

9. JUSTIFICATION (PART ONE)

ROMANS 3:19-4:6 AND 4:20-5:1

INTRODUCTION: JUSTIFICATION AND THE REFORMATION

Martin Luther (1483-1546): "the doctrine by which the church stands or falls"

"I had certainly wanted to understand Paul in his letter to the Romans. But what prevented me from doing so was... that one phrase in the first chapter: "the righteousness of God is revealed in it" (1:17). For I hated that phrase, "the righteousness of God", which I had been taught to understand as the righteousness by which God is righteous, and punishes unrighteous sinners... Although I lived a blameless life as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner with an uneasy conscience before God. I also could not believe that I had pleased him with my works. Far from loving that righteous God who punished sinners, I actually hated him..." (From Luther's *Autobiographical Fragment*)

Question: What is "justification"?

1. JUSTIFICATION IS A LEGAL DECLARATION THAT WE ARE RIGHT WITH GOD

(a) Key words and definition

- Justify – Justification – Righteous – Righteousness – Upright
- = "declared by God the judge to be in-the-right with him."

(b) Justification is NOT a work that God does IN us

(c) Justification is a legal declaration

- forensic / judicial / legal
- Bible examples – Deut. 25:1, Luke 7:29

(d) Justification is God's declaration that we are right with Him

- Romans 8:33-34
- J.I. Packer, "God's justifying decision is the judgement of the Last Day, declaring where we shall spend eternity, brought forward into the present and pronounced here and now. It is the last judgment that will ever be passed on our destiny; God will never go back on it, however much Satan may appeal against God's verdict." (J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, p165)

Question: Who does God declare to be righteous?

2. GOD JUSTIFIES THE UNGODLY

(a) We are totally unrighteous and deserve condemnation

- God's majestic holiness... our deep sinfulness
- Human judges must never justify the ungodly (Proverbs 17:15)

(b) God DOES justify the ungodly

- Romans 4:5, 3:19-24

Question: HOW can we be declared right?

3. CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS IMPUTED TO US

(a) God gives righteousness – we do not justify ourselves

- justification is NOT:
 - us saying sorry to God. It's not our confession.
 - us trying to excuse ourselves before God.
 - any religious exercise we perform, however good it may be
- it is a gift:
 - Romans 1:17, 3:21-22, 5:17, 10:3
 - Philippians 3:9
- Luther: "alien righteousness"

"I was in desperation to know what Paul meant in this passage. At last, as I meditated day and night on these words... I began to understand that 'righteousness of God' as that by which the righteous person lives by the gift of God; [that] by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'the righteous person lives by faith'... This immediately made me feel as though I had been born again... From that moment, I saw the whole face of Scripture in a new light... This passage in Paul became to me the very gate of paradise." (from Luther's *Autobiographical Fragment*)

(b) Christ's righteousness is imputed to us

- **Christ's righteousness = active and passive obedience**

- **Is reckoned to my account = imputed**

My sin is imputed to Christ... his righteousness is imputed to me

Not "just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned"!

"God cannot but accept into his favour those who are invested with the righteousness of his own Son." (John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied, p124)

- **In the context of union with Christ**

- **Key Bible verses**

Romans 5:18-19

- Adam's disobedience → makes many sinners

- Christ's obedience → makes many righteous.

2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Link Question: To whom is Christ's righteousness imputed?

4. CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS IMPUTED TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE

- (a) faith alone: the heart of the Reformation**

- (b) justification is by faith alone – it is not by works**

Galatians 2:15-16, 3:8-9, 5:4-5,

Philippians 3:8-9

Romans 1:17, 3:22-30, 4:3-5, 4:16, 4:23-24

- (c) why it has to be by faith alone:**

faith alone fits with grace alone

nothing inside us can deal with our problem

5. APPLICATION: WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD

- Romans 5:1
- “From that moment the whole face of scripture appeared to me in a different light... this passage in Paul became the very gate of paradise for me.” (Martin Luther)
- *Simul justus et peccator, semper justus et peccator*
“At the same time righteous and a sinner; always righteous and a sinner”

6. HOMEWORK

For reflection:

- Read, pray and worship in the light of some Bible texts we’ve looked at today.
- Read the hymn below and think about its words.

Next session: justification by faith continued

- Please read Isaiah 45:24-25, 61:10, 54:17 and Romans 8:33. According to these verses why is justification so wonderful? How should we respond to the Lord’s work in making us righteous?
- Next time: what is the relationship between salvation and good works? Why are we not Roman Catholics?

1. A debtor to mercy alone,
of covenant mercy I sing;
I come with your righteousness on,
my humble offering to bring.
The judgements of your holy law,
with me can have nothing to do,
My saviour’s obedience and blood
hide all my transgressions from view.

2. The work which your goodness began,
the arm of your strength will complete.
Your promise is yes and amen,
and never was forfeited yet.
The future or things that are now,
no power below or above,
can make you your purpose forego,
or sever my soul from your love.

3. My name from the palms of your hands,
eternity will not erase.
Impressed on your heart it remains
in marks of indelible grace.
Yes I, to the end, will endure,
until I bow down at your throne.
Forever and always secure,
a debtor to mercy, alone.

(Words: Augustus Toplady/ alt. words Bob Kauflin)