

1. Justification is the doctrine all of Christianity hangs upon

- A. Lose this and Christianity crumbles
Fail to understand this and you fail to understand what Christianity is all about
- B. Yet, if I asked the average Christian to explain justification, I fear they would fail miserably.
 - 1). That is a huge problem. We can misunderstand many things with little consequence
That's not the case here. To distort doctrine of justification will always lead to a distorted Gospel
 - 2). Therefore, it is possible that message we claim to have embraced in our salvation
May not have been a saving message at all
- C. Paul warns the Galatians – some will proclaim a message they call the Gospel – but is not
Ga 1:6–9 (ESV) I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁽⁷⁾ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁽⁸⁾ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁽⁹⁾ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Thought: What was causing this distortion of the Gospel in the Galatian church?
A misunderstanding of the doctrine of *justification by faith alone*

Transition: Let's look at why this doctrine is so important

- A. To do this we will have to dip back into last's weeks study with a bit of review

I. JUSTIFICATION NEEDED: WE ARE ALL GUILTY BEFORE GOD**1. Justification is necessary because we are all lawbreakers**

- A. We saw why this is important to know when we are witnessing to the unbeliever
 - 1). Because most unbelievers think they are good enough to get into heaven
 - 2). They believe that God will accept them because they try to be nice, they try to be sincere. honest
They are hard workers, good spouses, good parents etc.

Thought: They have their definition of what “Good enough to get into heaven” means

- A. But what is God's definition of “good enough” – that's what really matters
 - 1). It would be the same as righteousness = to be good enough would to be righteous
 - 2). Remember what righteousness is? = Moral perfection – earned by keeping God's law perfectly
- B. On the basis of that definition, who could stand before God claiming they deserve heaven? Nobody!
Ro 3:10 (ESV) as it is written: *“None is righteous, no, not one”*
Ro 3:12 (ESV) ... no one does good, not even one.”

Transition: “No one does good, not even one” – let's look at that a bit deeper

2. The difference between good on a human level and on a divine level

- A. That verse isn't saying nobody does anything good
 - 1). There are many who don't know God but do good things *on a human level*.
 - 2). They volunteer to in good causes. Give to charities. Reach out when others are in need.
 - a). That is wonderful, and we should be thankful for their efforts.
- B. But Paul, is talking about what could be considered good on a divine level.
 - 1). A goodness that could merit heaven.
 - 2). Romans 3 :12 makes it clear, there is nobody who does that kind of good
 - 2). Why? Because there is nothing done that doesn't have sin in it somewhere.
 - a). Nothing done that doesn't have self in it somewhere.

Point: So, while it may be good on a human level and very helpful.

A. It is not good enough on a divine level to earn eternal life.

It is still done by a person the Bible says this about

Ro 3:23 (ESV) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

B. The reality is – we’ve broken God’s law a thousand times and we are in trouble

1). Writing a check to a charity, serving as a volunteer in some good cause

Can’t overwrite the truth that we are lawbreakers and guilty before God.

2). Therefore, his justice demands that we must be judged

Ro 6:23 (ESV) For the wages of sin is death...

Point: Understanding that will cause us to see why justification is so necessary.

II. JUSTIFICATION DEFINED: A DECLARATION OF “NOT GUILTY” BY GOD

1. Justification is a legal term that comes right out of the courthouse

A. This is where the remedy for my guilt before God and alienation from Him must begin

1). It begins in the courtroom where God sits as judge and where I stand condemned by his law

B. If I am going to escape hell and go to heaven

1). I must be legally absolved from guilt. In other words forgiven of the sins I’ve committed.

2). And, I must be given a righteousness I don’t have

C. This is exactly what happens in justification.

1). At that moment a sinner embraces Christ by faith

God legally declares them to be righteous in Christ and acquitted from all sin and guilt.

Transition: Let’s put ourselves in a courtroom scene to get a sense of what happened

2. Illustrated in a courtroom scene

A. You are the defendant on trial – Jesus is the defense attorney (1 John 2:2 our advocate)

The devil (accuser of the brethren) is the prosecuting attorney (Rev 12:10)

B. You watch as the judge hears your case – devil presents one charger after another – sin after sin

Finally it comes time for the verdict – the judge picks up his gavel

It comes crashing down and to your relief the verdict rings out “Not guilty”

C. But here is the difference in this courtroom and the courtrooms of earth.

1). The case presented to the judge on your behalf was never to prove your innocence

a). It was accepted by all that you were guilty as charged

“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23)

2). There was never an argument against the devil’s accusations, they were all true.

a). You had sinned just like he said you did.

3). Your defense was based solely on the innocence of another.

a). It was argued that Jesus Christ had kept the law perfectly, he was innocent before the law

4). God, the judge, was willing to accept that in your place and declare you **“Not guilty”**

Point: You were declared to be righteous because Jesus Christ is righteous

A. We don’t go to heaven because we are good, we go to heaven because he is good!

B. So Justification is a statement by God your legal status with him has changed

1). From unrighteous to righteous, from guilty to not guilty.

2). A declaration by God this one who was lost and on their way to hell now enjoys a right standing with him that will never change.

Transition: That brings us to something we must see if we are going to have any peace and assurance

4. Justification is a legal declaration that is not based on any change in the sinner

A. Some believe this act of justification consists of God changing a person internally first.

1). Then, because of that internal change, the person begins to live a righteous life

2). Because they are now living righteously - God see that and declares them to be righteous

B. Therefore it becomes a salvation based on their performance rather than on Christ's performance.

Thought: While salvation does change us internally and radically and always results in a different lifestyle

A. We must see that justification is not based on that at all.

1). Justification is God declaring us to be right with him at the very moment we are saved

Before we've had any time to live out any change of lifestyle

B. Here is it: Justification is God declaring us to be righteous, even though he sees many things still sinful.

Question: How can he do this?

A. Because justification is based solely on what Christ has done *for us*

And it has nothing at all to do with what God has done *in us*.

John Murray's words are helpful: Regeneration (new birth) is an act of God in us; *justification is a judgment of God with respect to us*. The distinction is like that of the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon, when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. That is not what a judge does—he *gives a verdict regarding our judicial status. If we are innocent he declares accordingly*.

B. And we are innocent because we are "in Christ" the innocent one who never sinned once

1). So when God sees me "in him" he is able to declare correctly that I am "Not guilty."

a). That his law can find nothing that would keep me out of heaven – even though I still fail

Charles R. Swindoll: Justification is the sovereign act of God whereby He declares righteous the believing sinner-while he is still in a sinning state.

Turn: Ro 4:5 (ESV) And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

A. This verse says God declares the ungodly who believe (*see it "faith"*) to be righteous in his sight

1). IOW when you believe and are saved – you haven't changed yet – you were still ungodly

2). Therefore justification can't be on the basis of any morality, merit or works on your part.

B. God declares the sinner righteous when they place their faith in another's work

1). When they look away from self entirely and depend solely on the saving work of another

Transition: I'm really liking the way this sounds. But how does it all work.

A. This brings us to the glorious doctrine of substitution

1). Here we will see what God does in the books of heaven to change our legal status

B. Here is another theological concept we must understand for our spiritual wellbeing

III. JUSTIFICATION APPLIED: THE ACT OF IMPUTATION**1. Last week we saw that the law makes a double demand on sinners.**

A. It requires full obedience to its precepts. That is righteousness = 100% compliance to the law.

B. And, it demands full payment for every infraction of the law.

Thought: Saw that Jesus met both of those demands for all who would trust in him.

A. Through his life of perfect obedience to the law, he earned a righteous standing for us.

B. Through his sufficient death, he earned our forgiveness.

1). IOW He lived the life we needed to live, to earn heaven

and he died the death we deserved to die, because we couldn't live that life.

Transition: Now we need to see how His life and death actually affect us

- A. How God changes that legal status in the books of heaven, so that we are truly righteous before him.

The Doctrine of Substitution. 2 Cor 5:21

2 Co 5:21 (ESV) For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Intro: We're going to look at this verse by breaking it into two parts, then put it back together

2 Co 5:21a (ESV) For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin...

1. This doesn't mean that Christ became a sinner on the cross.

- A. The OT sacrificial system emphasized the lambs chosen to be sacrificed must be without spot or blemish.
- 1). I've heard some Bible teachers say, "that is because God didn't want your junk."
You have beautiful lamb and a deformed lamb so the deformed lamb is given to God
- B. It had nothing to do with God not wanting your junk
- 1). He established the OT sacrificial system to point to Jesus Christ that final sacrifice
 - a). The lambs were to be without spot or blemish to show
That Christ would die without one moral spot or blemish

Point: He could not die as a lawbreaker – if he did he was not righteous – then neither are we

1 Pe 1:18–19 (ESV) knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ⁽¹⁹⁾ *but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

- A. So it can't be saying Jesus became a sinner on that cross.
- 1). The truth is – He was holy on that cross as he was in heaven before he came to earth

2. What does "he was made to be sin" mean?

- A. It means - God treated him on the cross *as if he sinned*, even though he never sinned once.
- B. What we have here is a picture of divine bookkeeping. What the theologians call "imputation."
- 1). God took every one of our sins and transferred them from our account into his.
 - 2). Then God treated him as if he had lived our life and sinned our sin, even though he was sinless
 - a). As our substitute He paid the penalty of the law demanded for our disobedience

Isa 53:5-6 (NIV) ...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (6) We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Point: Now when you look at the believer's moral ledger in heaven, it is absolutely clean

- A. So the sin that demanded God's wrath was taken care of at the cross by my substitute
- 1). God no longer must judge me to be just, he has judged his son in my place.
- B. But, I need more than my sin being removed to get into heaven. I need to be righteous
- 1). And righteousness is a legal status earned by keeping God's law perfectly
By loving the Lord with all you are and your neighbor as yourself without any failure.

Transition: How many times have you heard "Nobody is perfect" – *fortunately there was one*

2 Co 5:21b (ESV) For our sake he made him to be sin *who knew no sin*,

1. See the righteousness there? He knew no sin

- A. Jesus came to earth as our new representative and *always* did what he should do
And never did what he shouldn't do. He never sinned once
- 1). Because of that, he earned a righteous standing
- B. We say salvation can't be earned - only partially true - can't be earned by us, was earned for us by him

- 1). He earned the righteous standing we needed to get into heaven.

Transition: Now watch how Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness

2 Co 5:21c (ESV) For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, *so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

1. We need to return to the thought of divine bookkeeping

- A. We've seen how God takes our sin and transfers it into Christ's account.

Then treats him as if he lived our life and sinned our sin.

- 1). Therefore, He receives the wrath I deserved.

- B. Now we see the second stage of this imputation.

- 1). God takes Christ's righteousness and transfers it into our account

Then treats me as if I had lived his life, as if I had obeyed the His law perfectly.

- C. As my substitute, he receives the wrath I deserved and I receive the blessings he earned.

- 1). Which would include acceptance with God and heaven as my eternal dwelling place.

Thought: Remember, last week I said we would be judged by the law. Here is the solution to that

- A. God is willing to accept Christ's perfect obedience in my place

So this becomes true of me: Ro 8:1 (ESV) There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

- 1). Why? Because I don't sin any longer? No! I still fail and so do you.

But Christ never failed once and God views me through His perfection.

- a). So the law of God can scan my life now and find only perfect obedience.

- B. It's what Martin Luther said, the justified saint is "Simul Justus et Peccator."

- 1). In our justification we are *at the same time righteous and sinful.*

- C. Righteous in Christ but I still fail at times in my walk, sometimes miserably.

- 1). But that failure doesn't change that righteous standing – Why?

because it is based solely on what Christ has done.

- a). It is linked only to his performance and not to yours.

Transition: Because we do still sin – we need to understand two theological concepts

- A. Both of these begin at the point of salvation

- 1). One determines how God views us legally - The other a process of growth we enter into

2. Justification and Sanctification

- A. Justification, as we've been seeing, is the legal side of salvation.

- 1). This is a one-time act of God where he declares us to be righteous in Christ.

- 2). It is a legal statement from the judge that we considers us to have obeyed his law perfectly.

- 3). This will never change because it is based on Christ's obedience and not our own

- B. Then there is sanctification.

- 1). A process of growth into Christlikeness that starts at salvation and changes continuously.

- 2). The normal pattern for the saved saint. Sanctification has peaks and valleys. Ups and downs

- a). Mr. Spiritual one moment, in car, praising God - singing "How great thou art"

- b). Then somebody cuts me off - The process of acting like Christ is challenged

- 1a). I can go from the heights of spirituality, to the depths of the flesh in a nanosecond.

- C. While justification will never change – stable as can be

Sanctification changes constantly – as unstable as water

Transition: But we must see the relationship between the two

- A. Does that failure in sanctification change the legal standing of being right with God?

Justification – Sanctification chart**1. Black line on the left titled “Compliance to God’s Law.”**

- A. Remember it takes righteousness to get into heaven, and righteousness is 100% compliance to God’s law.
 - 1). Any failure and you are not righteous, you are a lawbreaker. There are no lawbreakers in heaven.

2. Red line on the top titled “Christ’s Performance.”

- A. This shows that Christ’s obedience to the law was perfect.
- B. It is flatlined at 100% with no dips at all. Again, that is righteousness.
 - 1 Jn 3:5 (ESV)** You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, *and in him there is no sin.*

3. The green line on the bottom titles “Unbeliever’s Performance.”

- A. The unbeliever does comply with God’s law at all
 - Ro 8:7 (ESV)** For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.

4. The blue line in the middle titled the “Believer’s Performance.”

- A. This is that sanctification process we enter into at the moment of salvation – how we actually live
- B. This changes constantly – peaks and dips – Notice it never hits that red line required to get into heaven

Point: Here is the question I attempted to answer when I came up with this chart.

- A. How can a believer, like me, who still lives on that blue line – rest in the assurance of my salvation?
 - 1). How can somebody like me find any kind of lasting comfort?
- B. When that blue line is going up – I may feel some kind of assurance – doing pretty good with God
 - 1). But what about when it dips – that day you miss devotions and feel grumpy? Am I saved?
 - 2). Many believers – it is up and down – saved today – tomorrow don’t know
- C. So how can somebody like me, who lives on that blue line experience any rest? Any security?
 - 1). I must learn to look at the same thing God does, to determine if I’m fit for heaven.
 - 2). What does God look at? He looks at that red line alone! Christ performance not mine
- D. That blue line is important. It is evidence God has done a saving work in me
 - 1). It shows I’m no longer what I used to be. - What did I use to be? A green liner!
 - a). Down at bottom of chart = zero desire for God and zero compliance to his will
 - 2). Praise God His grace has changed that! Through His power I am changing, I am growing,
 - a). But I will never be perfect. How grateful I am for that red line – the perfection of Christ

Point: If you can learn to fix your eyes on the same thing God does – you’ll have peace and assurance

- A. If you’ll base your acceptance with God on the same thing He does – Christ’s performance
 - 1). You’ll be able to rest – hell will no longer be a tormenting fear

Transition: I want to look at one last thing – why some might struggle with truths like this

IV. THE PROPER WAY TO GREATER OBEDIENCE**1. These truths scare some people**

“If I truly believed my acceptance was based entirely on what Christ has done. And God looks only at that in determining my eternal state. That would just inspire me to sin. I’m afraid I’d just go wild. I’m the type that needs that fear of hell to keep my flesh in check.”

- A. You shouldn’t worry – understanding the amazing grace in this doctrine will do just the opposite
 - 1). It will lead to greater obedience NOT greater sin – obedience from the right motivation
- B. Fear and guilt are lousy motivators – they produce a half-hearted obedience that lacks joy
 - 1). The service of the slave – obeying only because he’s afraid to be beaten if he doesn’t

- C. The better way – learn the amazing things God has done for you – then you’ll fall in love with him
Isn’t that what John said? 1 John 4:19 (NKJV) We love Him *because* He first loved us.

- 1). John says our love for God is not a result of guilt or fear
 - a). It is a fruit of seeing how much he loves me
 - a). Seeing the incredible things he’s done for me in my salvation – breathtaking grace

Paul puts it this way: Rom 12:1 (NIV) Therefore, I urge you, brothers, *in view of God’s mercy*, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your *spiritual act of worship*. (NKJV translates it. “which is your *reasonable service*”).

- 1). Paul has written eleven chapters of breathtaking grace – *justification saturated words*
Finally chap12 - “In light of all that! It is reasonable, logical to give yourself to him entirely
Your obedience becomes an act of worship/devotion
 - a). Rather than a joyless, half-hearted duty that fear and guilt produces

Point: Don’t be afraid of what embracing these truths will do – you’ll fall in love with God

- A. When you fall in love with Him you will desire to obey as an act of worship
- B. Truths of grace don’t produce more sin in the believer – they produce more obedience
 - 1). As your Pastor I have no desire to fence in your flesh through beating you with fear
I do have a great longing to inspire your obedience by teaching you God’s grace

2. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is a grace saturated truth

- A. It tells us that everybody who places their faith in Christ and His finished work for them
 - 1). Will be given – as a free gift – His righteousness (imputation)
 - 2). From that point on God will view you as if you have kept His law perfectly
 - a). He looks at that red line and so should you

