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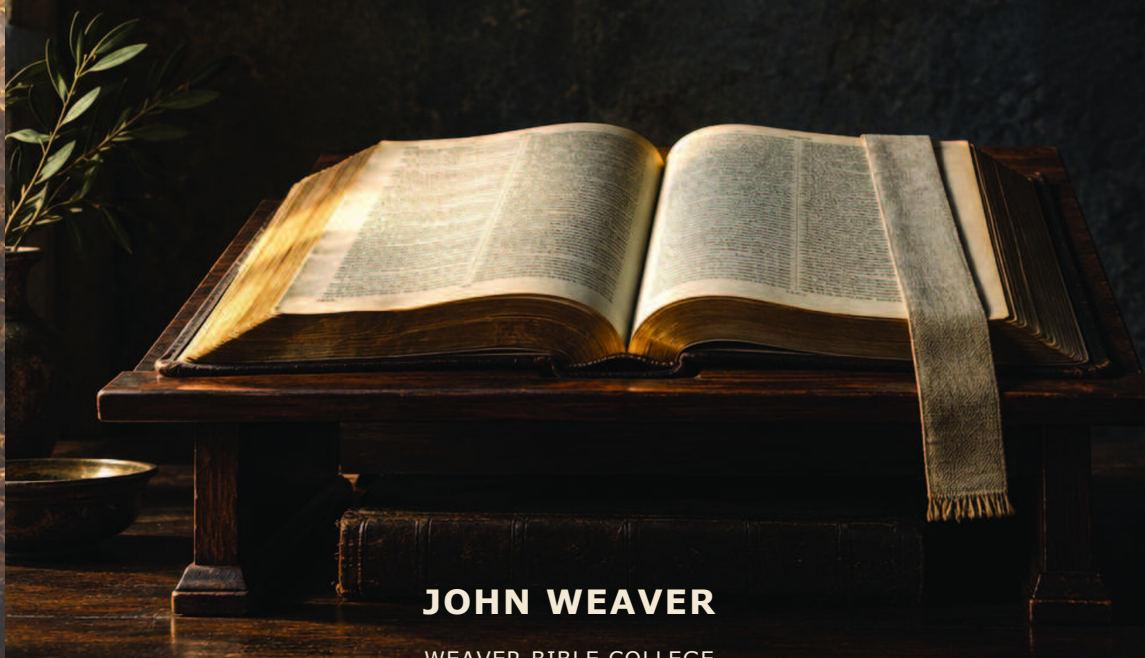
BIBLICAL STUDIES

Sola Fide

And Justification

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE

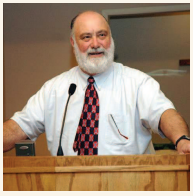
Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

ROMANS 3:28

Justification by faith alone concerns the ground of the sinner's acceptance before God. John Weaver examines faith, grace, righteousness, and the distinction between justification and the obedience that follows. These messages direct attention to Christ rather than human merit, asking readers to handle the biblical teaching with care.

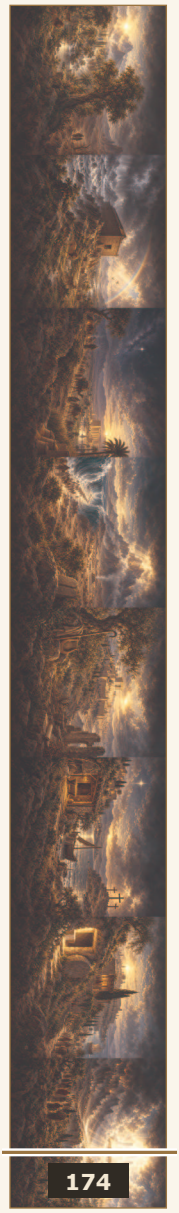
"Unless you realize your condition before God, you are never going to see Christ, and you are never going to want to understand the doctrine of justification by faith alone."

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.



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CHAPTER 1

Sola Fide And Justification

Part One of Two

Introduction: The Importance of Justification by Faith Alone

Romans chapter 5 and verse 1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Notice the phrase, "therefore being justified by faith." October is usually classified as Reformation month because the Reformation began in October 1517 with Martin Luther.

There were five solas designating the great foundational rallying cries of the reformers: sola scriptura, the Scriptures alone; sola gratia, grace alone; sola fide, faith alone; solus Christus, Christ alone; and soli Deo gloria, to God alone be the glory. The doctrine of justification by faith alone was the principle doctrine God used to bring reformers and many others out of Rome and into the light of Holy Scripture.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, said that the doctrine of justification by faith alone was the article of the standing or the

falling church. He meant that, to the degree a church understood and applied this doctrine, it could withstand heresy and the attacks of the devil. It was a standing church; but the church that did not understand it was going to fall. Therefore, if you want to know the spiritual health of any church, examine its understanding of justification by faith alone.

You may ask, "How can you say that?" The answer is found in the basic question of Job 25 and verse 4: "How then can a man be justified with God?" The answer is given in Romans 1, verses 16 and 17, by the Apostle Paul: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation."

"...to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." "For therein"—that is, in that gospel—"is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, so that the just shall live by faith." If there is any error on this point, it is far-reaching and fatal. This doctrine is the very heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One's view on justification also affects many other doctrines. It affects Christology, the doctrine of Christ; theology, the doctrine of God; soteriology, the doctrine of salvation; anthropology, the doctrine of man; the doctrine of the Trinity; and basic assurance. If you do not understand this point, you will be confounded and confused on many other doctrines as well.

Why is this doctrine important? It is important, first, for the glory of God, and second, for the good of man.

Why This Doctrine Matters

You will remember that when the birth of our Lord was announced in Luke chapter 2, the Bible said, "Suddenly there was with the angel a heavenly host saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'" God is glorified in the way He has ordained and designated salvation. Scripture reveals that God, in His works of creation, redemption, and providence, manifests His glory to His rational creatures. Therefore, Revelation chapter 4 and verse 11 says, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and power and honor, for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created."

God's honor and glory are involved. Where this doctrine is perverted or not understood, God is robbed of His glory. Secondly, it is important for the good of man—not only those who have already been called and justified, but also those who are yet to be called and justified.

A Definition of Justification

That is why Paul said, "For I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto everyone that believes." This doctrine of justification by faith alone has also been one of the major doctrines God used in the great revivals of the past. If you understand what has happened in time and history, you can see this basic doctrine involved in those great revivals.

Let me give you a definition of justification. You are not going to remember all of it, but I will give it to you once and then break it down. We will use this definition this Sunday and next Sunday to explain the doctrine. What is justification?

Definition of Justification

"Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners in which He pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in His sight, not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ by God imputed unto them and received by faith alone."

This definition provides the outline. First, we have the author of justification: justification is an act of God. Second, its source: an act of God's free grace. Third, its subject: sinners. Fourth, its essence: He pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in His sight. Fifth, its ground: not anything wrought in them or done by them, but only the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ.

Then we have the method of justification: "by God imputed unto them." Finally, we have its instrumental cause: "and received by faith alone." These points explain the definition.

James Buchanan, one of the early Puritans, said: "The best preparation for the study of this doctrine is neither great intellectual

ability nor much scholastic learning, but a conscience impressed with a sense of our actual condition as sinners in the sight of God."

You do not need great intellect or scholarship. What you really need is a conscience impressed with the fact of your sinful state and sinful condition before God.

Our Lord in Matthew 9:11–13 explained Buchanan's statement. When the Pharisees saw Jesus Christ eating with publicans and sinners, they said unto His disciples, "Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?" But when Jesus heard it, He said unto them, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that means. I will have mercy and not sacrifice, for I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

The Pharisees had no concept of their own sinfulness, wretchedness, and wickedness. Consequently, they had no desire for Jesus Christ. The publicans and sinners did. They understood their wickedness, and so they had a desire for Jesus Christ. "They that be whole need not a physician."

You are not going to get up in the morning feeling absolutely fabulous and wonderful and think, "I think I'll go by the doctor's office today and give him a hundred bucks just to say hello." Even if you wake up feeling kind of puny, you are not going to jump up and go to the doctor. You will go to your own medicine chest and try to talk to yourself. When that does not work, you still will not go to the doctor. You will call Francis or Gary, or someone else, and say, "Boy, I'm sick. I've done this and I've done that."

Gary may say, "When I was sick, I took a half a pint of mayonnaise and mustard and ketchup and apple cider vinegar and vinegar, and I mixed them together and got better." You will try that. When it does not work and only makes you sicker, then finally you break down and go to the doctor.

This is all the same. Unless you realize your condition before God, you are never going to see Christ, and you are never going to want to understand the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Let me give you two warnings, two caveats. First, we must understand that it is the object of faith that justifies, and not faith itself. The object of our faith is the Lord Jesus Christ and Him

crucified. The object of our faith is that which we glory in and have assurance in. Faith does not look to itself; it looks to Jesus Christ.

The second warning is this: It is true that it is faith alone that saves us, but faith never travels alone. It brings other graces, other gifts, and other works with it. But it is only faith that saves us.

The Nature of Justification as a Legal Declaration

What is it to justify? I have already given you a definition. When God justifies us, you have to understand that the word "justified" literally means to pronounce or declare righteous in light of the law. Justification, then, is a legal, judicial, forensic term. It is a term of the law, and it has to do with what we would call the legal side of salvation.

Since justification is a declaration, a pronouncement, you must also understand that it does not work any subjective change in our disposition. Why? Because it is wholly, completely, and totally outside of us, and all it relates to is our standing in light of the law. Justification does not change anything within a sinner; it is outside of the sinner. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that justification actually infuses righteousness into someone, which is totally and completely unbiblical, as I will show you momentarily. Justification does not do anything in us, although it does do something for us.

The term justification can apply to the act of God, or it can also apply to an act of man. Here is my illustration. David gets a big check, goes to the bank, cashes it, and walks out counting all his money. Unbeknownst to him, on the other side, there is a bank robber who grabs some money and starts running out, too. The alarm is sounded. The police come just as David is counting his money, and they collar him. They arrest him and say, "We've got you. You just robbed the bank." "No, no," he says. "I just cashed a check. This is my money." But they take him to jail. The attorney then gets an indictment against him. Now that he has been arrested and indicted, he is under the condemnation of the law. There is a jury trial, and David introduces his evidence: here is the check that he cashed.

Here is a copy of it, and here is the exact amount of money he had in his hand, et cetera. Then the jury returns and says, “This man happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. We find him not guilty.” The judge takes the jury’s finding, looks at David, and says, “I pronounce you not guilty. You are innocent.” Or he could say, “I pronounce you justified.” That means David is just in light of the standing of this law; he did not violate it.

When the judge pronounces David innocent, not guilty, or justified, it does not do anything inside of David. It might make him shout, but it does not really do anything within him. It is simply a legal declaration. That is what justification is in reference to salvation: a legal declaration by God. Justification refers to a change of status—from being guilty before God, condemned before God, and deserving the just penalty of a broken law, to being received into God’s favor, having been justified, and given a right to all His blessings in Jesus Christ.

Let me show you what I am talking about from the Bible. Look in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 25 and verse 1. I am trying to show you once again that justification is a legal act. It is a declaration. It is a pronouncement. God says, “If there be a controversy between men, and they come into judgment, that the judges may judge them, then they”—that is, the judges—“shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked.” Well, how do they justify the righteous?

They're certainly not infusing more righteousness into him. They're just declaring that he's just, that he's innocent, that he's not guilty. How do you condemn the wicked? By declaring that he is guilty, that he has done that which is wrong. So, in this passage, you can see very clearly, it's just simply a legal pronouncement.

I want you to understand, number one, justification is a legal pronouncement or declaration. Proverbs 17:15 says, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord." Now, "He that justifieth the wicked"—if the word "justifies" means to infuse righteousness according to Roman Catholic doctrine, then how could that be an abomination to God if you're infusing righteousness into a wicked man and making him more righteous? That wouldn't be an

abomination. But what is an abomination is when you take a wicked man that has violated law and then you say that he's innocent.

Or that you take an innocent man who's done nothing and say that he's guilty and he's wicked. So God says, obviously, that both of these are abomination to Him, and they are nothing more than just simply a declaration or a legal pronouncement. That's all they are.

Now, you're going to find the same truth in the New Testament as in the Old Testament. If you believe that somehow justification means infusing righteousness into someone, then you've got some real problems with this verse. In Luke 7, verses 29 and 30, the Bible says, "And all the people that heard him"—that is John, John the Baptist—"and all the people that heard him and the publicans justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John." Now watch verse 30: "But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him." Now look at verse 29: "And all the people that heard him and the publicans justified God." If you tell me that justification is the infusing of righteousness, how did these people infuse righteousness into God? God is already absolutely, perfectly righteous. No righteousness can be added to Him. No righteousness can be taken from Him. How did the publicans justify God? Here's how they justified God.

They declared and pronounced His words and counsel right and true, and they were wicked and wrong. They rejected the counsel of God against themselves. Luke 7:30 verifies that interpretation: “But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized with him.” So the Pharisees said, “No, no, no. God is not right. We are right. God is wrong.” They were rejecting the counsel of God. They were justifying themselves and were not justifying God.

Luke 16:14–15 speaks of the Pharisees again: “And the Pharisees also who were covetous heard all these things and they derided Him. And He said unto them, ‘You are they which justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts. For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.’” He said, “You are they which justify yourselves.” If justification means infusing righteousness into oneself, what would be wrong with that? Obviously, they were not making themselves more righteous. They

were simply declaring that they were righteous. They were saying they were not sinners, were not wicked, and had not violated God's law. "We are righteous," they said, but our Lord says that self-righteousness and self-justification are an abomination in the sight of God. Very clearly, justification is a legal pronouncing; it is a legal declaration.

Justification and condemnation are opposites; they are antithetical one to the other. Just as hot is the opposite of cold and big is the opposite of small, justification is the opposite of condemnation. Romans 8:33–34 says, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

"It is God that justifieth." "Who is he that condemneth?" Justification and condemnation are opposites. If a man is justified, he is not condemned; if a man is condemned, he is not justified. It is just that simple. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." If you are justified, there is absolutely no condemnation. The world, Satan, and all the hosts of hell cannot undo God's legal, forensic declaration of justification. It cannot be undone, controverted, or disannulled. The answer to our guilt and the answer to our condemnation is justification.

Justification is the passing of a sentence in favor of a person, by which the reward prescribed by the law is given unto him. It is a declaration of the judge.

Distinctions: Justification vs. Regeneration and Sanctification

Justification, regeneration, and sanctification are each different things. It is true that those who have been justified have also been regenerated and/or sanctified, but they are absolutely and totally different. They are not one and the same.

Justification differs from regeneration, although they are inseparably connected. You really cannot have one without the

other. Justification is an act of God the Judge. Genesis 18:25 asks, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Regeneration is an act of God the Father. James 1:18 says, "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth." Thus, regeneration is an act of God as Father, while justification is an act of God as Judge.

Regeneration gives me a place in the family of God; justification secures me a standing before His throne. Regeneration is internal, since it is the implantation of divine life into the soul. Justification is external, since it is the imputation of Christ's obedience and righteousness to my account.

In regeneration, I am drawn in repentance to the Father's house. In justification, I am given the best robe that fits me for His presence. Although justification and regeneration differ—they are not the same thing—there is no such thing as a justified, unregenerate person, nor an unregenerate, justified person. Anyone whom God justifies, He regenerates; anyone who has been regenerated is justified as well. They differ, but they are not the same.

Justification and sanctification are inseparably connected, but they differ. Sanctification is moral and experiential, while justification is legal and forensic. Sanctification results from the operation of the Holy Spirit within me; justification is based upon what Christ has done for me, outside of me. Sanctification is gradual and progressive, but justification is instantaneous and immutable. I never will forget what one preacher friend said many years ago: "God saves you so fast, you can't even talk about it in the present tense. You can't even say, 'I am being saved'; you have to say, 'I have been saved.'" That is about the truth.

Sanctification admits degrees and is never perfect in this life. Justification is complete and admits no increase or decrease. There is no saint more justified than another saint. If David has been saved for ten years and I have been saved for fifty years, I am still not more justified than he is. The Apostle Paul, as great as he was, is not more justified than we are. Justification is absolutely complete. It cannot be increased, and it cannot be decreased. You are either justified or condemned. It is that simple.

Sanctification concerns the state of the sinner, while justification concerns the standing of the sinner. Sanctification produces a moral transformation of character; justification is a change in legal status. Although justification differs from sanctification, the Bible knows nothing about a justified, unsanctified man, or an unsanctified, justified man. They go together, inseparably connected, but they are different.

When you confuse justification, regeneration, and sanctification, you not only pervert the Gospel and deny God His rightful glory, but you also confuse and confound the saints. Justification is God's act in remitting the sins of wicked men and accounting them righteous in His sight, freely by His grace through the work of Jesus Christ. We are not justified by our works, not by any stretch of the imagination. We are only justified by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The first point is the author of justification. Justification is an act of God; it is the work of God and God alone. Man cannot justify when it comes to salvation. God can justify in that area.

The Author of Justification: God

Although justification is an act of God, it is ascribed to all three persons in the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

When you study theology and come to the doctrine of the Trinity, you will encounter two terms: the ontological Trinity and the economical Trinity. The ontological Trinity is derived from the Greek word ontos, which actually means "being." The ontological Trinity is the logical order of being: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. That is the logical order of being—Father, Son, Holy Spirit. That is the ontological Trinity.

The economical Trinity is how God works. When you study the Scripture, you will find that everything is out of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. The Father is the originator, the Son is the funnel or the tunnel, and the Holy Spirit is the one who does the application. Thus, everything is out of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.

Consider Romans 8:33: “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.” That is God the Father. Look also at Romans 3:26: “To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness, that He”—that is, God the Father—“might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” In this passage, God is called the author of justification. Romans 3:30 says, “Seeing it is one God who shall justify the circumcision by faith, the uncircumcision through faith”—one God. In each of these passages, justification is attributed to God the Father. The Bible says that it is one God who shall justify both the circumcision and the uncircumcision.

Acts 13:37 then attributes justification to God the Son: “But He”—that is, Jesus Christ—“whom God raised again saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” We are talking about Jesus Christ. The passage continues, “And by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Notice the words “by Him”: by Jesus Christ, those who believe are justified from all things. Thus, this passage says that Jesus Christ is the author of justification.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verses 9–11, the Holy Spirit is here mentioned as the author of justification. Paul writes: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” This passage makes clear that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God, yet some of these people were washed, sanctified, and justified. Justification is an act of God, but it is an act of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

Now, if you will listen to me I'm going to give you three sentences and explain this for you. Number one, God the Father justifies as He declares or pronounces us righteous. Number two, God the Son justifies as He imputes His righteousness to us. And number three, God the Holy Spirit justifies us as He clears up our titles and seals us

unto the day of redemption. So, only God can justify. Justification is an act of God.

Now, I want to cover my second point. I'm still going to go back to my definition. Justification is an act of God's free grace. So the second point is the source of justification.

The Source of Justification: Free Grace

Now, I want you to look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 3. And if you would go ahead and turn to John 15. Romans chapter 3 and go ahead and find John 15 in your Bibles because we'll be turning there next. So look at Romans chapter 3 if you would and verse 24. We're talking about justification being an act of God and now the source is God's free grace. "Being justified freely by His grace through

the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Now, notice, if you would, the word "freely"—"being justified freely by His grace." When we read the word "freely" or we hear the word or the words "free grace," we normally do not really think of what they actually mean. We more normally just think, well, the word "free" means that which is gift. So, if David said to me, "Brother Weaver, if you will hang around at five o'clock, I'll buy your supper." And he buys my supper. And so, I look at Steve and say, "Hey, I got a free meal." Now, what do I mean by that? I mean two things. Normally, I mean, number one, it didn't cost me anything, and number two, it was a gift. Now, I use that illustration just to tell you that it's not what is meant by free grace. That's how we normally think about it. The Greek word for "freely" here is dorean, d-o-r-e-a-n, is how we would spell it in English. And it actually means "freely" or "without a cause."

Now, go in your Bibles to John chapter 15. John 15 verse 24, look what our Lord says. John 15 verse 24, He said, "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin. But now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father. But this cometh to pass that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'"

When He says in verse 25, "They hated Me without a cause," the Greek word translated "without a cause" is dorean, the exact same word translated "freely" in Romans 3:24. What does it mean when

our Lord says, "They hated Me without a cause"? You have to remember that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, the holy, sinless Son of God. He was perfect God and perfect man and still is. There was nothing in Jesus Christ that merited, drew forth, or earned their hatred. He was sinless and perfect.

He never did anything wicked, wrong, or vile. He never lied to them, misrepresented, stole, or beat them. They hated Him freely, without a cause. There was nothing in Him that earned, merited, or drew forth their hatred. So when the Bible says, "Being justified freely by His grace," it means there is nothing in us that merited, earned, or drew forth God's grace. There was nothing in us that constrained God. God did not look down and say, "Oh, those poor, rotten, dirty sinners. I feel so sorry for them. I think I'll just have mercy." That would mean there was something in us constraining God.

The truth is that everything in us would repel the grace of God. We were sinners, wicked and vile; we hated Him and His law, and did everything contrary to Him. God, in His pure grace, came to us when we could never deserve or earn it. Even if you were to turn absolutely perfect right now, never sin again, and serve God completely and faithfully for the next one hundred years, you could still not deserve it. If you did so for ten thousand years or throughout eternity, you still could not deserve it. Anything you can earn and deserve is not grace; it is works. God therefore moved upon us in free grace. We could never bring it forth: there was nothing in us to draw it or merit it.

Romans 5:20–21 says, "But the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness." And that is so wonderful.

If grace is reigning, that means grace is on the throne and is sovereign. It comes at God's pleasure, not ours. There was absolutely nothing in us that constrained or drew forth the grace of God. It was pure, undeserved grace. Anyone who glories in anything other than free grace is unbiblical and unscriptural, because it was only grace that came to us.

Now, in what way is justification an act of free, unmerited grace toward sinners? I am going to give you three answers. Think with me. It was pure grace that God was willing to accept a substitute or a surety in our stead. You and I owed Him the money. We were the ones who had sinned. We owed God because we violated His law.

Let me draw you a picture. Suppose David came to me and said, "I need $10,000. I need it now and badly. I can pay it back in thirty days." Suppose I had it, and I loaned it to him for thirty days. The thirty days passed, then forty-five days, and David still had not returned my money. I came to him and said, "I want my money, and I want it now. If you do not give it to me within six hours, I am going to beat you within an inch of your life. I will beat you to a bloody pulp. I will hurt you. I will break your arms and legs. You will be in the hospital. I want my money. Do you understand?"

Steve overheard me and said, "Do not hurt him. I will give you the money in his stead." I looked at Steve and said, "Who are you? Get out of here. You did not borrow any money from me. You do not owe me anything. He owes me."

I could say, if Steve says, "Well, here's the money he owes you," I could say, "David, you better thank God. Because I'm willing to receive a substitute. I'm willing to receive a surety in your stead." In other words, he bailed you out; he kept you from getting what you deserved.

The point is this: God did not have to accept a substitute, but He did. He was willing to have a substitute pay our debt. So it was pure grace that He was willing to do that. Secondly, I must point out that it was wondrous grace—not only that God was willing to accept a substitute, but that God Himself provided that substitute.

If you look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 3, notice verse 24: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood." Who set forth Jesus Christ? God the Father did. God the Father set forth, pushed forward, His own Son and said, "Here, here's My substitute."

Do you remember Galatians 4, verses 4 and 5? "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a

woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Notice: God sent forth His Son. It was pure grace that God was willing to accept a substitute, wonderful, amazing grace that He provided a substitute, and pure, wondrous, amazing grace that Jesus Christ willingly came as our substitute.

Do you remember Hebrews chapter 10, verses 6 and 7? He said, "In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, 'Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God.'" Do you remember Philippians 2? "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." It is absolutely amazing grace that Jesus Christ was willing to come and suffer and bleed and die in our place.

Applications of Justification

So we can actually sing truthfully, "O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be! Let Thy grace, Lord, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee." If we understand God's grace, it should bind us more effectually, because God had mercy upon us as well as grace.

Applications: Rejoicing in God's Justification

Remember, I have told you, first, that God is the author of justification, and second, that the source of justification is God's free grace. I want to deal mainly with the first point: God is the author of justification. Do you realize that there are a lot of people who are counting upon their works to get them into heaven? They think somehow, some way, their good deeds are going to balance out their evil deeds and that they will make it in. Or some will say, "Well, I've served Him for so many years and surely He's going to let me in," or, "I've preached for this many years."

You remember that passage in Matthew 7? What did He say? "Many that day shall say, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy

name? And in Thy name cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?' Then shall I profess unto them, 'Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity. I never knew you.'"

There are a lot of people who think that somehow their works are going to get them in. Listen to me carefully: If God is the author of justification, it does not matter what a man thinks, believes, or desires in this sense of the word. If God does not justify him, he is not justified. He is still condemned, no matter what he believes and no matter what he thinks. If God is the author, He is the only one who can justify.

That means that men must throw themselves at the mercy of God through Jesus Christ and beg Him for His justification, or else they will forever be condemned, because God, and God alone, is the author of justification. Secondly, if God is the author of justification, it is a declaration that none can alter or cancel. There is no Court of Appeals. God Himself is the Supreme Court Justice, and He is the Supreme Court. None can go beyond Him. So when God justifies, that individual is justified. The Bible says in Romans 8:33, "It is God that justifieth." In the next verse it says, "Who is he that condemneth?" It does no good for anyone to condemn those whom God has justified.

If you have been justified by the grace of God, it does not matter if men lie about you and slander you. It does not matter if the devil attacks you. Nothing can change God's forensic, legal declaration of justification. If the devil and all the hosts of hell, every wicked man that has ever lived, that is living, and shall live, could join hands together and try to overthrow God's declaration of justification, it would not work and could not work, because God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He is God. There is plenty of room to rejoice in the fact that once God justifies us, there is none that can condemn us.

Look in Romans chapter 8, beginning with verse 29: "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called. And whom He called, them He also justified. And whom He justified, them He also glorified." In other words, if God has justified you, you

are going to end up glorified. Nothing is going to change that—not one thing. It is a declaration that none can alter or change. And if God is the author of justification, it is a declaration founded upon truth and reality. God is not going to do that which He condemns.

You remember that passage we read earlier in Proverbs 17 and verse 15: "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord." God is not going to justify the wicked. It is true that we were wicked, but He makes us righteous when He pronounces us justified. I'll explain that next week. God is not going to condemn the whom He has justified, nor is God going to justify a wicked man. So, you can marker down, if God justifies us, it is a declaration based upon absolute truth and absolute righteousness.

That means you have grounds to rejoice in your justification. Finally, if God is the author of justification, it has to be an act solely based upon the grace of God. Why? Because each of us has foully revolted against God. We have transgressed, broken His law, and violated every principle in the book. We are iniquitous, wicked, ungodly, and undone. Our only hope is in the pure, wondrous, amazing grace of God. If God had not been merciful to us and extended His grace, we would still be condemned, lost, and undone. But we can glory in the fact that God is gracious and faithful. Justification is an act of God's free grace. He gives us His mercy, and we need to rejoice and glorify Him.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your grace and Your mercy. We pray that You would help us, build us up in the most holy faith, and help us understand this important and glorious doctrine, that we might honor Thee, worship Thee, and praise Thee. Give us, Lord, an understanding heart and an understanding mind. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Sola Fide And Justification

Part Two of Two

Introduction and Review

Let's begin by looking at Romans 5 and verse 1. And this is so lofty: that it is faith alone and justification. Romans 5 verse 1 says, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let me take just a few moments and review last week's message on part one. I pointed out how justification is indeed a legal, forensic term. It is, in fact, a declaration of the law court. It is the declaration of a judge. I also pointed out from Deuteronomy, Proverbs 17, Luke 6, Luke 16, how that it is simply a pronunciation. It is a declaration. And I showed how that even used in human terms, it is still just simply a declaration.

It has nothing to do with infusing righteousness into anyone. It is a term of the law courts. I also pointed out that there is no such thing as a justified unregenerate or unsanctified person. It is true that

justification, regeneration, and sanctification differ, but all those who are justified have been regenerated and sanctified as well. Those things always go together, although they are separate and different.

Now, the definition that I've tried to give you is a very simple one, yet this definition can be found in the Bible. It could also be found basically in the Westminster Confession of Faith, in the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith, the Old London Confession of Faith. All you have to do is look up justification by faith and you're going to find something similar. Sometimes it might be more extensive, but it's going to say, in essence, the same thing. So here it is.

Definition of Justification

Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which He pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in His sight, not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Jesus Christ, by faith imputed unto them and received by faith alone. This definition summarizes justification by faith.

The Author and Source of Justification

Last week we looked at two points. First, we saw the author of justification. Justification is an act of God, and the Bible ascribes it to all three persons of the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. God the Father justifies us by declaring and pronouncing us justified. God the Son does so by imputing His righteousness, and God the Holy Spirit does so by sealing us and our lives unto the day of redemption. Thus all three persons in the Godhead are given the act of justification.

Then I pointed out that justification is an act of God's free grace. That was the source of justification: free grace. Free does not simply mean that it does not cost us anything, or that it is a gift. It means far more than that.

In John 15:25, our Lord said, “They hated me without a cause.” The Greek word there is dorean, the same word used in Romans 3:24: “being justified freely by His grace.” Jesus Christ is God, perfect and sinless. There was nothing in Him that drew forth or

merited their hatred. They hated Him freely. Likewise, in justification, there is nothing in us that drew forth or merited the free grace of God. We did not earn it or merit it. It is not that we merely needed it; God gave it to us freely.

In fact, the Bible tells us that we have everything to our demerit. We were sinners, vile, wicked, and undone. Therefore, in 1 Peter 5:10, God is called the God of all grace. When God comes to us in grace, it has absolutely nothing to do with what we are in and of ourselves, what we have, or what we have done. In Isaiah 43:25, God said, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out all thy transgression for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." Psalm 106:8 says, "Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power to be known." God saved us for His name's sake.

We cannot look for one moment for anything in us or anything around us. The only thing that we can look for is the free grace of God. It is the only reason and the only motive that He should ever save us or take even notice of us at all. We are justified freely by His grace, even without a cause. God did not justify us or save us because we needed saving. Someone says, "Why did God save you?" "Well, I needed to be saved." There are a lot of people that need to be saved who are not saved. Therefore, we have to look only to the grace of God.

In Titus 3, verses 3 and 5, Paul wrote: "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But after the kindness and love of God our Savior toward men appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His own mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ."

Then he says, "That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Even all that we were, we are justified by grace. Justification is an act of God; there is the author. It is an act of God's free grace; there is the source.

The Subjects of Justification: Sinners

The third one is the subjects. Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners. You have to ask this question: Who is it that God justifies? Let me answer that question from three different perspectives, or three different standpoints. Since you're in Romans, look in Romans 8 and verse 33. The Bible asks, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies." Thus, from the standpoint of God's eternal decree, those whom He justifies are His elect. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? God's elect are those whom He chose in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world. He said clearly in Ephesians 1 verses 3 and 4, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we

Those whom He chose should be holy and without blame before Him in love. So He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Paul is in prison and, writing to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse 8, says: "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." Then, in verse 9, he says: "According to the power of God, that is God in His power, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our own works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

So from the standpoint then of God's eternal decree, those whom He justifies are His elect, those whom He gave grace in Christ Jesus before the world ever began. The first statement is from God's eternal decree. The second statement concerns the book of Acts, chapter 13, and the standpoint or the perspective of the effects produced by the work of the Holy Spirit, those whom He justifies

Those whom God justifies are those who believe. Acts 13:38–39 says, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man—that is Jesus Christ—is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

From the standpoint of God's eternal decree, those whom He justifies are the elect. From the standpoint of the quickening of the Holy Spirit, those whom He justifies are those who believe. Concerning Abraham, Romans 4:23–25 says, “Now it was not written for his sake alone—that is for Abraham's sake alone—that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification.” Thus, justification is also viewed from the standpoint of the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit.

Those whom God justifies are those who believe. Now, thirdly, from the perspective and standpoint of what we are in and of ourselves, look in Romans 4:5: “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness.” Note in this verse that God justifies the ungodly. He does not justify those who try their best, those who are moral and upright and self-righteous, or those who try to make their good works outweigh their bad works. No. He justifies those who are absolutely destitute of righteousness and have absolutely nothing in themselves. They have no acceptable works, no good deeds, and nothing to recommend them. They are nothing but pure, unadulterated sinners.

John Owen, commenting on this verse, said, “To say, ‘He who worketh not is justified through believing,’ is to say that his works, whatever they may be, have no influence in his justification, nor hath God in justifying him in respect to them. Wherefore he alone who worketh not is the subject of justification, the person to be justified. That is, God considers no man’s works, no man’s duties of obedience in his justification, seeing we are justified freely by His grace.” Obviously, then, he is saying that He justifies the ungodly.

Romans chapter 4 gives two wonderful illustrations in this chapter: Abraham and David. Do you remember where Abraham was when God found him and saved him? He was in Ur of the Chaldees. He was an idolater. He was not seeking after God. God sought him. And what about David? David was a whoremonger, an adulterer, a murderer. And God saved him and justified him. So here

in Romans chapter 4 is basically what you and I would call a divine miracle.

Here is the very heart of the gospel. Here God justifies the ungodly and allows the ungodly to enter into a new and blessed relationship with Himself. The Apostle Paul said it like this in 1 Timothy chapter 1, in verse 15: “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” Think about this for a moment. The gospel of Jesus Christ and the mercy that God shows us through Jesus Christ differs from all other false gospels and all other religious systems. The gospel of Jesus Christ does not hold out hope for the self-righteous. It does not hold out hope for those who do their best. It does not hold out hope for the Pharisee. It holds out hope for the vilest and the most despicable sinner. All these other religions say, “If you do this and you do that, well, you have hope.” No, no, no. The message in the gospel of Jesus Christ is that there is hope only for sinners. There is a beautiful hymn.

We used to sing it all the time in our church. The title of it is "Come, Ye Sinners." Let me give you the stanzas. Listen carefully. I'm going to just repeat the chorus one time. But here's the first stanza: "Come, ye sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore; Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity joined with power." Now the chorus would be this: "I will arise and go to Jesus, He will embrace me in

His arms; in the arms of my dear Savior, O there are ten thousand charms." So here's the second stanza: "Come, ye thirsty, come and welcome, God's free bounty glorify; true belief and true repentance, every grace that brings you nigh." Third stanza: "Come, ye weary, heavy laden, lost and ruined by the fall; if you tarry till you're better, you will not come at all. Let not conscience make you linger, nor fitness fondly dream; all the fitness He requireth is to feel your need of Him." And that's true.

The Essence of Justification

Jesus Christ came to save sinners. Who, then, are the subjects of justification? Sinners—the ungodly. Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners.

The Essence of Justification: Pardon and Imputed Righteousness

The essence of justification concerns that which it consists of, that which makes it up. Justification is the act of God's free grace unto sinners in which He pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in His sight. In this definition, there is both a negative and a positive. The negative is that He pardons all our sins, because our sins were against Him and against His law. The positive is that He accepts and accounts our persons righteous in His sight.

I've often heard preachers, and well-meaning Christians witnessing to family and friends, ask, "Do not you want your sins forgiven so that you may go to heaven?" But forgiveness of sins does not take anyone into heaven or bring anyone into the presence of God. Forgiveness of sins may keep you out of punishment, but it would not get you into God's presence. To enter God's presence, you need more than forgiveness of sins; you need an absolute positive righteousness.

The justified sinner sustains a twofold relation to God. First, he is a responsible creature born under the law. Second, he is a guilty criminal who has transgressed and violated that law. The fact that he violated God's law and is a criminal does not cancel his responsibilities. There is a vast difference between responsibility and ability. In the fall, man lost his ability to please God, but he did not lose his responsibility. Man was made under the law; therefore, he has responsibility. He is a sinner; therefore, he has sins. He is a criminal.

Justification answers these things. In justification, we are made free from all our guilt and condemnation through the work of Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:13 tells us, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for as it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.” The curse under which we stood has been removed by the person and work of Jesus Christ. He washed away our sins, removed our guilt, and removed our condemnation.

The second thing is this: in justification there is a reception into God’s favor. The essence of justification is not merely that He

pardons all our sins, but that He accepts and accounts us righteous in His sight. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, the Bible says, “For He—that is God the Father—hath made Him—that is God the Son—to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” And in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “But of Him—that is of God the Father—of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification.”

Jesus Christ in His person and work has paid all my debts. But He has not only paid my debts; He has discharged my responsibilities fully as well. My lawgiver is my law fulfiller. God can therefore righteously be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus Christ, because in justification He not only pardons our transgressions, but accepts and accounts us righteous in Jesus Christ.

How can God do this when Scripture and our experience show that we are ungodly and wicked in ourselves? Here is the ground of justification: it is an act of God’s free grace unto sinners, in which He pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in His sight—not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ. There is a negative and a positive. The negative is that it is not for anything wrought in us or done by us.

The Ground of Justification: Christ Alone

I am going to deal with that negative first. You remember Titus 3:5: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His own mercy He saved us.” The apostle said in Galatians 2:16, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no man be justified.” Romans 3:28 says, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”

Our works could never be meritorious. We can never earn salvation. No one has ever been saved by keeping the law, and no one will ever be saved by keeping the law. Why? Because the law demands three things of every individual: personal obedience,

perfect obedience, and perpetual obedience. No one has ever rendered to the law that which it requires except Jesus Christ.

Suppose that each one of us, from this moment on, became absolutely perfect—perfect in thought, word, and deed—and never sinned again from now until the day we died. Would that take us into the presence of God? No. What about the sins we committed before we became perfect? Obviously, no one can be saved by the law. A fallen creature, a depraved man, cannot give the law what it demands. Our best is absolutely nothing but failure. For He said in Isaiah 64:6, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all of our righteousnesses are filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

It is therefore impossible to be saved by the law. Paul said in Galatians 3:21, “Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law that could have given righteousness, then verily—or given life—then verily righteousness would have been by the law.” If there had been a law given that could give life, righteousness would have been by the law. If you can be saved by law, any law, then Jesus Christ died in vain. That is Paul's argument right there.

There is another negative in this definition: not by works done by them or works that are wrought in them, not for anything wrought in them. Simply stated, we are not justified because of repentance, faith, regeneration, or anything wrought in us. We are not justified because we believed. It is true that we receive this blessing by faith, but faith is not the ground of our justification.

What, then, is the ground of our justification? Not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ. The ground of our justification is wholly, totally, and completely outside of ourselves. It is found only in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is not Christ plus. It is not Christ and. It is Christ alone. It is Jesus Christ, period.

When we speak of the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, we refer to everything about Jesus Christ: His virgin birth, His sinless life, His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension in heaven, and His intercession. Hebrews 13 speaks of this work:

“We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.” If you go back to the types and emblems, then you have no right to Jesus Christ. “For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.” Then the passage says, “Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.”

Jesus sanctifies the people with His own blood. We are justified and declared righteous because the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to us in this work. God does not set aside His law; He keeps and honors that law. That is why Romans 3 says that He might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

So, when we are justified, the ground is only the person and work of Jesus Christ. But how does God do that? We know that we are sinners, and we know that Jesus Christ is righteous. How, then, does God do that?

The Method of Justification

The Method of Justification: Imputation

Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which He pardons their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in His sight, not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed unto them.

So, how does God justify us? The answer is by imputation. If you do not understand imputation, then you do not understand salvation. If you do not understand imputation, it is impossible to be sound in the faith. The word impute, which occurs frequently in our Bible, especially in the New Testament, literally means to credit to someone's account.

We use the word impute today in a different sense. Lorraine is downtown shopping and sees a beautiful dress costing two hundred dollars. She has only fifteen dollars, but she wants the dress, and it is the only one in her size. Other women are coming into the store, so

she reaches into her purse, pulls out her plastic card, and says, “Charge it.” When you charge something to someone's account, that is imputation; that is exactly what the word means.

Do you remember in Philemon? Onesimus was a runaway slave. He had stolen from Philemon and fled to Rome, where he was thrown into a dungeon. In the providence of God, the Apostle Paul was in the same dungeon. Paul preached to him, and he was converted. Then Paul sent him back to Philemon. In Philemon 1:18, Paul says, “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee aught, put that on my account.” What did he say? Impute it to me. Charge it to me. “I'll pay it when I come again. Put that on my account.”

There are only three acts of imputation in the Bible. First, there is the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity. Second, there is the imputation of believers' sins to Jesus Christ. Third, there is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers. It is easy to prove the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity. Romans 5:18 says, “Therefore as by one offense judgment came unto many,” and verse 19 says, “For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners.”

But I can make it simpler than that. In fact, verse 12 is very simple. Verse 12 says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." How can I prove to you that Adam's sin was imputed to his posterity? The answer is because everybody dies. That should be obvious and very plain.

Now, when it comes to the imputation of believers' sins to Christ and Christ's righteousness to believers, remember that verse I quoted earlier in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 21. Notice what the Bible does say: "For He—that is God the Father—hath made Him—that is God the Son—to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

Before I explain that, let me give you a quote. Listen carefully: "Christ was not made sin by the infusion of depravity, nor are we made righteous by the infusion of holiness. Though personally holy, our surety the Lord Jesus Christ did, by entering our law place, render Himself officially liable to the wrath of God. And so though

personally unholy, we are by virtue of our legal identification with Christ entitled to the favor of God. As the consequence of Christ's being made sin for us was that the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all, so the consequence of Christ's obedience being reckoned to our account is that God lays righteousness upon all them that believe. As our sins were the judicial ground for the sufferings of Christ, by which sufferings He satisfied justice, so Christ's righteousness is the judicial ground of our acceptance with God, by which our pardon is an act of justice and in which our justification also is an act of justice."

When the Bible says, "For He—that is God the Father—hath made Him—God the Son—to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him," this verse teaches imputation. Now remember what I told you earlier: Jesus Christ is perfect man and perfect God.

Jesus Christ is sinless. Jesus Christ agreed to be our substitute and our surety through the eternal covenant. We were given to Christ, and we are identified with Him. So when Christ came in our place, there was a legal, judicial obligation upon Him by assuming suretyship and substitution for us.

The way to explain it is this: If Gary needs to borrow money, but the bank will not let him have it without a cosigner, and he asks me to cosign the note, I agree. Gary signs his name, and I sign mine. If Gary does not pay, who do they come after? Me. Because I became a surety and a substitute for him. If he cannot pay, I am still the surety; I am still the substitute.

Jesus Christ entered into a legal, judicially binding covenant with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, and He came in our place.

Suppose this pen represents all our sins. Here we are, unholy, ungodly, condemned under the wrath and curse of God, and here is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law. He lived a perfect, holy life. He gave the law what it demanded: personal, perfect, perpetual obedience. He then suffered in our stead and satisfied the wrath, justice, and holiness of God.

Why did Jesus Christ suffer? He was personally innocent, yet judicially or legally guilty, because God took our sins and imputed them to Jesus Christ. He charged them to His account. Then God the Father took this perfect righteousness, which God the Son earned, and imputed it to our account. He can forgive our sins because they are paid for, and we can be in the presence of God because we have a perfect righteousness given to us through Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that this is imputation. In Romans 4:1, the Apostle Paul asks, “What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?” The answer is that he found righteousness through imputation. Verse 11 says, “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.” Romans 4:22 says, “And therefore it was imputed unto him for righteousness.” Romans 4:24 says, “But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

The framework of imputation is the eternal covenant spoken of in Hebrews 13:20, entered into between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit before the world began. God the Father gave God the Son a people; the Son agreed to die for those people and redeem them; and God the Holy Spirit promised to regenerate and convert them. That is the eternal covenant mentioned in Hebrews 13:20.

Now understand the poem and song written by Horatius Bonar: “Upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die; another’s life, another’s death, I’ll stake my whole eternity.” The second stanza says, “Not on my tears which I have shed, not on my sorrows which I have known; another’s tears, another’s grief, on these I rest and rest alone.” Our whole focus is upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. The method of justification is by imputation, so that God can be just and the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus.

The Instrumental Means of Justification

The Instrumental Means: Faith Alone

The instrumental means of justification is faith. Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which He pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in His sight, not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Jesus Christ, by God imputed unto them and received by faith alone.

The one little word “alone” makes the difference between truth and error. Faith alone is the instrumental cause, or means, of justification. A man is justified in faith, through faith, and by faith, but never on account of faith, because faith is not the ground of justification. The person and work of Jesus Christ are the ground for justification. We may be justified in faith, by faith, and through faith, but not because of our faith.

Faith is something wrought in us. It is neither the ground nor the substance of our justification, but simply the hand that receives the divine gift offered to us in the gospel. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:9, “And be found in Him, not having a righteousness of mine own, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” In Romans 3:22 he said, “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.” Again, Romans 3:28 says, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Thomas Goodwin asked, “How are we justified by faith?”

Having given a threefold negative answer—and here is the negative answer: not by faith as a joint cause with works, which the Romanists teach; not by faith as an act of grace in us, which the Arminians teach; and not by faith that receives the Spirit's witness, as the antinomians teach—he turns to the positive answer. Faith justifies only as an instrument which God has appointed for the apprehension and application of Christ's righteousness.

When we say that faith is an instrument of our justification, we do not mean that faith is an instrument wherewith God justifies, but the

instrument whereby we receive Christ. Christ has merited righteousness for us, and faith in Christ is that which renders it meet in God's sight that purchased blessings be assigned. Faith unites us to Christ, and, being united to Him, we are possessed of all that is in Christ, so far as it is consistent with our capacity of receiving and God's appointment in giving. Having been made one with Christ in spirit, God now considers us one with Him in law.

What Thomas Goodwin is saying is that we receive our justification and salvation by faith alone only because God ordained and appointed faith. If God had not ordained faith, faith would have been insufficient; it would have done nothing.

The Westminster Larger Catechism asks, in question 73, “How does faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?” Its answer is that faith justifies “not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works which are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, was imputed to him for his justification, but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and His righteousness.” Again, the Westminster Confession says that faith alone grasps what God gives.

Why does the Bible speak of being justified by faith, when faith never travels alone? If God gives you faith, a multitude of other graces always accompany it. The answer is that faith is the only grace that is totally receptive. Faith is nothing more than an outstretched hand saying, “Give, Lord, please give, Lord. Here I am. I'm ready to receive.” It is the outstretched hand that receives Christ as He is fully and freely offered in the gospel.

Stephen Charnock, another Puritan, said it like this: “And therefore it is observed that our justification by faith is always expressed in the passive and not in the active. We are justified by faith, not that faith justifies us. The efficacy is in Christ’s blood. The reception is in our faith.” Literally, what this means is that we are simply beggars with outstretched hands. The outstretched hand is faith. It is faith that God has ordained, which apprehends and applies Jesus Christ. The only reason faith works is because God ordained that.

Suppose I am starving to death. I have done without food thirty-nine and a half days; I am very weak and emaciated. David Price comes, bringing a great, heavy bowl full of milk and cereal. He says, “There you go, big boy. Eat up. Help yourself.” I am so weak that I cannot pick up the bowl and get it to my mouth. I am afraid that if I fall into it, I will be unable to lift my head and might drown. What good is that nutrition doing me? I cannot get to it. Then David gives me a spoon. I dip the spoon into the bowl, eat, and am revived. Would it not be foolish to say the spoon saved my life? The spoon did not save my life; the milk and cereal did. The spoon was only the means of reaching the life-saving nutrients.

Faith saves only because faith apprehends Jesus Christ, who is life. Faith is a means to receive Jesus Christ. When God gives us saving faith, He gives us other graces as well, and real, genuine saving faith works. Most people can quote Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” But they completely misverse it: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath foreordained that we should walk therein before the foundation of the world.” Created unto good works. Good works always follow real, genuine, saving faith.

When you read the Bible, you find expressions relating to faith: great faith, strong faith, little faith, and weak faith. How much faith does it take to get saved? Have you ever thought about that? Is my faith sufficient?

Suppose this phone were a miracle-working phone. Suppose this community had a horrible virus, a terrible virus, and once you caught it, you died. But this phone emanated a certain frequency that, if you came in touch with it, you would live. Here is somebody who has been sick for forty days, another who has been sick for twenty days, another for only a day, and a man who has just gotten the virus within the last ten minutes. All of them are dying, but everybody knows that if they touch this phone, they will be saved and healed. The man who has just gotten the virus runs, grabs the phone, and hugs it, and he is healed. The individual who has been sick for forty days can barely move and can scarcely touch it. How

many are healed? All of them. It was not the force with which they touched it; it was simply that they touched it.

You remember the woman who had the issue of blood. She said, "If I can but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be made whole." That is all it takes. You remember the serpent in the wilderness: "Whosoever looketh upon the serpent shall live." Some might could stare for hours; others might only could take a glance because they were so sick. But if you looked, you lived.

If you have faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, whether it is great faith, strong faith, weak faith, or little faith, it is still faith. You apprehend Jesus Christ and receive Him by faith alone. Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which He pardons their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in His sight, not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed unto them and received by faith alone. So, life today: faith alone. Justification is by faith and faith alone. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee.

We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth, justifying faith, and so great salvation. And Lord, we pray for those on the prayer list. We remember James and Effie as they travel; Jeff Heath; Franklin Sanders' family and Cindy's family; Dan Miller's family and Jack Gordon's family. For each one who is suffering, we ask Your blessing and help. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

Source Notes

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