

The Drama of Justification

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Take your copy of the word of God and go to Romans chapter 3 this morning. Romans chapter 3. I have been delighted to revisit this passage and uh hope it is a blessing to you. Now listen, a part of our worship is to think hard, to be attuned, to be alert, to think hard on the truths of God. So if you think hard, you might actually learn something this morning and hopefully at least have some wonderful things reaffirmed in your heart and mind.

Romans chapter 3, verses 20 through 26. Paul writes to the church at Rome,

20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. 21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 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; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

1 Peter chapter 4 verse 5 tells us that Jesus is ready to judge the living and the dead. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that he will judge the thoughts and the intentions of your heart. Matthew 12:36 reminds us that we will have to give an account in judgment for every idle word we've ever spoken. James tells us that if we've broken one of the commandments of God, even the least of the commandments of God, we stand before God guilty of all of them. Romans 14:12 says so each so each of us shall give an account of himself to God. Now, how are you going to stand just before God as a sinner with holy and perfect scrutiny of this judge? How are you gonna stand justified?

You know, the doctrine of justification is the doctrine of perhaps most interest to any sinner. I mean, the doctrine of justification tells us how a person can stand as just before the throne of God and a proper understanding of the doctrine of of justification is

essential for the proper understanding of many other doctrines that are very, very important to our faith. For example, the Roman Catholic system views justification this way, and I quote, "It's the sanctification and the renovation of the inner man." The sanctification and the renovation of the inner man and that's what Roman Catholic doctrine teaches. So when you start with that premise that you have to sanctify and renovate yourself to gain justification, then teaching human works and church sacraments becomes essential for you to renovate yourself, to get yourself to some place where you can stand as just before God and this brings you to a place of slavery to human works and slavery to church sacraments, rituals, or systems. So you come back and come back and come back and hope and hope and hope that somehow, maybe some way, you've renovated yourself enough that you might have gained a standing of justness or justification before a holy God. But a doctrine of justification that involves works or church sacraments is a doctrine that exalts man and is therefore contrary to the foundational principles of all true religion because all true religion must humble man and only exalt God. But this concept of human renovation and cleaning yourself up, if you will, is a false doctrine. Biblical justification never means to renovate yourself. Biblical justification never means to make holy. Justification is the act of God whereby he declares us just in his sight, he declares or accounts us as just and that on the basis of Christ's work on our behalf and not on the basis of us renovating anything or cleaning up anything. It's a formal, judistic declaration of God on our behalf based on the work of his Son, Jesus Christ.

So our justification is a new standing before God, not a change of heart or behavior. Now listen to me: the change of heart and change of behavior flows after justification, but is not your justification. Super important. The changing of heart affections, heart desires, viewpoints, principles, values, and then the continual renovation and including or or or increasing of sanctification and holiness of life follows justification but does not constitute justification. Justification means that God, again, based on the merits of his Son on our behalf, puts us in a new relation to God's holy law. We now stand as a law performer, a law achiever, if you will, and we now stand as not guilty of violating any of the law in and through the person of Jesus Christ.

Uh Romans chapter uh 3 verse 20, the first verse in our text, "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." No works can make us just or justified before God but God himself reckons, declares, accounts us, if you will, as just. Again, it's a formal judicial declaration. Again, the fruit of justification, the works do follow, but this is what you would call progressive sanctification, it is not forensic justification.

Uh there's an illustration from the ancient world. In the ancient world, it was common that a a a a cast, if you will, or a group of judges would sit in court and the case would come before the judges and after those judges heard all of the arguments for and against, the judges would walk by an urn that's set in front of the accused and as they walked by the urn, they would put in a a white pebble or a black pebble. The white pebble means they do not stand in violation of the law. The black pebble stood stood for, they are guilty, they do stand in debt to the law of the land. Now, putting in the white pebble

didn't renovate them. Putting in the black pebble didn't mean that it made them more evil or law-breaking. It was just a formal declaration of how the court saw them and the new standing they had before the law of the land. That's what biblical justification is. It's not a change of heart, not an increase in holiness, not a renovation of anything. It is the declaration that you now stand as just before the Triune and holy God.

That's biblical justification. That's my introduction. I've entitled this, "The Drama of Justification," and there are three acts. Act one in the drama of justification is the personal dilemma. Act two is the uh public display. Then Act three is the pardon delivered. So let's begin with Act one, the personal dilemma. I use the word dilemma because humanly speaking, mankind is in a dilemma that has no solution, that is, we are sinners and God is holy. We are in a dilemma or a perplexing, a deeply troubling condition.

Now, two subpoints here under the personal dilemma. A) because all have sinned, verse 23. Is this not one of the most familiar verses in all of evangelical history? Verse 23, Acts or Romans uh chapter 3, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In other words, all means all. From from the Pope in Rome, he just sinned recently, down to the lowest uh most vile man on the street doing drugs, committing immoralities, living only for himself, but all have sinned. That's why the psalmist wrote, "For in sin did my mother conceive me." Now the psalmist is not saying his mother conceived him in a sinful act. He's saying from the moment I was a one-celled human being in the womb of my mother, I had a nature, a bent to rebel against God and do what I wanted to do. That was my very core being, my very core nature.

The text says, for all have sinned, that means we are already sinners, and as sinners, we already all have sinned, and there's nothing you can do. It's a personal dilemma. There's nothing you can do to change it. No good work has can change this. That's why John 3:18 says you are condemned already. It's already your situation. It's already your status. It's already your standing that you stand condemned. When you are born into this world, you stood condemned by the nature you inherited at conception as a sinner. You stood condemned by a holy God.

Now all have sinned, and remember the idea of sin is to miss the mark. God says, "I've made you as the highest of creation. I've made you, that is mankind, in My very image and I have a high and lofty standard for how you should live. The morality, the ethics, the character, the obedience, the law abiding nature that you as the highest of My creation should walk in. But every single one of you has fallen short of that great, glorious condition and that great, glorious role and lifestyle I intended for you to live out. All have missed the mark." You see, we miss the mark continuously, and unfortunately, we miss the mark progressively. You see, you do not become a sinner by committing sin, you commit sin because you are a sinner. Did you get that? You don't become a sinner by committing sin, you're born with the nature of sin. You're a sinner when you're born. You're a sinner when you were conceived. You don't become a sinner by committing sin, you commit sin because you are a sinner.

What a personal dilemma. All have sinned. Now B in our subpoint here under the Act one, our personal dilemma, is because the law has no help. How could the law help us? Every day in every way, the corruption of sin has metastasized in every part of our being and there is no clean or healthy part of us whereby we might lift ourselves up or pull ourselves up out of this mire and muck of lost condemnation. What a condition we're in. Verse 21 of our text reminds us, "But now," you just gotta understand that that the Jewish culture of this age and what a shocking earthquake blast this was when Paul made this statement, "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." It's as if God said, um, "Law, you sit down right here." Law has to sit down. "Now now you don't have any part in this. Alright, now the prophets, all the Old Testament prophets who prophesied, the prophets, you sit down over here and who's going to take the stage? My Son Jesus Christ. He's going to do something and He doesn't need either one of you to help Him." Powerful stuff because in the ancient world and in early progressing professing Christianity, i.e. mainly the Roman Catholic era when they basically dominated world Christianity, or at least professing Christianity, the whole concept of righteousness was punitive righteousness. That is, that we're all sinners and we all fail and God is perfectly just or righteous to punish us all. That was the premier, permeating, uh abiding view of the righteousness of God. God is right, good, and holy to continually condemn all of us for all of our unrighteousness. And of course, the Catholic Church kept everyone under their thumb because they thought the only slight hope you have is to submit to all of us, stay under our thumb, under our authority, give us most of your money, and maybe we can sneak you through a purgatory and into heaven one day. It was a control mechanism. Work salvation's always been a control mechanism. That's how they viewed the righteousness of God.

Now, "apart from the law," that means to make no use of it whatsoever. You see, God proved in the Garden of Eden that man could not do good works and maintain a right standing before God. God gave Adam and Eve one work, "Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." That's about the only thing they did after that was eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So man failed the test of works. God didn't have to do anything else. In perfect holy justice, God could just wiped out mankind and said, "I'm done with this bunch." But in order to display his glory, he did something on our behalf through the merits of not an angel, not a prophet, but his own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the Pharisees of this day, and uh this is quite humorous, and this is literally what they would do, they they had Pharisees who were just holding on to some kind of law works approach to maintaining righteousness and there was one group of Pharisees that's called the shechemite Pharisee, and he's the Pharisee who keeps the law for his own profit. There was the tumbling Pharisee lest he look on something, money or whatever, and lust after it, he kept his head down all the time and he was always tumbling stumbling and tumbling along. There was the black and blue Pharisee who just beat himself up and think that through suffering and self-deprivation, I could somehow maybe love God more and obey his law better. There was the mortar Pharisee who had a mortar shaped hat. I'm not sure why, but he did. Then there was the, what am I yet to do

Pharisee. He was always just in turmoil, uh in morbid introspection. "What what law did I miss? What aspect of law? What what jot or tittle of the law have I might have missed this day and I need to make sure I I get that right, that I might be in a right standing before God." There's the fearful Pharisee, he just lived in constant angst and fear, "Am I gonna face the judgment of God?" But praise the Lord, there was a few of the love Pharisees who obeyed the law of God because he loved the Lord and he had found redemption through God's provision. You see, the law is a mirror. James tells us that in James chapter 1. It's a mirror that shows you your condition. It is not a bomb that heals your condition.

So what a personal dilemma we're in, all have sinned and, secondly, because the law has no help for us. I mean, to use the law, to strive toward a right standing before God is like saddling up on a boat anchor to sail the Atlantic Ocean. I mean, the moment you jump in is over. It's like trying to to to launch out on a airplane made of lead with a cardboard propeller and a rubber band propulsion system. It's not going anywhere. It never has. Well, that's Act one, our or man's personal dilemma. You know, one of the the deep frustrations about being a Bible preacher and pastoring a church today is the the hardness of heart, the the dullness, the the the insensitivity to the sinfulness that's all around us and the transcendent holiness of the God to which we answer. There was a lot of error in the old world where they would exalt God's holiness and his angst and his wrath and his judgment without a proper balance of teaching on grace. Maybe there was too much of that, but I'm telling you what, we've lost the fear of God. We've lost a trembling over the holiness of God. And I'm telling you, I don't care how dulled, how hardened, how calloused, how indifferent a man may be to who God is, God is still who he is and we will all still account for every word, every thought, every deed.

We're in a personal dilemma. Act two in this drama of justification, the public display. The public display. He says that in verse 25, talking about Jesus came to our rescue and he says, "whom God displayed publicly." That means God stepped in and said, "I'm going to do something now apart from the law, and I'm going to do it before Myself, and I'm going to do it before the whole world." In Isaiah, as the prophet prophesied about the coming Messiah, the suffering servant of God, he said, "God was pleased, the Father was pleased to crush Him." Publicly, God crushed him. God did not work out this glory of salvation in some back corner of the universe. He did it before all the world to see the ugliness of man's sin and need and the unfathomable nature of his great love for sinners. Men laughed then and they still laugh today about this crucifixion of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, but that's just a testimony of man's utter depravity.

There is the essential shedding of blood in this work of Christ for us, doing something for us that the law could never do, that works could never do, that church sacraments could never do. Notice how he words it there in verse 25, "whom God displayed displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." The Bible tells us without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. The entire Old Testament sacrificial system was a shadow or a type that pointed to Jesus' sacrifice. None of those sacrifices could cleanse or wash away sin. They were to point us forward to Christ. But why were they all based on the shedding of blood? Because the life of the flesh is in the blood and

the wages of sin is death. The death of a victim, a third party, was required that the guilty might find acquittal before a holy God.

So the sinless one, Jesus, took on the death of sin so that sinners might know the life of God. That's what happens when you're saved. That's why the Bible says you're quickened by the Spirit. That's why the Bible says you're made alive by the Spirit. That's why the Bible says you're born again of the Spirit. Jesus took our death and he imparted into us his life. Now, unfortunately, we still walk around down here in this frail, flesh, human package of unredeemed humanity, but the spark of the life of God has been placed in us at our conversion. That's why you're here this morning or maybe that's why most of you are here, because something in you wants to hear the word of God. A spark, an affection, an appetite, a desire you don't have naturally. It came at the new birth and it's what draws you to want to be with other Christians and in church ministry and service and sitting under the preaching of the word of God.

Then he uses that theological word propitiation. Look at there in verse 25, "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation." The word propitiation comes from a root word that has the idea of "to appease." God was appeased in his wrath and just anger and retribution that he should have against sinners. That's been appeased. It's been placated, you could say. Uh there's been amends made between God and man through the death and shed blood of Jesus Christ. In other words, we hear a lot about reparations today, have you all been hearing about reparations in our country? There's a proper way for reparations, there's improper ways, but we hear a lot about that today. Well, I want you to know Jesus made all the reparations necessary on our behalf before his Father, God the Father. The amends has been made. The the placation of God's heart has been made. Reparations has been made because he expiated our crimes in his death. Expiate means to full up and complete all that was owed to God because we're sinners has been expiated, taken care of. "It is finished," he cried, through the death of Jesus Christ. He is the propitiation.

The word propitiation symbolizes the mercy seat. That's where the the high priest would come in and sprinkle the blood of of the animal on the mercy seat, symbolizing the rolling back of sins. Well, friends, Calvary is the true mercy seat that the Old Testament priest's mercy seat pointed to. That's where the sins of us are not just rolled back, they're expiated, removed, and taken away, and no longer stand as a defense between us and holy God. That's what he did when he publicly displayed his Son. The mercy seat is the altar of Calvary.

Now, the liberals have had a time with us through the years, have they not? The liberals want to look at our doctrine of the essential nature of the suffering and bleeding and dying of the Son of God and they used to use a a a phrase of of contempt called, "Well, that's slaughterhouse religion," they would say. Well, that's just um, you know, the cross is just a symbol. It's just a symbol of sacrificially giving yourself for the good of others. You you just you just need to live the golden rule, the liberals would tell us. You can't take the cross literally, they would tell us. But by the way um there's a literal God and I'm a literal sinner and the literal Son of God died a literal death and shed his literal blood and was raised in a literal body to seal a literal justification so he could one day in justice take

me to a literal heaven, and the blood had to be literal because my sin was literal because I'm not some mystical and mythical person so I did not need some mystical and mythical symbolic cross. I needed a vicarious literal substitute in my place. And only one qualified. You could not die for the sins of the world. An angel could not die for the sins of the world. Only Christ could do that. And he did that in public display.

This was to demonstrate, he said, this was for verse 26, the first part, for the demonstration. In other words, all of you that, Paul is writing, all of you that may have a Jewish orientation as to keeping the law and obeying the rights and the rituals and the ceremonies and the rules in order to somehow gain a right standing before God, listen, God has demonstrated openly to all that that is now obsolete. Hebrew word from the book of Hebrews, all the old covenant's obsolete. We have a new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. And God's made it clear. He's manifested it. What was once a shadow in the Old Testament teaching and understanding, what was once just a figure, what was once just a type is now in literal fruition. It literally has happened for us and on our behalf. God has demonstrated it before all the world how he, now listen to me, how he, according to his own justice, now has provided a just way of justifying the unjust. Oh, goodness. According to God's own holy definition of justice, God said, "I have proven with irrefutable unequivocal fact that I have provided through My Son a way for the unjust to now be considered just in My sight. Through the public display of My Son."

So God dealt with our sin, what word shall I use? Effectually, did everything necessary to get it out of the way. And by the way, if I might just elaborate here for a moment, God, have y'all ever heard this before, God has always wanted a people. He's always wanted a people but there's one magnanimous problem: no people qualified to dwell in his presence for the corruption and defilement of sin made us unholy and unwelcome and unworthy to be with him. So God says, "I still want a people and I'm gonna provide a way where those unworthy, unqualified, defiled, sin metastasized wretches can now become My holy people through the merits of My Son." So God said, "I found a way to effectually get it to its completed place, if you will, to effectually, another word, to adequately, publicly, eternally, through the merits, i.e. the cross of My Son, make them the unjust to become My people and stand as just before Me." You see, Christ being infinite in worth and eternal in nature suffered our eternal punishment in a finite time when he died on the cross. That's the public display that fixed our personal dilemma.

Now acts Act three of the drama of justification, the pardon delivered, it's granted to us in a particular unique way, a way that man never could see or find out by himself. Look at verse 22, if you will, for "even the righteousness of God," in other words, the righteousness that is out of God's very nature, that is the only righteousness God respects, has become ours. How? Verse 22, "through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there's no distinction." Gentile, Jew, barbarian, slave, free man, royalty, king, priest, peasant, pauper, it doesn't matter. Anyone, anyone can come to Jesus by grace through faith. That's how the pardon is delivered to you when you come to faith in Jesus Christ. And he repeats this in several ways. Matter of fact, in uh verse 22, how does he say it? Even the righteousness of God through faith. Uh look, if you will, at verse 25, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith. Then verse 26, for the

demonstration, I say, of his righteousness at the present time so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, just as a side note here, when we talk about the righteousness of God, there's three aspects we all ought to remember. There is mandatory righteousness, where God, listen to me, God by his very composition, his very nature, must mandate everyone before him be righteous as he is righteous. Did you get that? There's no exception to that. Mandatory, holy, divine, mandatory righteousness. God cannot lower the standard and still be God. He mandates all of his creatures be righteous as he is righteous.

Then there's punitive righteousness, that by his very being and holy character, he must punish all unrighteousness. We began with that, didn't we? Every idle thought, every intention of the heart, every deed, he is going to punish all unrighteousness. Trying to maintain my dignity this morning, because the third one is redemptive righteousness. God, I can't say discovered because God didn't discover anything. God, I can't say figured out because God didn't have to figure out anything. God produced a righteous way to make all the unrighteous righteous and that's what's called his redemptive righteousness and that's through his Son Jesus Christ, and redemptive righteous is granted, listen to me, as our new standing when we come bankrupt, empty, no hope, utterly guilty and defiled, no renovation, no fixing anything, no ethical reform, just coming as a bankrupt wretch and believing that Jesus did all that was necessary and he gives us redemptive righteousness.

Now listen to me, we didn't get back what Adam and Eve lost in the garden. We don't get Adam's pre-sin righteousness. I'm gonna have to go play the drums or something. We get the very righteousness of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, so the new creation is greater than the old creation, though it was perfect. Woo, the new creation, it's gonna be something. And we're just, you know what we are? We're the embryotic stage of the new creation. That's what every true biblically healthy local church is, is the embryotic stage of the new creation and sometimes we get in church, one of our ladies said, "Well, we had church today last Sunday, and we can feel it, can't we?" Every now and then we get in church and we think, "Boy, there's something, there's something better than 306 barbecue after church. There's there's something, we've got something better." I'm telling you, this this new glorious righteousness, you know what revelation means? It means the unveiling. All that's been held back that the immoral and the ungodly and the unbeliever and the worldly and the secularist can't see, we we're beginning to see it because we have new eyes. But one day it's going to be peeled back and Christ will be unveiled and our righteousness, which is the righteousness of Christ, will be unveiled. Now we're clothed in it now. It's all ours now, but we just don't get to enjoy it all yet.

I I thought, did I hear correctly? You all better listen because I'll come up with stuff that you're not expecting to come out. If I remember correctly, I was told that one of our young ladies' classes, did I hear that right, one of our young ladies' classes had 18 pregnant women in it? Was that right, Pam? You don't know. I thought you kept up with all of that stuff, babies and all that stuff. It was a whole bunch. And when that baby's alive and kicking and moving its arms and brain's working, heart's beating, by the way,

it's a real human but it still don't understand what it's all gonna be like yet, does it till it's born and begins to take in all that is to being alive in this world. Well, that's the way we are spiritually. We're tasting it, we're seeing it, but it's gonna be glorious when it's all unveiled in the end time.

It's all when we believe on Christ. Spurgeon said it this way. Now, get the balance of what he's saying, "It is not your hope in Christ that saves you. It is Christ." You see, you'd like to make hope into some kind of work. "Well, I'm going to do this. I'm going to believe this way and that way. Did I believe this right? Did I believe that right?" Sweat that and look at Jesus. Quit all that nonsense. It's not your hope in Christ that saves you. It is Christ. It's not your joy in Christ that saves you. It is Christ. It's not your faith in Christ that saves you, though that is the instrument. It is Christ. At the end of the day, did I walk down the aisle right? Did I put my right foot out first right? Did I bow my head right? Did I repeat the prayer right? Did I did I come to the right altar? You know, we call this an altar. It's never been an altar, never will be an altar. Those are steps. As a matter of fact, if we don't change this before long, one day I'm going to fall through it. It's just, it's not meant to be permanent. It squeaks and it's not good. This is not a good altar. Did I come to the right altar? Did I kneel the right way? Did I say the right thing? Be done with that silly Romanist superstition. It is Christ. Christ. Christ. And you know what? In a very real sense, you get saved many times every day because many times every day, the Holy Spirit convicts you that you're a sinner and you cast your heart and eyes toward heaven and say, "O Christ, if You don't save me, I'm done. If You're not the one who keeps me, I'm finished. If Your justification wasn't sealed and settled, I have no hope. I look only to You, Christ. I look only to You." As David Miller sometimes says, "Are y'all getting this?" This just blessed me good.

So, this pardon that's been delivered to us is a pardon of infinite worth and infinite value and it has to be a gift or nothing at all. Don't you get don't you get lazy on me and stop thinking. It has, this pardon from God has to be a gift or nothing. It's like your grandmother, who has a many generations precious to the family, infinitely value heirloom and she wants to hand it down to you, her grandchild, her granddaughter, let's say, because ladies are a little more sentimental than men. And as she hands it down to you, she says, "Sweetheart, this is the most precious prized part of our family history. It's so sacred to this family, and it's yours for \$1,000." It's it's over. It's meaningless from then on, because you know what? That's priceless. That's a rabid insult to the glory and the wonder of the heirloom. How much more the precious blood of Jesus, how much more the free gift of salvation wrought by the very Son of God, it's either free or it's worthless. It's too priceless. I could pick up this pulpit and throw it at you, how would anybody dare they do one thing to merit or add to the glory and the preciousness of our pardon through Jesus Christ? Don't you insult my God by bringing your frail, depraved, weak, worthless, metastasized sin infiltrated works before this God. You come empty, you come bankrupt, you come with nothing and cling to those bloody feet that hung on that precious cross. and then you can walk away with head held high in confidence in him.

I used to think that, well, boy, the grace of God had to reach way on down to save him. Somebody like David Young, well, the grace of God had to get way down there for him. And then I got to reading the Scripture and the Holy Spirit convicted my heart, and I thought, well, I'm down there with David. And the most precious and sweet church lady in this church, who's been raised and started in the nursery when she was one week old, been here ever since, never had a foul thought in her life, at least that's what we think. I've teased a few of our senior adult, I've teased a few of our senior adult ladies that are prim and proper and reserved. I say, when you get in the nursing home, you're gonna start cussing. It's in there. It's in there. It's in there and I'm gonna record it. Now I'm teasing, but here's what I'm saying. He had to reach way on down there for all of us and he's sufficient to reach way on down there for every single one of us. You could have a million worlds of sinners and you'd never exhaust the grace of Jesus Christ. You see, salvation is like a garment of clothes. It's like the righteousness of Christ. It's like I'm holding out a big old coat of Jesus' righteousness. All you gotta do is let it fall on you.

Martin Luther, often called the father of the Reformation and I honor the memory of Martin Luther, esteem of the work of Luther and Calvin and Zwingli and many other early, this is 16th century, this is the early part, 1520s, 1510s maybe, when a few men started reading their Bible and looking at all the state-controlled churches of Europe, all Roman Catholic-controlled churches, and begin to look at the Bible and look at the church practice and the Bible and the church practice and begin to be grieved. For example, Martin Luther was so serious about striving to be correct and righteous before God, Martin Luther spent six hours a day confessing to the priest at the Catholic church. Six hours a day and he said, only to leave the priest and get halfway home and remember, I forgot some sins. He would fast for days on end. He refused a blanket at night that he might shiver and struggle and suffer, hoping that would help him not sin so much. He was tortured by his weakness. He said, and I quote, "Have I fasted enough? Have I prayed enough? Have I suffered enough? Have I have I served enough?" Now the Roman Catholic Church had many superstitious things they would try to get people to do.

One of them is is to crawl on your knees up the steps in Rome and on every step stop and pray and confess sin. Martin Luther went to Rome. You tell him he's got to do something to try to gain righteousness, he'd try to do it. So he goes to Rome and he goes up that staircase on his knees confessing sin on each step and at the top, he wrote that this is what I thought, "Who knows whether it's so. I've done it all. I've done all I can do with all the strength I've got." He started studying the word of God more diligently and here's what he said. These are his direct words, "I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. Miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Ten Commandments. Thus I rage with a fierce and troubled conscience. I was myself more than once driven to the very abyss of despair. I wished I'd never been created. Then at last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, quote, in the righteousness of God is revealed as it is written, he who through faith is righteous shall live and the just shall live by faith. There I begin to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning, the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness, that

means somebody else does it for you, namely, the passive righteousness which the merciful God justifies us by faith. So here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through the open gates and I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had hated the words before, quote, the righteousness of God." You understand the context because to everybody this era, the righteousness of God means God's going to crush you sinner. He said, "That's all I knew about and I hated God and I hated the righteousness of God." He said, "But then I realized God has a righteous way of making me righteous through the work of another. Now, I love the phrase, the righteousness of God."

Powerful. But folks, you've got to put yourself in a context. 500 years? The corruption in the Catholic system came to its head probably 300 years before Luther. So for probably at least 500 years, listen to me, nobody, nobody, nobody taught salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. Do you know how radical it was for Luther to have those thoughts? Which brings me to a point for us today, does not familiarity breed contempt? You hear this all the time and it should melt our hearts with exceeding joy, just like it did Martin Luther. Have you received the righteousness of God, justification, and now stand holy, accepted before this holy God through faith in Jesus Christ? I'm not going to ask you to do a thing. You can't walk here. You can't walk there. You can't go to a counseling room. You can't go anywhere. I'm leaving you with Jesus. Deal with him. Do you know how many Baptists have gone to the mourners' bench? You know how many Baptists have gone to the steps? You know how many Baptists have gone to a counseling? You know how many Baptists have come talk to the pastor and never made it to Jesus?

Spurgeon, the most published Baptist preacher of all time, matter of fact, I read that he's the most published author of all time, more of his things have been published and read than any other author. He used to tell his congregation, "I'm gonna not gonna ask you to go do this, this, or this because your flesh would love that. You'd love something I can do to make me feel like I've done it. You can't do anything but cast yourself from a heart of faith on the merits of Jesus Christ." I've told you this before, but if I'm at your deathbed, and I'll say, "Brother, sister, how how's your hope? What is your hope in?" "Well, preacher, you told me to do this and I did it. You told me to do that and I did it." You're going to crush my heart in a thousand pieces if you do that. Here's what I want to hear, "Pastor, my hope is only, exclusively and absolutely in my Lord Jesus Christ who died for me and rose for my justification." That's it. That's it. Come, you sinners, seek his grace whose wrath you cannot bear. Flee to the shelter of the cross and find justification there.