

Salvation Belongs to the Lord (Justification – Part 2)

This month, our president was making comments to the media about Ukraine and his desire to see peace in that country. But then he went further to speak about himself and how this would be a very good thing to accomplish. And then he said something like, “I would love to go to heaven, it is something I am trying to accomplish.” And then, in this context he said that he is probably somewhere on the bottom of the totem pole in that regard, but something he wants to change. I am not questioning his motive or trying to give some kind of commentary on exactly what he meant by this, except that by doing something good, this may better his chances of heaven one day. I think this is the way most people in the world think. People want to do something GOOD and RIGHT, and when they do, maybe their good works will outweigh their bad works, and then God will accept them.

Well, this kind of thinking falls way short of how someone gets to heaven. But, there is some truth behind this kind of thinking. Remember Adam. God said, “*Obey me and . . . you will be right . . . your works of obedience both from you heart and in your actions will be GOOD . . . You will LIVE . . . You will have fellowship with Me . . . forever.*” God is commanding Adam to do something which is righteous. There MUST be obedience to the command of God for anyone to be SAVED, for anyone to be JUSTIFIED, for anyone to be RIGHT with God. And as we saw last week, Adam failed in his works of righteousness by breaking God’s righteous command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And from that moment, instead of righteous before God, He (AND ALL WHO FOLLOW) are unrighteous. We FALL SHORT of the glory of God as regards righteousness. So what does this mean? Let’s go back to Trump’s comments. He is trying to do something GOOD. Why? So that he may get to heaven, so that he may be right with God someday. But, he can’t! Why? He is a sinner by nature. This means that when he does something good (like broker peace in Ukraine), in his relation to God, he is still a sinner. A man could usher peace throughout the whole world, but this would not be good enough to change his nature, to do something good enough to get the righteousness of God to be justified.

This is why, if anyone is to be justified before God, he/she must be righteous . . . he must no longer “fall short” of God’s glory. Our question is not “*how can a man be made righteous before God, but how can a sinful man be made righteous before God.*” Well, there is good news. God makes a way for sinners to be made righteous, to be “just” before Him, to be saved. Look with me to Tit. 3:3-7: “**For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.**” This is who we are and what we do as sinners. Now look at v. 4: “**But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**” Now, if this righteousness is not something we can do through our own obedience with good works, then how can we be saved. I have two truths: 1)

Righteousness is declarative, and 2) Righteousness is given. In other words, God declares a sinner to be righteous. And, God gives a sinner the righteousness needed to be justified in his sight. I pray these truths will be made clear as we continue. For, there is nothing more important to the gospel of Jesus Christ, nothing more important to the character of God, nothing more important to which everything we think and believe about what the Bible teaches about how someone gets saved than these two truths about justification. So, let's begin!

1. Justification means God declares a sinner to be righteous. In other words, if you are justified before God, it is because God has "declared" you to be righteous. Our best picture here is a courtroom. When someone commits a crime and stands before the judge, he/she will either say, "guilty" or "not guilty" based on law. If a man is accused of stealing, he must go to a court, evidence must be given, and then at the end of the trial the judge will declare him "guilty" or "not guilty." If he is guilty, he will be punished accordingly. If he is not guilty, he will go free. In the same kind of way, this is what happens when we are justified before God. The eternal judge declares a sinner to be NOT GUILTY.

Let this sink in! If you are justified, it is because God the eternal judge has entered his courtroom and struck his hammer of justice, saying, "*You are not guilty. You can go free. There will be no punishments for you.*" Based upon principles of righteousness God says to you, "*You are not condemned as a criminal. You are justified before me.*" Now, I must ask, "*Do you see a problem with this declaration?*" Of course we do! Even this week in my quiet time, I read Prov. 17:15: **"He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord."** It is wrong to justify a guilty person.

Kids, what if your sister hits you in the nose and it starts to bleed. Then, you run to your daddy, who saw your sister hit you. And you cry out, "*She hit me. Look at the blood.*" And your dad says, "*Yes, I saw the whole thing.*" Well, let me ask, what should he say to your sister? If he just, he will say something like this: "*You will be punished. You will be spanked and you will have to stay in your room for the rest of the day. And, you will have to write 100 times, 'I will not hit my brother in the nose.'*" And you would be satisfied and say, "Ok, that is justice, that is the right thing to do." But, what if your daddy looks at your sister and says, "*You are not guilty*" . . . when everyone knows she is.

Do you see the problem here? How can a guilty person be declared righteous when he is not . . . righteous. If we were to do this in our courts of law, our entire system of law would fail. Yet, this is EXACTLY what God does when he declares a guilty sinner to be "righteous." We cannot think of an example anywhere in the history of the courts of man where a judge can declare a lawbreaker to be not guilty. As one who steals you are thief. As one who kills, you are a murderer. As one who cheats on his wife, he is an adulterer. In every case guilty! And I think, as the Apostle Paul looked back upon the sinfulness of mankind and the sacrificial system of Judaism, he could not get over this truth. HOW CAN THIS BE? Yet, in Rom. 3:26 he says God is JUST to do this. And this is what the Bible teaches. God declares a person to be just.

Again, HOW CAN THIS BE? Let's think about this further in human terms. A judge may declare someone not guilty or not guilty. But, this same judge cannot give a person righteousness. Nor can he make a person who is not guilty unrighteous. He is merely making a judgment. What if I am accused of stealing and go to court and there I am declared "not guilty" based on the evidence. But, can this declaration of the judge make me a "righteous" person? No, it is only a declaration based upon law. This declaration does not make me "holy" and "good" as God is; it only declares, it only makes a judgment in that particular case. Think of a judge vs. a surgeon. An earthly judge can only declare, he/she cannot change me or make me/us into something we are not. But, a surgeon can operate on you and take out the cancer so that you are no longer cancerous, no longer sick. WELL, I believe this is what the Bible teaches concerning justification. (This is our first truth, now to our second truth.)

2. Justification means God gives a sinner the righteousness required. In other words, in order for a person to be justified before God, (to be saved) there must be MORE than a mere declaration. A judge cannot just say, "*you are not guilty*," when you have broken the law, you must also actually have the righteousness required to be declared "not guilty." You see, God must also GIVE you righteousness that he requires in order to declare you not guilty. Here, He must become MORE than a judge, He must also become the One who justifies. In other words, God does not merely declare a sinner to be righteous . . . He also gives the righteousness needed in order to be justified before him. Let's think back of our illustration about your sister hitting you in the nose. Your mother or father can't just say, "*not guilty*." And even if they could say this, the sister would still be guilty. Such is the same with God. "***All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God***" (Rom. 3:23). Brothers and sisters, this is all of us! We are all Adam's kin. We are all guilty. We FALL SHORT of the righteousness God requires. In order to be declared "not guilty" a sinner must actually have the righteousness God requires. IT MUST ACTUALLY BE OURS!

Now, turn with me to Rom. 3:21-26. Let me read vv. 21-23: "**But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it . . .**" What is this righteousness? Continue in v. 22: IT is "**the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .**" Why does he say, "*apart from the law*." It is because we ALL hit our siblings! Well, yes. But it is much worse. If you stand before the law of God, as a sinner, you FALL SHORT of keeping it. Even if you haven't killed someone, even if you haven't committed adultery, Jesus says, "***even if you think evil about someone, you've broken the law in your heart.***" "***Even if you've looked at a woman with lust, you've broken the law***" (Matt. 5:27-30). Brothers and sisters, WE CANNOT STAND in the courtroom of God as a guilty lawbreaking sin and be JUST.

And then Paul says, "***NOW?***" It is because, up until the cross of Christ, NO ANIMAL SACRIFICE was sufficient, no good work was good enough! Nothing in the Jewish system of sacrifice was enough to justify a sinner. But, NOW what has happened? In the person and work

of the Son of God, the Son of man we now have the righteousness of God. And this righteousness is given to all who have faith in Jesus Christ. How can this be? Well, keep reading in vv. 24-25: Paul says, we “***are justified by his grace as a gift . . .***” He doesn’t merely declare us righteousness, he also GIVES us the righteousness we need. (This goes back to our first truth today. God can actually declare you righteous and be just. Why? Because in Christ, you have what is required. He “declares” you as righteous. You actually have it in your possession. How? Keep reading in 24-25: “**through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood . . .**” Stop again. What does this mean? Propitiation? It means Christ laid down his life as a wrath appeasing sacrifice. Though He is sinless, as ONE who never broke the law of God, he lays down his life as a lamb to be slaughtered. And this is what He does on the cross. He enters the courtroom of God as One who is not guilty and he stands ALONE. And God says to him, “*you are guilty. You will be punished.*” And then he says to sinners, “*you are not guilty, you may go free.*”

HOW! When He is not guilty! Well, our answer is found in Rom. 5:15-19: “**But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.**” There is a lot here, but this text teaches us that sin and unrighteousness came down to us through Adam’s sin (we are sinners by nature). This is a mystery, but it is true! Adam’s sin is imputed (given) to us. But, for those who have faith in Christ, what happens? The righteousness of Christ is given to us, which is also a mystery, but true.

Now, back to Rom. 3:25-26: “**This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**” Brothers and sisters, this is how God can DECLARE us righteousness. If you are in Christ, God gives you what you need . . . righteousness. This is why God can be both JUST and JUSTIFIER. Do you see this? As eternal judge, He DECLARES you as righteous. Why, because He GIVES what is needed? There is NO BETTER NEWS to a sinful . . . unrighteous person than what I am preaching today. This is the doctrine of justification.

Ask: Do we have to understand all this to get saved. In the beginning, I don’t think so. When I got saved, I just knew that Christ died for my sins on the cross, and I believed in Him. I knew I was free. I knew I was right with God. I knew I was part of his family. As Gal. 4:6 says, “**And**

because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” It wasn’t until much later that I understood this doctrine of justification. I hope this is the case for some of you today. And if you are not a Christian, and you hear and understand these truths, I urge you to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. The Gospel of Christ is the best news! It is the **ONLY** way the righteousness of God comes down to sinners. In Christ we are declared righteous. And this is because this righteousness is given to us.

By way of application let me read 3 short portions of Scripture.

Rom. 5:1-5: **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”**

Titus 3:4-7: **“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”**

Rom. 8:1-4: **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit . . .”**

In closing, to bring us back to our larger topic of salvation. In this GREAT salvation that belongs to the Lord, in Christ, WE ARE JUSTIFIED, forever before Him.