Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. 24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

I expect Paul struggled in closing his letter as I am struggling in closing this Sermon! How do you close such a glorious work in the Word of God through any imperfect man of flesh and blood? I can't know for sure how Paul felt, but I want to close by repeating Chapters 1-16 of the Book of Romans. But instead, I will only repeat the Main Theme: **JUSTIFICATION is the declaration by God that we are no longer guilty but we are made righteous on the basis of Jesus' death on The Cross to buy OUR eternal forgiveness.**

I will end my Message today with Paul's prayer and declaration to the Romans in verses 25-27, but I direct it to you Saints at OIC. I can't think of any way to improve upon such a prayer to close a Message:

Let Us Pray

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, *leading to* obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

REFERENCES

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