

Justification: A New Standing

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Well, we're gonna suspend our study in 1 Timothy and, ah, this morning we're gonna look at Romans 8. Would you turn there? Romans 8. Well, we'll not be able to unpack this exegetically the way we would normally do it, I want to talk about the doctrine of justification or a new standing. "Justification: A New Standing."

Now we look at Romans 8, beginning in verse 28. We're gonna go through verse 30. Paul writes to the church at Rome and says,

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for the good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Now here's all the good things, not all of them but the bulk of the good things he's bringing together for our good. Verse 29,

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also [here's our word] justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Justification, a new standing.

Now if I'm over here, what is to me the right side of the pulpit, and then I move and I come over here from my perspective again, I'm to the left side of the pulpit. Let me ask you from over there to over here, what has changed about me? I'm the same guy. I've still got the same curly graying hair. Still got the same wrinkles. The same character attributes I had just a moment before. Same sins. Same whatever. The only thing that changed was my standing. I was standing over there, now I'm standing over here. That gives us an idea, maybe not a full idea but an idea of what's involved in the biblical doctrine of justification.

Now we have here in these verses what's often called the golden chain of redemption. In verse 29 he says God foreknew you. It doesn't mean he knew about you, it doesn't mean he knew what you might do, it meant he knew you in a personal and intimate way. Not

just mankind in general but his children. He knew you, those who would be his. And then it says in verse 29, he predestined. That means marked out beforehand. Of those he knew in an intimate way beforehand he also marked out for particular outcome. Then he goes further in verse 30 and says that those he predestined, he called. There was a, a moment in time and space history when God enabled you to hear the Gospel and by aid of the Holy Spirit he drew you to himself whereby you and you must repented of sin and placed your faith in Jesus Christ. But from the divine perspective, it's all considered God's calling. And then those whom were foreknown, he knew you intimately, those whom he predestined, he marked you out for an eventual outcome that couldn't be altered, those whom he called, he worked upon you through the Gospel and the Spirit to come to Jesus, then upon belief he justified, verse 30 says. You are now standing in a new place before God, justified. And then he says of those whom he justified, he glorified, a past tense verb because it's as through as if it was already done, though it's not yet happened in our experience yet. The golden chain of redemption.

Now where did this come from? Well, very simply this is the divine ordinance of God. Verse 28 of our text tells us we are called according to his purpose. You will never ever figure this out except God ordained it to be so, and by the way, he's God. So we just rest in that and glory in him, amen? He designed it. He does it. He's God.

Ephesians 3:11 reminds us that he works all things after the counsel of his will. He doesn't wait for the meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention decide what doctrine ought to be or what truth ought to be. He didn't wait for the committee meeting of any church or any president or any court, anything. He's God and he works all things after the counsel of his own will and, brothers and sisters, I don't resist that, I glory in it and I wonder over it.

Philippians 2:13 reminds us he wills and works out of his own good pleasure. You say, "Pastor, why did God do it that way?" It just gave him pleasure to do it. He does what pleases him and it's always good for us.

Now verse 29 also tells us something that I think sometimes, well, I think most of the time we miss in our scholarly, academic or theological studies of these wonderful truths. Look at verse 29, the last phrase, "so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren." You see, God did all this because he's about creating something new through Jesus Christ. A church. A band, a fellowship of brothers and sisters who believe in Christ. A new creation. It's a new body. It's a new people that truly know God and belong to God who will exist in time and then for all eternity future.

And here's, here's the way I'd like to say it: it's a new belonging. The Bible says he's the firstborn among many brethren. What does that emphasize? That's a communal or a familiar kind of idea. To be with him. He says, "I'm gonna be the first and I'm gonna have a lot of brethren with Me." God didn't just save you to save you, he saved you to be with you and that you might be with him and all of you who are gonna be with him, and all of you to whom he is with, we are with one another also and that's why we have local churches.

Now we're getting warmed up for the eternal state when all of God's glorified children will be together forever. Jesus said in John 14:3, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself that where I am, there you may be also." So what he's saying is this is about us being together forever. These are not raw, cold, intellectual, theological facts, though they are true Bible theological facts. It's more than that. God does this for the personal relationship that he will have with us that will last for time and through all of eternity.

Now, I., in my outline: justification, a new standing is a formal declaration, not an internal reformation. It's a formal declaration, not an internal reformation. What I mean is, when you were justified, you just went from standing in this to standing in this. Nothing changed about you except the formal declaration of God about you. At one moment you were unjust, at one moment you were condemned, at one moment you rejected, the next moment you stand as just, you stand as forgiven and guiltless, you stand now as God's child. That's the biblical doctrine of justification.

I mean, think about it. We're all guilty sinners and the penalty of our sin is eternal judgment in hell, and to be justified, if we were just looking at it from a natural perspective, we would have to perfectly keep the holy law of God and nobody can do that. All of us have failed many many times. So how is it, then, that we can all of a sudden stand as justified before God? Here's how: God declares it so in his power and in his authority. It's a formal declaration, not a change or a reformation. Matter of fact, in, in Romans 3:20, the Bible says, "by works no man is justified in His sight." So there's no way in the world you can somehow, ah, strive hard enough, work hard enough, ah, gather a new set of ethics or morals and keep them well enough that God somehow says, "Okay, you've done it. You now stand before Me justified." Never has happened. Never will happen. God declares you justified. It's a formal declaration.

Matter of fact, it comes, it's a forensic word that comes from the courts of this day, and in the ancient world it was common for a person accused of a crime to stand before judges and at the end of the trial, the judges wouldn't say a word. They had a white stone and they had a black stone, and they would pass by an urn and they would drop either a white stone in that says they're now just before the court and the law, or a black stone that says they do not stand as just, they stand condemned. Now look, when that judge walked by and dropped in a white stone or a black stone, it changed nothing about the person standing out there. He may have done everything he was accused of, he may not have done it, it just didn't change anything about him. All it was was a formal declaration. Here's how he now stands before the judge and before the court.

Friends, that's exactly what happens when God justifies you. You have a standing now of justification. You still have the old sins you used to have pretty much. You still have the old heart you used to have. You do have a new nature that comes in but that's, that's more along the lines of the new birth and we're gonna talk about that separately. Now they are interconnected in such a way that you can't really separate them, but in the Bible text when he uses this phrase, these are justified, he's talking about not that you have altered

anything, renewed anything, reformed anything, or changed anything. No, it's that God has declared you now in a new standing before himself and before his holy law.

What a glory that is. You see, the justified now stands in a new relationship before the law. Before he was under guilt and condemnation, but now that God has justified you, the law of God that used to thunder your guilt has been hushed into eternal silence. So justification is not a change of heart, it's not a change of behavior, it's not an adding on of religion, it's not that you did the sacraments down at the church. Justification is a formal declaration that you are now having, you now, rather, have a new standing of justified in the eyes of a holy God.

II. This is possible through Jesus and his cross. And now there, there was, there was a work done for our justification, there was an effort, ah, extended, there was a meritorious act performed but it was done by someone for us, it was done by Jesus Christ in his work for his children on the cross.

You say, "Well, how can God declare the law-breaker, the sinner, just and then Him remain just Himself?" I mean, when one stands before a judge and the judge knows he's guilty and he declares him not guilty, then the judge is condemned. How can God, the Judge, let all these sinners go free and just suddenly declare them formally innocent or just before him? Well, answer: he can do this through the cross of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:24, "He Himself bore our sin in His body on the cross." The Bible tells us that so very clearly in so many ways, that Christ assumed our legal responsibilities and was treated as if he had been a sinner, and now because of that we are treated as if we are righteous as he is righteous. A new standing. A new formal declaration.

Matter of fact, Romans 3 and we could go to many many verses, but I'm gonna go to Romans 3 here and we're gonna look at verses, um, 24 through 26. Notice how he words it here, "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." How are you justified? It's a gift. It's a gift for him to state that you now are declared just. Verse 25, "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time," so notice here, "so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." So there you go, through Jesus Christ and his cross God remains just and yet he can justify all of us who deserve wrath and not blessing, who deserve condemnation and not vindication.

Now we might also say that the, the biblical doctrine of justification does include forgiveness and pardon. These break down a little bit to me, but they do, they do connect to justification. Forgiveness is the releasing one of their debt to you. Pardon is having the authority and the power to excuse one from the legal consequences of their wrongdoing. All of that is involved here.

I, I remember this many many years ago when, ah, Ted Bundy, the, the horrific, ah, rapist and murderer, he had raped and murdered so many girls on college campuses and he was caught and he was in prison and it came out on this documentary that the mom of one of the girls he so brutally raped and murdered had written him a letter and had told him of something of her faith and that she was forgiving him for what he had done to her and to her daughter. Now that's only something I think a Christian heart can come up with. Now while she forgave him and released him from a debt she owed him, she could not pardon him from the consequence he faced under the law and he faced those consequences.

Well, but however, God can do both but actually pardoned is a little weak because today when we talk about pardoning, it implies that one is still guilty, just excused from the punishment. But now listen, in God's eyes when we are justified, we're no longer considered still guilty, just pardoned, we're no longer considered guilty at all. From that moment on, we're considered cleansed and just in God's sight. What a gift God gives us through justification.

You might ask, "Does the cross cover all aspects of my sin? What about the depth of my sin? The Bible talks about the, the, the inner core depravity of my very being. What about the death of my, the depth of my sin? My, my inner root problem?" Yes. The cross covers to the depth of your sin. "Well, what about the duration of my sin? Does this cover all of my sin of the past? All of my sin of the present? And all of my sin in the future?" Absolutely, it does. Christ was an eternal being and when he died on the cross, he covered your past, he covered your present, he covers your future.

The duration of your sin, the, the, the depth of your sin, thirdly, it covers the diversity of your sin. You say, "Pastor, you don't understand, I can sin in so many ways and the longer I live, the more I understand, the more sin that I have." Yes. The Bible says, "Look, He became sin for us." All of our sin. The depth of it, the duration of it, the diversity of it. Romans 4:20 reminds us where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

Look, you have no capacity to see the weightiness, the rottenness, and the pollution of the sin mark that's in your soul. Matter of fact, if you're a child of God, part of your sanctification is the longer you live and grow in Christ, the more this is unveiled to you, but God saw it all. God saw every bit of it, the depth of it, the diversity of it, the duration of it. God saw it all and God said, "Take the weight of all of those sinners as great as it is, and through My Son Jesus Christ, I'm gonna favor them grace, I'm gonna favor them a far greater way than their sin has marred their standing against Me. I'm gonna cause them to stand as just in My sight."

III. I am justified when I believe on Jesus. Now you're foreknown from the foundation of the world. You're predestined from the foundation of the world. Your call was determined and set out before the foundation of the world. But your standing of justification hinges on believing in Jesus Christ. But faith is, is the hinge on which turns a sinner's justification.

John 3:18 reminds us, "He who believes in Him," very simple, isn't it, "is not judged." Did you see that? Don't just read that and go on. Think about it. He who believes in him is not judged. It hinges on faith in Jesus Christ. There must be a time and a place where you cast yourself hopeless and bankrupt at the feet of a bloody cross and you just from your heart of faith say, "Christ, save me. I bring nothing but ruin. I bring nothing but sin. I bring nothing but heartache. I bring nothing but pride and selfishness. And O Christ, I take You." And he says, "That's all I'm looking for, that faith that My Son paid for your sins." That is the faith on which turns a sinner's justification.

Let's be reminded, though, that it is not our faith that saves us. I think I made that mistake a lot early in my ministry. I'd keep examining people's faith and there is some truth to that, but you can, you can become morbid in your introspection on that and be like a dog chasing your tail because as you've matured in Christ, you'll always look back and find things you didn't understand like you understand them today, and you have to remind yourself that salvation depends on looking at Christ. Sometimes parents will tell me about counseling their children about their faith, and there is something to looking at their repentance, of course, there is something to examining their faith, of course, but far more than any one of those, keep showing them Jesus. Keep opening the text and teaching Jesus, what he did, who he is, how he died, why he died, why he was buried, how he rose, how he intercedes for us, who he is in his person as the deity, as full deity with God the Father. Just keep showing them Christ. Faith comes by hearing, hearing the things about Christ because the blessings of salvation flow not from our faith but they flow from the object of our faith. Faith can do nothing of itself.

We hear all this stuff today about, ah, the community of faith. I'm not part of the community of faith. I'm part of the church that has faith in Jesus Christ. The object of your faith is not only important, it's everything. It is faith in Christ that saves. Faith is the instrument of justification just because it receives Christ, and for no other reason. Faith does not produce works that save me, faith saves me by bringing me in union with Jesus Christ, then he justifies me and he saves me and he begins, then, to do good works through me. But that's sanctification, that's another component. We're talking about justification here today.

Really in a, in a powerful way, your justification is like adoption and that's another Bible word for our salvation, we're adopted. But think about it, when a child is adopted, we have some precious wonderful children that our families in the church have adopted, and when they adopt a child, think about it, the child's nature does not change. The child's genetics, DNA, all the same. The moment they're adopted, nothing changes about their personality, their characteristics, their attributes. Those all stay the same. But what does change? Their standing in the community. They're now a part of a different societal unit, you would say. Here, they've found a new belonging. Now they belong to a different group than they belonged to before. Nothing's changed about them, just their standing is changed. They have new parents now, new siblings, new relatives, and their future is gonna change a lot. They may grow up in a new town, go to a new school, live in a new house, wear new clothes, a future of learning the things that the new family wants them to learn, and then of course, they are an equal heir with everyone else in the household.

That's what happens to us as justification. You find instantly by the formal declaration of God a new place of belonging with God and with God's people. You didn't reform yourself to get there, God placed you there by grace.

Look back at our text again. Is it not interesting here that as Paul writes these words in Romans 8:28-30 and he gives us this unbreakable golden chain of redemption, God foreknew us, intimately he knew who we were from the foundation of the world, God predestined us, he marked us out to become one of his own, he called us through the agency of the preached Gospel in the power of the Spirit in our lives, he justifies us and then one day he will glorify us, all theological truths. But again in verse 29, we have this warm, communal, familial statement that he did this so that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Look, God saved us not that we could study these doctrines in a cold or sterile way and, and somehow feel smart or proud of ourselves. No, God ultimately saved us that we might be his. He saves us that we might be with him. He saves us that we might be his children; that we might belong to his family; that we might commune as brother to brother and son to father forever and ever and ever.

So when we take the Lord's Table here in a few moments, we're gonna take this Table praising God for justification, not as a cold theological concept but as necessary to make us part of God's family. We're his and we're one another in communion because we're his family. We have found a new, vital, eternal place of belonging in God's family.