

# Justified by God

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**Bible Verse:** Romans 4:5-8  
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Well, I'm very grateful to be back with Nancy after a couple of weeks away. It's a happy providence to meet together again on a communion Sunday. It's our pattern as a church when we have communion to devote the entire service to it. We don't always do that but it is our pattern. We believe that communion is an important time in the life of a church. Communion is a church ordinance appointed by Christ. It is one of the means that he established by which to remember him, and as we have sung today on all of our hymns, we remember today that the Lord Jesus in love, in mercy for sinners like us, went to the cross in furtherance of the Father's preordained plan in order to shed his righteous blood as a sacrifice to reconcile guilty sinners like you and me to a holy God, and as we consider communion, as we consider the meaning of the cross, we realize that properly understood it helps us understand how we are justified before a holy God.

Now, justification is a very important term biblically in our salvation and it is connected intimately with the death of Christ and justification will be our meditation this morning to prepare us for taking communion in a worthy way. You know, Scripture calls us to take communion in a worthy way. Jesus warns us and the Scriptures warn us against coming to the table with unconfessed sin. It warns us against taking communion as an unconverted soul because to take communion is to say that I partake in the benefits of the death of Christ, that I recognize my guilt, I recognize my sin and I trust in Christ alone to be the one to take away all of my guilt before a holy God. Those are sober matters, beloved. It is a sober matter to come to the table. It is a sober matter to remember the cross. It is a sober matter to remember that we are accountable to our Creator, that we are accountable to a holy God, that we are accountable to a God who made our eyes, who made our ears, who created our hearts and, therefore, who sees each moment that we live, who hears each word that we speak, who knows our inner man, therefore, we are exposed before a God who knows all of our ways. We are exposed before a God who knows us intimately and, therefore, all of our sin and guilt is known before him. He takes account of those things and will one day bring judgment on those who are not reconciled before him. These are serious matters and, therefore, when we come to communion, we remember the fact that God sent his only Son, he sent the second person of the Godhead in order to save sinners like us. We remember that as we preach the cross, as we sing about the cross, that we are speaking and remembering and singing of the highest and holiest and the loftiest things in all of the universe. We realize that a holy God in love came down-to-earth, bent as it were his glory in order to take our sin upon his shoulders

and to suffer the wrath of God on our behalf; that it was our guilt, it was our sin, it was our shame that sent him to the cross; that it was our guilt that had to be paid for, and all of these things come into focus when we consider the biblical doctrine of justification.

Now, the Bible, speaking and considering ourselves as Christians here this morning, communion is for believers not for the world, this is given to the church not to the world at large, and so as we gather together as the people of God, we speak in that way. The Bible speaks of our status before God in many different ways. It uses different metaphors to help us understand for those of us that are Christians. As Christians, God is our heavenly Father and we are his children and that speaks of the love and the security that we have in that family relationship. He is our Father. We are his children. We are under his fatherly care. The Bible speaks of God as our Creator and we are his creatures. He is infinite and uncreated. We are finite and subject to death. He's not like that. We are under the realm of his creative care. Scripture speaks of Christ as our Shepherd, as the Good Shepherd. "The Lord is my shepherd," Psalm 23 says and Jesus applied that to himself in John 10. He is the Shepherd, we are the sheep. He is the one who provides for us, who protects us, who guides us through life by his care and his love and his omniscience and his great power.

So we recognize that we are under the umbrella of a love that we never deserved; that we are under the care of a great God who had no reason to look upon us, we mortal, passing specks on the orbiting rock of earth spinning throughout the universe, that the Lord himself created. No wonder the Psalmist in Psalm 8 says, "What is man that you take note of him?" And yet here we are as believers in Christ under his care as a Father, under his care as a Shepherd, under the direction of his providence. We are greatly blessed, aren't we? None of that would be possible except through the cross of our Lord and, you know, if you step back and you remember your life before Christ, before salvation, there was a status before God, there was an aspect of his dominion, there was an aspect of his rule that was a threat to us and that we were powerless to address and that status was this: we were guilty sinners before a holy God. We were guilty sinners before, let's say, a righteous Judge. And the Bible speaks about this judgment of God, it speaks about God in his role as a judge and speaks about it at length and speaks about it profusely. It's the aspect of God that the world tries to push aside. In fact, let's just bring it more individual and more personal: it is the aspect of God that individual men without exception try to suppress, try to hold down, try to deny, try to define God out of existence lest their conscience testify to the reality that we are accountable to one who will one day judge us.

Look at Romans 1. We'll spend most of our meditation in the book of Romans here this morning. In Romans 1 the Bible says that "the wrath of God," in verse 18, "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." There it is, actively suppressing what their own conscience speaks to. Verse 19, "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." God imprinted on the human heart the knowledge of his existence and man in sin, man in rebellion is in continual warfare against the testimony of his own conscience, against his existence. Verse 20, "since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being

understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God," verse 21, "they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." Rather than submit to the glory of God who has revealed himself in nature and has revealed himself in his word, but a God who is also a God of wrath against their sin, rather than submit to that, they push that aside and substitute other things, creatures for the object of their worship. This is the driving force, the driving satanic force behind the whole convoluted theory of evolution that we came not from God but through immaterial forces and descended from animals without a God who made us.

Well, God does not take that assault on his character lightly and if you look in chapter 2, verse 1, you'll see that the Apostle Paul in this aspect of God's word brings to bear the judgment of God upon the guilt of man of which we were all universally a part of both by nature and by choice and by our actions. Chapter 2, verse 1, you see the judgment of God coming to bear upon this wickedness of man in rebellion against God. Chapter 2, verse 1, "Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things." What I want you to see as we start to go more deeply into this is the role that God has as Judge against guilty sinners.

Chapter 2, verse 5, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds." Verse 14 of chapter 2, "when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus." God is a judge. God with coming judgment. God, a God of wrath. God prepared to judge our guilt. The gavel ready to fall upon the courtroom declaring all men guilty, one day to send many away into an eternal judgment of condemnation. Beloved, you see that when we speak of judgment, we're speaking of that which is of the utmost consequence, that which is of great seriousness and, therefore, we treat these themes with reverence, we treat these things with fear and trembling, we treat these things with the serious contemplation that they deserve.

Now, to step into this room as we gather together as Christians as we remember our spiritual past before we were saved by the grace of God, this looming judgment of God, may I remind you, threatened the well-being of your soul and if you are not a Christian here this morning, it is a present and serious threat to your well-being. This looming judgment of God threatened the well-being of your soul. You were a violator of God's law and you were subject to punishment from the Judge.

Look at Romans 3:19 with me, actually in verse 10, and we see that there is a universal condemnation of all of humanity; men and women, boys and girls all under the judgment of God. Romans 3:9, "Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." And in verse 19 Paul goes on to say, "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

Scripture condemns all of humanity, Jew and Gentile alike. That's comprehensive. That's exhaustive of humanity. Violators of the law of God guilty of not loving him with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind, guilty of suppressing the testimony that he impressed on our own conscience, of ignoring and suppressing what he has testified in his word, what he has testified in the skies, what he has testified in the Scriptures, what he has revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ by whom we measure time as we live in the year 2018 in the year of our Lord. So what I want you to see is that there is just this great accumulation of guilt before God as Judge that was characteristic of us all. We were accountable with nothing to offer to an offended Judge to appease his righteous wrath.

You know, we say this so often that it can sometimes seem to be a cliché, a truism, but friends, when you understand the righteous holiness of God from this perspective, you understand the depth of our guilt, the depth of our sin, the blackness of sin, the horrible condemnation that attaches to every man, woman and child, and you have any kind of serious appreciation of that, you instantly realize that it would be an impossibility for a man to be saved by his works. How could a guilty man do anything from the depths of his guilty soul to offer up to a righteous God to pay for his own sins? We have nothing to offer to him. We are standing before the bar of God, standing before the judgment of God helpless, guilty and condemned.

Now, there is a temptation that we face when we hear these things. The temptation when we hear these things of such sobriety, the temptation when we hear these things is to give a certain mental assent to them; to say, "That's true. That's right," while simultaneously holding in our hearts a thought that is utterly irreconcilable to it, simultaneously reassuring ourselves inwardly that we ourselves are really not so bad. "Yes, yes, I know about the judgment of God. I see all of that in Scripture. I've heard that time and again," but inside there is this sense, "but I'm not so bad," and we minimize our guilt before a righteous Judge when we do that. "I'm not so bad," the sinner says to himself and in so doing multiplies and compounds his own guilt in light of the word of God. The word of God brought to bear upon his understanding, brought to bear upon his conscience says, "Yes, yes, yes, I know all of that is true but I'm really not that bad."

I certainly used to be that way long ago. For those of you that perhaps find yourself secretly harboring that kind of thought that would insulate you from the full weight of what we've said, let me ask you a couple of questions as you try to treasure your own

righteousness. Have you ever told a lie? Have you ever violated truth? God is a God of truth. Have you ever told a lie? Have you ever lost your temper? Have you ever used the name of the Lord in vain, used Jesus Christ as a curse word rather than the holy reverence that his name always deserves? Have you ever casually used the name of God, "Oh my God!" Taking the name of the holy God as a matter of jest like that? Have you ever committed sexual sin or at least wished that you could? Jesus said the adulterous thought, the adulterous intent of the heart is just as guilty before God, it creates equivalent guilt before God as the act itself. As you start to consider these things, that pocket of self-righteousness and self-congratulation in our hearts is popped like a balloon with a pin pricking it and that which was puffed up suddenly explodes into a shriveled mess of judgment. Have you ever wished harm on your enemies? Don't you see, beloved, that as we consider what the Bible says about the inward motions of our heart, what it says about our lives, that we are brought before, the Bible as it were brings us before the law that God will use to judge us, convicts us of our guilt and leaves us without excuse.

I could but probably need not continue along that line of thought. You see, you can only congratulate yourself on your self-righteousness, you can only harbor the thought that, "I don't really need a Savior," you can only harbor the thought, "I think I'm good enough to go to heaven," you can only do that by closing the Bible and casting it away from yourself and it only takes one sin to make you eternally guilty before God. It doesn't take a million, although we have a million sins against our account and more. It only takes one, Scripture says, one lie to puncture your righteousness. One sexual sin. One angry thought. One outburst of temper. It just takes one in the course of a lifetime. Yes, that's the testimony of Scripture. James 2 says this, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said," speaking of God, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not commit murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law." You see, this whole idea that God is going to grade us on a curve and as long as we're a little bit better than someone else we're going to be okay, that is a lie from the pit of hell. That is the spirit of worldliness giving you a sense of assurance that is false. It's not a question of whether you are better than some other person, as if God graded you comparatively on a horizontal level to everyone else. The question is are you perfect as God himself is perfect, Matthew 5:48. You are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect and if you're not, the fact that others have sinned in different ways does not provide you with any comfort before the bar, the judgment of God because you are a transgressor and transgressors will be judged. We have all broken God's law. We are all transgressors. The law condemns us all before our Judge and sinners like us have no claim on God. Men are not basically good. God does not owe anyone salvation. He does not even owe anyone the chance to be saved. He owes nothing to humanity but punishment for sin and guilt and that is what we all were partakers of before our salvation and God's punishment is not brief, it's not a slap on the wrist, it is eternal condemnation in the lake of fire.

Beloved, what I want you to see as we gather together as we come to communion is that if we are in Christ, if God has saved us, if our sins are forgiven, mark this clearly in your mind that if we are in Christ, Christ saved us even though we did not deserve it. In fact, we deserved his judgment. We are on the receiving end of mercy from our Judge and

what does that have to do with the term "justification"? How does salvation pertain to this recognition of the judgment of God? Well, salvation has a legal dimension. The gift of eternal life carries with it a judicial verdict that we all need. Salvation, justification more specifically, resolves our guilt before a holy God. Our guilt is resolved in the justification that we find in Christ.

Justification is a legal term which means this, I'm going to give it in two steps, the definition. It's a legal term which means that God has declared us not guilty under his law. All of that guilt is declared forgiven. That's one aspect of justification, there is really a fuller dimension to it, the second fuller stage of justification. Stage is a very bad word to use. A second aspect of justification. It's not simply that God declares us not guilty, although we were sinners, justification goes further and says this: God has declared us righteous in the sight of his law. Justification declares us as individuals who have fulfilled all of the requirements of God's law to utter perfection; that there is no defect, no charge to be brought against us because all of the demands of the law of God have been fulfilled. That's what justification says. You have been declared righteous by your Judge who could have condemned you. Justification means the demands of the law have been fully satisfied and God will no longer hold our sins against us.

That's what justification is. That's what belongs to every true Christian and the question, then, is this: how can a holy God do that? How can a righteous Judge declare us righteous if in fact we are guilty as we have seen from God's word? You see, beloved, that declaration, the means by which God declares us righteous, that's what we remember at communion. That's why this is such a precious time. That's why communion is not an ordinance to be rushed through, it is to be approached with meditation, to be approached with remembrance, to be approached with a clarity of thought of the centrality of Christ, the centrality of the cross in the eternal well-being of our soul; to be remembered with reverence, to be remembered with love, to be remembered with gratitude deep in our hearts because what we remember at communion is this: that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, Incarnate, walked on earth, that one, that Jesus Christ, that Lord became a man and stood in our place. He represented us before the law. He represented us before a holy God. He lived a life over his 30 plus years of perfect obedience to that law which you and I had repeatedly violated. Christ was without sin. Christ lived in perfect obedience to answer the demands of the law and he did it for us. The law which condemned us, the law which cried out for justice against us, the law which cried out for punishment, Christ answered that when he suffered on the cross.

Look at 2 Corinthians 5:21. Our brother Dane opened our service with this text. I didn't know he was going to do that but I'm glad he did. 2 Corinthians 5:21, God "made Him," referring to Christ, God made Christ "who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Who is it that survives the righteous judgment of God? Only those who have a perfect righteousness on their account. That's what Christ has done. That's what Christ has provided for us in our justification. Christ went to the cross and stood in our place as our representative, as our substitute and received the judgment that we deserved. God imputed our sin to him, treated Christ as though he had committed all of our sins and punished Christ for them even though he was

innocent so that our sin, your sin, my Christian brother or sister, your sin with all of its guilt, with all of its shame was charged to the account of Christ and the stroke of God fell upon him, your guilt reckoned as if it was his even though it was not. That's how great the love, the mercy, the kindness, the grace of Christ is, how great his love for his people, that he says, "I will take responsibility for all of their sin. I will pay all of their debt with my righteous life. Even though there is no judgment, no sin in me, I will gladly take it all." He describes it in John 10:18 as something that he did voluntarily. He voluntarily laid down his life for sinners and that death, that death of Christ on the cross, that sin wrath-bearing death on the cross satisfies the justice of God, satisfies the death penalty we deserve for our sin. The curse, Galatians 3 says, that should have fallen on us, Christ bore the curse of God on our behalf in order that the justice of God might be fulfilled and that a righteous Judge could be satisfied on our behalf.

Go back to Romans 4, if you will. What does this mean? This means that our lawless deeds are forgiven. It means that God will not take our sin into account when he judges us. Oh beloved, hear it again. That is such a blessed truth. God will not take our sins into account when we stand before him. Look at Romans 4:5, it says,

5 ... to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. 8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account."

This is what justification is. This is what justification does. It is a legal description of how God deals with our guilt. He assigned your guilt to Christ and punished him on the cross and for those who turn to Christ and receive him by faith, God does a second imputation and takes the righteousness of Christ and says, "I will consider you as though you had lived the perfect righteousness of Christ." He accepts the righteousness of Christ on your behalf. He regards you as having fully satisfied every demand of the law because Christ fulfilled it for you. You go to heaven not on your own merit, you stand before a holy God not in your own righteousness, you stand in the righteousness alone of someone else and that someone else is our Lord Jesus. God graciously accepts Christ's righteousness to meet the demands of his law, the requirement you could not meet.

Sinclair Ferguson summarizes it this way in justification, I quote, "Before God I stand as though I were in Christ's place so that I may receive Christ's righteous judgment which is really his." We stand before God as Christians in the place of Christ, in his righteousness, clothed in his perfection not our own, and rather than receiving judgment, you receive a gift of eternal life.

Look at Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The free gift, not that which is earned, not that which is given as a reward for behavior. A free gift. How do you receive that gift? On what basis does that become our personal possession? How does that righteous declaration become

ours? Not through what we do, received through faith alone. One writer says this, "Faith, true faith is all that is required to be justified by the righteousness of Christ. Faith trusts in and lays hold of a righteousness that is not our own." So when we come to communion, we realize that Christ has answered the greatest need of our souls. The law is no longer a threat. God, the Judge, has been reconciled to us. You are reconciled to the Judge who could have condemned you. You are reconciled through the saving mercy manifested at the cross of Christ. You have been rescued, you have been delivered from sin, guilt and wrath by grace alone.

I would suggest to you a couple of different responses to that. One is this great sense of relief that the whole burden of the law on your conscience has been satisfied. This great sense of peace, a subjective sense of peace resulting from an objective peace, an objective reconciliation with the God who would otherwise have judged you in condemnation. A great sense of love. We're not talking about a matter of just some kind of transaction that has taken place. Christ did this out of love for your soul. "God so loved the world that He sent his only begotten Son. This is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Gratitude. Peace. Relief. Love in response to a love given first to us. Love initiated by God toward us, not that we loved him first, and a recognition that the grace of justification came at a cost, came at a price that we could never have paid, came at the price of the precious blood of the cross, the precious blood of Christ shed at the cross, that cross of which we have sung this morning.

So what do we remember at communion? We remember that we have been justified, that we have been declared righteous before a holy God on the basis of what someone else did for us, what Christ did for us, fulfilling the law and paying the law's penalty for us. That's what we remember. The bread, the cup, giving us a physical picture of the spiritual reality that took place when Christ shed his blood as the price for all of our sin. Christian, as you come to the table today, remember it with wonder, remember it with praise, remember it with gratitude, remember it with humility. We are on the receiving end of the greatest gift that we had no claim on. Christian, as you come to the table, come to it with a sense of repentance forsaking any sin that you have perhaps been holding onto, come in the spirit of confession.

If you're not a Christian with us this morning, you've heard the message of the Gospel today, the good news about how you can be reconciled to God. Do you know what would be really wonderful about this communion service on July 1, 2018? It would be if you as a Christian previously trusting in your own works, your own religious behavior, your own righteousness, if you would forsake that and come to Christ and ask him to save you; to come to him by faith alone and say, "Save me in the way that I have heard described to me today." That would make that great. But if you refuse Christ, if you know you don't belong to him, we would ask you to let the elements pass. There is no shame in that, in one sense. It would be better not to take the elements rather than to play the part of a hypocrite pretending to participate in something which really isn't yours. Just let the elements pass if you don't want Christ reigning over you, if you don't know him. But as Christians today as gathered corporately as Truth Community Church, we rejoice in what



we're about to do. We rejoice in this remembrance. With a holy gratitude we say in light of all that we've heard from God's word today, "Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

Let's bow together in prayer.

*Our Lord Jesus, we thank you for paying the price of all of our sin at Calvary. We thank you that you came to earth, that you lived in perfect obedience to your Father, that you fulfilled all of the demands of the law in your life and in your death and we know that God has accepted your sacrifice on our behalf because you are now resurrected. The resurrection is the testimony to the world, it is the testimony to the people of God that the Father has accepted the sacrifice that you made on our behalf. We no longer have fear of the judgment of God as Christians. We will pass safely through because you have covered us in your righteousness. Your blood has paid the price for all of our sin and that which once was the greatest threat to our soul has been satisfied. We will live eternally with you. As you are raised from the dead, so also shall we. O Christ, our hearts are full of thanksgiving toward you. We are satisfied in you. In you we have our all and we thank you for that. And now as we come to this table which you have appointed, bless us as we remember you in this way that you have appointed. In the name of Christ, I pray. Amen.*

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