

The Past Accomplishment of Christ's Work

Week 4 Theme: The Vindication of God's Righteousness

Description: It would be unjust for a holy God to withhold infinite punishment for sin. It would be equally unjust for God to accept sinners into everlasting blessing apart from restitution for their treason. Therefore, the death of Christ, the infinitely holy Son of God, is the most glorious act in history because it upholds in perfect harmony both the righteousness and the mercy of God.

Chapter 9

- Why do forgiveness and grace go together – Acts 10:43 (p.36)?
- Is forgiveness enough to make the world right (p.37)?
- How can the cross be both free and just – Eph. 1:7 (p.37)?

Chapter 10

- How is forgiveness different from justification (p.38)?
- What is the difference between sanctification and justification – Rom. 3:28 (p.38-39)?
- List the first reason why God's declaration that we are law keepers is not an abomination (p.39)?

Chapter 11

- List the second reason why God's declaration that we are law keepers is not an abomination – Rom. 4:5 (p.41)?
- What does the Bible mean when it says God made sinless Jesus to be our sin – 2 Cor. 5:21 (41)?

Chapter 12

- If we have been justified by faith, will we be condemned for our sin – Rom 8:31-34 (p.42)?
- How do we make sense of the world's condemnation and persecution (p.42)?

FIFTY REASONS WHY
JESUS CAME TO DIE

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FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS



*In him we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of our trespasses.*

Ephesians 1:7

*This is my blood of the covenant,
which is poured out for many
for the forgiveness of sins.*

Matthew 26:28

When we forgive a debt or an offense or an injury, we don't require a payment for settlement. That would be the opposite of forgiveness. If repayment is made to us for what we lost, there is no need for forgiveness. We have our due.

Forgiveness assumes grace. If I am injured by you, grace lets it go. I don't sue you. I forgive you. Grace gives what someone doesn't deserve. That's why *forgiveness* has the word *give* in it. *Forgiveness* is not "getting" even. It is giving away the right to get even.

That is what God does to us when we trust Christ: "Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43). If we believe in Christ, God no longer holds our sins against us. This is God's own testimony in the Bible: "I, I am he who wipes out your transgressions for my own sake" (Isaiah 43:25). "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

But this raises a problem. We all know that forgiveness is not enough. We may only see it clearly when the injury is great—like murder or rape. Neither society nor the universe can hold together if judges (or God) simply say to every murderer and rapist, “Are you sorry? Okay. The state forgives you. You may go.” In cases like these we see that while a victim may have a forgiving spirit, the state cannot forsake justice.

So it is with God’s justice. All sin is serious, because it is against God (see chapter 1). He is the one whose glory is injured when we ignore or disobey or blaspheme him. His justice will no more allow him simply to set us free than a human judge can cancel all the debts that criminals owe to society. The injury done to God’s glory by our sin must be repaired so that in justice his glory shines more brightly. And if we criminals are to go free and be forgiven, there must be some dramatic demonstration that the honor of God is upheld even though former blasphemers are being set free.

That is why Christ suffered and died. “In him we have redemption *through his blood*, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Ephesians 1:7). Forgiveness costs us nothing. All our costly obedience is the fruit, not the root, of being forgiven. That’s why we call it grace. But it cost Jesus his life. That is why we call it just. Oh, how precious is the news that God does not hold our sins against us! And how beautiful is Christ, whose blood made it right for God to do this.

TO PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION



We have now been justified by his blood.

ROMANS 5:9

*[We] are justified by his grace as a gift,
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

ROMANS 3:24

*We hold that one is justified by faith
apart from works of the law.*

ROMANS 3:28

Being justified before God and being forgiven by God are not identical. To be justified in a courtroom is not the same as being forgiven. Being forgiven implies that I am guilty and my crime is not counted. Being justified implies that I have been tried and found innocent. My claim is just. I am vindicated. The *judge* says, “Not guilty.”

Justifying is a legal act. It means declaring someone to be just. It is a verdict. The verdict of justification does not *make* a person just. It *declares* a person just. It is based on someone actually being just. We can see this most clearly when the Bible tells us that, in response to Jesus’ teaching, the people “justified” God (Luke 7:29). This does not mean they *made* God just (since he already was). It means they declared God to be just.

The moral change we undergo when we trust Christ is not

justification. The Bible usually calls that sanctification—the process of becoming good. Justification is not that process. It is not a process at all. It is a declaration that happens in a moment. A verdict: Just! Righteous!

The ordinary way to be justified in a human court is to keep the law. In that case the jury and the judge simply declare what is true of you: You kept the law. They justify you. But in the courtroom of God, we have *not* kept the law. Therefore, justification, on ordinary terms, is hopeless. The Bible even says, “He who justifies the wicked [is] an abomination to the LORD” (Proverbs 17:15). And yet, amazingly, because of Christ, it also says God “justifies the ungodly” who trust in his grace (Romans 4:5). God does what looks abominable.

Why is it not abominable? Or, as the Bible puts it, how can God “be just *and* the justifier of the one who [simply!] has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26)? It is not abominable for God to justify the ungodly who trust him, for two reasons. One is that *Christ shed his blood to cancel the guilt of our crime*. So it says, “We have now been justified *by his blood*” (Romans 5:9). But that is only the removal of guilt. That does not declare us righteous. Canceling our failures to keep the law is not the same as declaring us to be a law-keeper. When a teacher cancels from the record an exam that got an F, it’s not the same as declaring it an A. If the bank were to forgive me the debts on my account, that would not be the same as declaring me rich. So also, canceling our sins is not the same as declaring us righteous. The cancellation must happen. That is essential to justification. But there is more. There is another reason why it is not abominable for God to justify the ungodly by faith. For that we turn to the next chapter.

Why Jesus Came to Die:

II

TO COMPLETE THE OBEDIENCE
THAT BECOMES
OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS



Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:8

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.

Romans 5:19

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21

... not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.

Philippians 3:9

Justification is not merely the cancellation of my unrighteousness. It is also the imputation of Christ's righteousness to me. I do not have a righteousness that commends me to God. My claim before God is this: "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ" (Philippians 3:9).

This is Christ's righteousness. It is imputed to me. That means Christ fulfilled all righteousness perfectly; and then

that righteousness was reckoned to be mine, when I trusted in him. I was counted righteous. God looked on Christ's perfect righteousness, and he declared me to be righteous with the righteousness of Christ.

So there are two reasons why it is not abominable for God to justify the ungodly (Romans 4:5). First, *the death of Christ paid the debt of our unrighteousness* (see the previous chapter). Second, *the obedience of Christ provided the righteousness we needed to be justified in God's court*. The demands of God for entrance into eternal life are not merely that our unrighteousness be canceled, but that our perfect righteousness be established.

The suffering and death of Christ is the basis of both. His suffering is the suffering that our unrighteousness deserved. "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). But his suffering and death were also the climax and completion of the obedience that became the basis of our justification. He was "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). His death was the pinnacle of his obedience. This is what the Bible refers to when it says, "By the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

Therefore, Christ's death became the basis of our pardon and our perfection. "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). What does it mean that God made the sinless Christ to be sin? It means our sin was imputed to him, and thus he became our pardon. And what does it mean that we (who *are* sinners) become the righteousness of God in Christ? It means, similarly, that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, and thus he became our perfection.

May Christ be honored for his whole achievement in suffering and dying! Both the work of pardoning our sin, and the work of providing our righteousness. Let us admire him and treasure him and trust him for this great achievement.

TO TAKE AWAY OUR CONDEMNATION



*Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—
more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand
of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

ROMANS 8:34

The great conclusion to the suffering and death of Christ is this: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). To be “in Christ” means to be in relationship to him by faith. Faith in Christ unites us to Christ so that his death becomes our death and his perfection becomes our perfection. Christ becomes our punishment (which we don’t have to bear) and our perfection (which we cannot perform).

Faith is not the ground of our acceptance with God. Christ alone is. Faith unites us to Christ so that his righteousness is counted as ours. “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Galatians 2:16). Being “justified by faith” and being “justified . . . in Christ” (Galatians 2:17) are parallel terms. We are in Christ by faith, and therefore justified.

When the question is asked, “Who is to condemn?” the answer

is assumed. No one! Then the basis is declared: “Christ Jesus is the one who died!” The death of Christ secures our freedom from condemnation. It is as sure that we cannot be condemned as it is sure that Christ died. There is no double jeopardy in God’s court. We will not be condemned twice for the same offenses. Christ has died once for our sins. We will not be condemned for them. Condemnation is gone not because there isn’t any, but because it has already happened.

But what about condemnation by the world? Is that not an answer to the question, “Who is to condemn?” Aren’t Christians condemned by the world? There have been many martyrs. The answer is that no one can condemn us *successfully*. Charges can be brought, but none will stick in the end. “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies” (Romans 8:33). It’s the same as when the Bible asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” (Romans 8:35). The answer is not that these things don’t happen to Christians. The answer is: “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

The world will bring its condemnation. They may even put their sword behind it. But we know that the highest court has already ruled in our favor. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). No one successfully. If they reject us, he accepts us. If they hate us, he loves us. If they imprison us, he sets our spirits free. If they afflict us, he refines us by the fire. If they kill us, he makes it a passage to paradise. They cannot defeat us. Christ has died. Christ is risen. We are alive in him. And in him there is no condemnation. We are forgiven, and we are righteous. “And the righteous are bold as a lion” (Proverbs 28:1).