

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 4 Issue 1

January 2, 2005

Justification

Romans 8:30

In your opinion what are the most difficult doctrines taught in Scripture? When you disciple another person in the Lord, what topics do you find most perplexing?

I remember years ago discussing this with a friend and we came up with a list of things. For example the doctrine of inspiration of the Scriptures can be difficult because how can God's word be said to be completely God's and yet completely that of the inspired author? Then the doctrine commonly known as limited atonement or more accurately, particular atonement, the fact that Christ death on the cross is not efficacious to all men, but to only those on whom God has set His love. Then of course we could add these doctrines: redemption, spiritual gifts, the virgin birth, eschatology, etc.

Amazingly as I look back on my walk with God, I find that these are "easy" doctrines in comparison to the doctrine of justification. I am not saying that the doctrine of justification is too difficult to comprehend. In fact, the doctrine is very straightforward. Rather, it is that the doctrine of justification is most difficult to accept! Dr. Archibald Alexander said "there is a defect in our belief in the freeness of divine grace. To exercise unshaken confidence in the doctrine of gratuitous pardon [justification] is one of the most difficult things in the world."¹

Justification Defined

Romans 8:30, "**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."²

Justification is not a new term in the book of Romans and certainly is not a new term to us. It or its derivatives are used forty-three times in the first seven chapters of this epistle. It therefore obviously is a very important word in the Bible. And yet, what does it mean? How would you define it?

Justification is a forensic or legal term which was used when a defendant was declared by a judge that he was righteous, not guilty, or innocent of the charge in question. From this perspective we note that

¹ Dr. Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*.

² Romans 8:30 ouj de prowrisen toutouj kai ekalesen kai ouj ekalesen toutouj kai edikaiwsen ouj de edikaiwsen toutouj kai edoxasen

justification is an objective forensic judgment regarding the innocence of someone. The Old Testament speaks of a judge as one who “justifies” another.

Deuteronomy 25:1, “If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked.”

Here the judges do not make the person righteous; they simply declare that to be the case. Again we find this in the case of Job.

Job 32:2, “Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God.”

Again, this does not mean that Job made himself righteous before God. Rather it simply means that he declared his innocence in the presence of God. This principle is carried into the New Testament.

Luke 7:29, “And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.”

This does not mean that the people changed something in or about God. Rather it means that the people said, “God is right or just.”

The Bible doctrine of justification is the provision of the sentence of “Not Guilty” when it comes to violating God’s law. Now in the Bible, for a guilty person to receive this declaration of “not guilty” the innocent would be required to go in the place or suffer the punishment of the guilty—which is what the Old Testament sacrificial system was all about. In the course of the offering, the sin of the guilty was symbolically transferred to the innocent animal whereupon the animal bore the punishment of the guilty — which was death.

Leviticus, 4:24, “And he [the one guilty of sin] shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD: it is a sin offering.”

In this context, listen to the words of one such Old Testament worshipper who had been forgiven for his sin via sacrifice.

Psalms 32:1-2, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”

This is what the provision of justification is all about. In reference to our salvation, justification refers to the declaration of God, based upon the sacrifice/death of Christ, that the sinner is not guilty of transgressing the law. It is the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us.

The Ground of Our Justification

This raises this question: What then is the ground of our justification? Or perhaps a better way to state this question is this: Upon what basis does God declare us not guilty of sin? God does not declare us righteous because of the righteous deeds or good works that we have done.

Titus 3:5, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he

saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”
=Is. 64:6a: in fact, Isaiah said, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment..."

The basis or ground of God's declaration of our right standing before Him is CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Romans 5:17-19, “For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

And yet, how then can I be justified? While it is based on Christ's work on our behalf, nevertheless the gift is received as we rely upon Christ to be our offering for our sin!

Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”

Acts 16:31, “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

As a person trusts that Christ is the sacrifice for their sin, God accepts their sacrifice—which is Christ—and declares the person not guilty. This statement can summarize the doctrine of justification:

“Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein [God] pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight, [on account] of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and [all of this] received by faith alone.”³

This really is not all that difficult to understand, is it? Now you ask this: Wherein lies the *difficulty* of this doctrine? The doctrine of justification is difficult in its reception.

The Reception of the Doctrine of Justification

Romans 10:2-3, “For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”

Brothers and sisters as most of you know, the Jews had a very difficult time accepting the doctrine we have just examined. Truly they had a zeal for God, but their zeal was NOT in accordance with knowledge. When faced with whether they would ACCEPT His free offer of salvation, receive God's unmerited favor, and welcome God's grace they rejected it in favor of a religion of works righteousness — of earning God's favor by one's moral conduct. Paul affirms this by saying that they were “. . . seeking to establish their own righteousness they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of

³ Modified Westminster Confession of Faith # 33

God” (Romans 10:3).

And thus we read of Christ offering free salvation to a prostitute and the Pharisee rejecting Him.⁴
Why?

It was NOT because Pharisees didn't want lost people to be saved. Christ had commented that the Pharisee's "travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte" (Matthew 23:15). Rather it was Christ had proclaimed the unthinkable — unmerited forgiveness.⁵

The Pharisee of Luke 7 was shocked not because a prostitute was forgiven, but because the forgiven prostitute didn't have to first clean up her act.

This doctrine of grace caused Barnabas and Paul to argue at great lengths with supposed Jewish Christians in Acts 15. Why? Once again it was because the notion of unmerited forgiveness was unacceptable to their Jewish audience.

Acts 15:1-2, "And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, **Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.** When therefore **Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them,** they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question."

Paul argued against this same stubborn disbelief with the Galatian believers.

Galatians 3:11, "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith."

Galatians 3:13, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:"

It was this doctrine — the doctrine of unmerited forgiveness, the doctrine of justification — that Paul's contemporaries found so hard to accept and receive. Truly it was unthinkable to the human mind.

Romans 9:16, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

The Protestant Reformation

Now lest you think that this was a problem germane only to the Jews of Christ's day, would you notice that the Protestant Reformation was centered around this very same issue. By the time of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the like, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) had developed the doctrine of INFUSED grace. Recall David's words:

Psalm 32:2, "Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."

⁴ Compare Luke 7:36-50

⁵ Compare Luke 7:48

To "impute" is to apply something to another's account. For example to impute guilt is to count someone guilty for another's crime. To impute motive is to consider a person guilty of a certain motive. Now as we have seen, the Biblical Doctrine of Justification includes this concept of imputed righteousness.

Recall that "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). The RCC rejected this doctrine in favor of what is known as INFUSED righteousness.

The RCC teaches that Romans 1:17 which speaks about the "righteousness of God" being "revealed from faith to faith" means that salvation is NOT God counting a sinner as not guilty based upon the work of Christ BUT God physically making a sinner righteous. God infuses His righteousness into the sinner and makes a sinner beautiful.

And thus, in the RCC scheme, a man stands before God because through their participation in the sacraments — through their good works — they become beautiful. They teach that one literally receives a dose of God's own righteousness into their bodies.

Now you say, wait a minute, if the Biblical Doctrine of Justification is so simple and easy to understand, how in all the world could the Jews of Paul's day and the Catholics of the Reformer's day have missed it?

They (the RCC and the Jews) refused to believe or trust in the love of God for sinners! They refused to believe in the undeserved mercy that God grants to the rebellious. They refused to trust in the sovereign and unmerited grace that God bestows on the wicked. They refuse to accept the notion that a holy, righteous, and good God could love a wicked person unconditionally with no strings attached.

Dr. Archibald Alexander wrote these words:

"There is a defect in our belief in the freeness of divine grace. To exercise unshaken confidence in the doctrine of gratuitous pardon [justification] is one of the most difficult things in the world."⁶

Now brothers and sisters this refusal to accept the Biblical doctrine of justification was a problem with the Jews of Christ's day, and the RCC during and after the Reformation. But why am I making such a big deal about this today?

Because it still is an issue today — theologically and practically.

Modern Theological Issue

Some of you have heard about the Norman Shepherd controversy in which Shepherd essentially makes faith- or as he calls it, "obedient faith"- the cause of justification.⁷ It is my belief that Shepherd's

⁶ Dr. Archibald Alexander, Thoughts on Religious Experience

⁷ Compare the article by Dr. David Van Druenen in "Katekomen" Volume 14, No. 1, Summer 2002, edited by Dr. Joseph Pipa, a publication of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Note the paragraph beginning with, "There is a

theology is not an issue at Broomfield Presbyterian Church; rather, the issue where we fall revolves around the practical side!

It is my belief that as a Protestant community we have exchanged the gospel and its life-changing power for social activism, coalitions, and impact organizations. We, who are the possessors of the treasure of God's word which forcefully speaks of the grace of God on every page, have rejected the Biblical doctrine of justification.

Our profession of faith in Christ is little different from the Judaizers of Paul's day. In fact practically it is little different than the RCC of the Protestant Reformation. We have forgotten what it means to be declared not guilty on account of the imputed righteousness of Christ and thus what it means to be a Protestant.

Instead, and for all sakes and purposes, our confidence before God is that we have been infused with His righteousness!

Now, let me explain this because it is so important to understand.

Today there are two kinds of Christians who profess faith in Christ: The one who lives as if he has been infused with God's Righteousness and the one who lives by Imputed Righteousness.

The Disciple of Infused Righteousness

The Doctrine of Infusion says that God has made you beautiful. And so when this "beauty" sins, he is shocked and says, "I am beautiful, why would I do that?"

Thus he goes away determined to try harder not to sin. And yet this beauty continues to sin, doesn't he? In fact, he not only sins a couple of times, but if the thoughts and motives of his heart were revealed, he would be undone!

But what is his recourse?

As a beauty who struggles with the ugliness of his sin, he doesn't dare ask God to forgive him for that would only confirm that he really is not beautiful. And so, the beauty eventually is left either to lie to himself that his sin really isn't that bad, or he fakes it.

Now the person who holds this view and yet refuses to "fake it" eventually will begin to doubt his beauty and thus his salvation!

Sadly, the evangelical church today is filled with people in this camp who have long lost their joy in the Lord. They have only their duty to rely upon as the basis for their salvation.

Perhaps this is you!

stronger and perhaps even more problematic evidence..."

The Disciple of Imputed Righteousness

Now in contrast to this, let us look at the Disciple of Imputed Righteousness. He is one who lives by the Biblical doctrine of justification. This doctrine says that God has declared the sinner to be not guilty of sin and thus beautiful in God's sight because of Christ's work.

Now understand the implication here: To be DECLARED "not guilty" implies at least two things. First it implies that the sacrifice of Christ that we present to God is acceptable before God and thus we have ourselves are acceptable to God — in fact, on account of Christ we know that God takes great delight in us. Secondly, our sinful flesh which characterized us a non-Christian remains part of us — though its power has been destroyed.⁸

Now in light of this when a disciple of imputed righteousness sins, he is not shocked because he knows that he is indeed a sinner. He does not hide this fact. He does not rationalize his sin away.

Rather, he boldly confesses it in light of the sacrifice that God has provided for his sin — Jesus Christ. He rejoices that in spite of his sin, God loves him and accepts him because of what Christ has done!

Truly, this disciple knows that his beauty is the result NOT of God physically changing him BUT of God declaring him not guilty and thus beautiful in God's eyes on account of Christ!

We have two kinds of disciples today those who live by grace and those who live by merit. And those who rely upon Christ and those who ultimately rely upon themselves.

Which are you? Of which do you expect the body of Christ to be comprised?

Mephibosheth

2 Samuel 9 gives us the account of Mephibosheth. As you recall, Mephibosheth lived during the time of King David. He was the son of Jonathan and the grandson of King Saul. During the Israelite wars against the Philistines, after his father and grandfather were killed, his nursemaid hastily carried him away into safety. And yet, something horrible happened.

2 Samuel 4:4, "Now Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the report of Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled. And it happened that in her hurry to flee, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth."

Well, years later, King David sought to honor any remaining relatives of Jonathan. So when it was determined that Mephibosheth was the last remaining heir of Saul and Jonathan, David called for him.

2 Samuel 9:5-7, 'Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar. Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant! And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father;

⁸ Compare Romans 7:21

and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.”

Now you have to understand the context. Mephibosheth was the only man who could have claimed the throne of Saul for himself and so he knew his life was in danger. In fact this is why in the Ancient Near East when a new king ascended into power He usually killed everyone who might have a claim to his throne. This was the obvious fear of Mephibosheth to which David responded with, “Do not fear.”

Now the amazing thing about this account is NOT that David would show kindness to Jonathan's son—this is understandable on account of the relationship David had with Jonathan. RATHER, what is striking about this text is WHAT Jonathan's son was when he received David's kindness.

2 Samuel 9:8, “And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?”

This was not just a statement of false-humility on the part of Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth meant it!

Now why would I say this? Because Mephibosheth was crippled- he had two lame feet!

In our day, this is no big deal. But in the context of the Ancient Near East, this was huge. To be crippled was to bear in your body the marks of your sin. Recall that in Christ's day the thought even among the disciples was that physical ailment was the consequence of sin; it was the divine punishment for an evil life.

John 9:1-2, “And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?”

And so, Mephibosheth believed that he was nothing better than a “dead dog.” In fact, the passage is going to great lengths to show this. The Hebrew is much more inclined to show it rather than to say it.

Notice, "So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate at the king's table regularly. Now he was lame in both feet."

Herein we behold the gospel! David doesn't refute the fact that according to societal standards Mephibosheth was wretched. Instead, in spite of his wretchedness, Mephibosheth is brought into the house of THE King to fellowship — which was a strong statement of approval in a Jewish context.

2 Samuel 9:9-10a, “Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table.”

I hope you don't miss the point: for this is the Gospel and what we as children of God are all about in this age. The church is comprised NOT of people made beautiful and thus worthy to enter into the presence of their Lord. The church NOT is comprised of former lame people who sit at the table of the Lord as perfectly healed people. Rather the church is comprised of Mephibosheths: Lame and hurting

people whom God considers to be beautiful on account of their daddy. They are sinners declared as "not guilty" and therefore beautiful in God's eyes on account of Christ.

Herein lies our confidence. It is NOT that we have loved God, served Him faithfully, and so fulfilled our obligations to Him. RATHER, like Mephibosheth, it is that in spite of our crippled condition on account of our sinful flesh that God loves us. God has brought us into His house. God has seated us at His banqueting table. God considers us to be beautiful. God delights in us.

Let us leave this morning on our knees asking God to give us the faith to accept this doctrine. Let us receive His forgiveness. Let us relate to God and one another on the basis of Christ's righteousness.

For it is this — AND ONLY THIS — that makes the child of God, Christ's righteousness. We are debtor's to God's mercy.

Let us therefore be zealous for good deeds. Let us hunger and thirst after Christ's righteousness. Let us delight in the glorious grace of God!

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on January 2, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.