

The ground for justification

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to Paul's Epistle to the Romans, chapter 3, reading at verse 24.

Romans chapter 3, verse 24, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God.

To declare, I say at this time, his righteousness, that he might be just and a justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. On Sabbath mornings we are looking at what lies at the very centre of the good news of the gospel.

Why is it that the gospel is the most glorious good news in the whole world? And we have found the reason is because it tells how sinful man can be right with his maker.

How sinful man can be right with God. And it's good news for everyone. There's no one you can find in the whole world for whom this is not good news.

[1 : 28] For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And last week we saw two things. We saw first of all the need for justification.

And then secondly we saw the source of justification. It is good news because there is a need. There's a need for justification.

If there was no sin there would be no need for justification. Adam before he fell did not need to be justified. Jesus Christ did not need to be justified.

You don't justify a righteous man. He is righteous. The law has no quarrel with him. The judge has no quarrel with him.

Justification is only for those who are in a wrong relationship to the law. A wrong relationship to the judge. A wrong relationship to the king.

[2 : 35] So we saw that there's a need for justification. If there was no sin there would be no need for justification. And then the second thing we saw was the source of justification.

If there was no grace there would be no possibility of justification. What makes justification possible? Only the free grace of God.

The initiative is taken by God. We saw the shorter catechism and the larger catechism are so clear. Justification is an act of God's free grace.

It's God's action and it's entirely of grace. He takes the initiative. The action on God's part derives its whole motivation from what God himself is and does.

The cause is to be found in God and in God alone. There's no deserving in the creature. There's no merit in the creature. There is a need and grace meets that need.

[3 : 48] So this morning we move on to consider the ground on which God justifies the sinner. What is the ground on which God justifies the sinner?

Is it on the ground of something the sinner does? Is it on the ground of something done in the sinner? Well you see how specific the catechism is again.

It says justification, I'm reading a larger catechism, is an act of God's free grace unto sinners in which he pardons all our sins, accepts and accounts our persons righteous in his sight, not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ.

Not for anything wrought in them or done by them. First of all, not for anything done by them. And negatives are so important in the preaching of the gospel.

You cannot preach the gospel without negatives. Why? Because the human heart has this instinctive bias towards earning the favor of God.

[5 : 12] It has a propensity towards work and towards merit. And men take refuge and women in every nook and cranny of self-justification.

They go into every corner of self-justification. I remember Al Martin saying at a recent minister's conference, saying you need flamethrowers to scorch them out.

Because they are so entrenched in an idea of merit and of good works, that only ultimately the Spirit of God can drive them out.

You see, it's legalism, moralism, good works, sincerity. These are the things that people rely on.

And therefore, the Catechism says, not for anything done by them.

And it's speaking to a specific situation. The situation of legalism. The situation of moralism. The situation that says sincerity is enough.

[6 : 19] Good works are enough. And therefore, it's not for anything done by them. But then the second thing is, it's not for anything wrought in them.

And of course here, the framers of the Catechisms and the Westminster Confession were counteracting the teaching of Rome. Because you see, Rome taught that you're justified by infusing righteousness into you.

That was the great Roman Catholic error that was counteracted at the Reformation. The baptized person is cleansed from all original and actual sins and is simultaneously infused with a new and supernatural righteousness.

That happens to you at baptism. It's wrought in you, they say. And then post-baptismal sins have to be purged by contrition, confession, and penance.

And these things merit eternal life. And therefore, they said specifically, it's not for anything wrought in us. It's not the infusion of righteousness that makes us righteous.

[7 : 35] And it's very important to remember that it counteracts that serious error that we have an infused righteousness. But you see, it's not only the Roman Catholics that make that error.

There was a theory of the atonement that was very popular at one time. It was called the moral influence theory of the atonement. And what it taught was this, that you looking at Christ on the cross, that draws out of you love for Christ.

And where there is that love for Christ, you are forgiven. The moral influence theory of the atonement. In other words, the looking at Christ and the influence of the cross as an effect upon you.

And you could call that a divine infusion of love. But you see, that's not the way. It's not for anything wrought in us. And then there was the followers of Richard Baxter in England.

Baxterianism, sometimes it's called, or Neonomianism, the new law. And Baxter taught that we are justified on account of our faith.

[8 : 47] And faith is the ground of our justification. And God imputes faith to us for righteousness. And you see that again, it's something that's infused into us.

The infusion of faith. The infusion of love. The infusion of righteousness. And all these things are wrong. And that's why we should be so clear on it.

And we should know our shorter catechism and our larger catechism and our confession of faith.

Because they're counteracting. These errors. Not for anything done by us.

Or for anything wrought in us. But then it comes to the positive. But only. Only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ.

Why is that? Why is it only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ? Well, we touched on the reason last week when we were looking at the need.

[9 : 49] And this is the reason. Because God is righteous. God is morally perfect. All that he is and does is good. And anything that is contrary to him is wrong.

And he cannot be complacent towards anything that is a contradiction of himself. And sin is a contradiction of God.

It's against God. And God recoils against sin with righteous indignation and anger. His wrath goes against sin.

And that's the reason why this is the ground of our justification. This may be hard to grasp but it's worth grasping. God's righteousness requires him to require righteousness in us.

God's righteousness requires him to require righteousness in us. And where he does not find righteousness there must be the going forth of his justice to demand a payment which the sin of man fails to render to his righteous requirement.

[11 : 04] That's a mouthful but yet it's necessary to make this clear. God's righteousness requires him to require righteousness in us.

And where he does not find it his justice demands the payment. And that's the reason you see. God is 100% perfect and he made man to be 100% righteous.

And in God's eyes 99.9% will not do. It will not do. Not 99% or 99.9% will do.

For where you come short is a contradiction of God. If you're in school you're happy if you get 51% you're glad because you've passed and that's good.

But you see that's not God's past mark. 50% is not God's past mark. God's past mark is 100%.

[12 : 06] And you see in God's eyes if we break one commandment we are guilty of all. The law as has been said quite frequently is like a pane of glass.

Now imagine one of you children in Rockfield School and you put a stone through a large window and the headmaster he comes to you and says you will be punished for doing this and you will have to pay for the cost of replacing the glass or your father will have to pay for the cost.

And the cost is 100 pounds and you'd say to the headmaster but sir I only made a small hole in the window and I'll pay for that glass that will cover the hole.

You see what nonsense because when you break a pane of glass the whole glass has to be replaced. You can't pay a pound for the wee corner of the window that you break.

If you break the window it's all broken and it's all got to be replaced and you've got to meet the cost of it. And that's the same with us in breaking God's law.

[13 : 21] If we break one of his commandments we break the whole law. And this is the problem. We have sinned against God. We fail to live up to his standard.

We come short of his righteousness and we have got to pay the penalty. Now what is the penalty? Well the penalty is death. The penalty is separation from God.

That's the penalty that God has attached to a breaking his law. And if we are able to meet that penalty say we were able to meet that penalty but we are able to meet the penalty of God's law and we are able to start all over again.

Well you see if we started all over again we were able to give 100% righteousness. And if we did that if we met the penalty of the law and if we started all over again and gave God 100% righteousness then God could say this person is righteous.

I accept him as a righteous person because he's met the penalty which was death he's exhausted the penalty and now he's come back and he's started living again and he's given me 100% righteousness.

[14 : 44] Now is that possible? No it's not possible. The first reason why it's not possible is that we would never be able to pay the penalty because you see the penalty is eternal death and we would go on trying to pay it throughout a never ending eternity going on and on and on trying to exhaust the penalty of a broken law and we'd never do it.

So we can never meet the penalty and even the question of starting again from scratch is out because we've got an evil heart and unless our heart is changed there's no possibility of giving 100% and you see therefore our way of doing it is out as far as we are concerned we can't do it we can't meet the demands and so the glory of the gospel is this that God has found a way of restoring man to a righteous position before him it's rather awkward wording but greater men and I use it and it's this it's his righteous way of righteasing the unrighteous it's God's righteous way of righteasing the unrighteous or if you like God's method of making sinners right with himself while remaining true to himself and that's the heart of the gospel

God's method of making sinners right with himself while remaining true to himself that's what God does and he does it through the perfect obedience and the full satisfaction of the Lord Jesus Christ because Christ acted on our behalf he became our representative the one stood for the many as Adam stood for the many so Christ stood for the many God dealt with Adam and all who were in him and now God deals with Christ and all who were in him all those who are his are lined up behind him and what did he do for them well he did two things God made him to be sin for us sin was laid to his account and he became responsible for the penalty imagine that incident I spoke about in Rockfield school imagine it was David

McCray who broke that window and David is terrified he doesn't want his parents to know about it and anyway his parents are poor and they can't pay the cost of the window but his friend Billy Smith comes along and says I will take the blame I will shield you I'll go to the headmaster and say I did it and it's my parents who will pay for it you see that's what happened in our case Christ took the blame Christ took the penalty he stood in our place he bore the wrath the righteous indignation of God he was as this verse 25 says set forth to be a propitiation a drinking up of the wrath of God he

drank it up in his own person the wrath that was due to us he received it in his person and he drank it up he quenched the wrath of God he was made a propitiation he took our place he bore our penalty but the second thing is and the second ground is the perfect obedience of Christ he was the only man who ever walked this earth who kept the commandments of the law of God perfectly he didn't need to do it as the son of

God he already was in the favor of God but he did it as the son of man he did it in human flesh he did it under the most unfavorable conditions he did it for us he made that obedience for us and so God said at his baptism on an amount of transfiguration this is my beloved son and this is the only beloved son and the other sons are only beloved because they're in Christ but it's Christ's obedience that counts his fulfilling of the law that counts you see the active obedience of Christ the active obedience of Christ we never think so much of that we think of the penalty he paid but that wouldn't be enough we wouldn't be righteous unless the active obedience of Christ was imputed to us I recall and often recalled that incident of Gresham

[20 : 01] Maitre that great champion of the faith cut down in middle life and away from where his base was and dying and he sent a telegram to Professor John Murray one of his colleagues at Westminster Seminary and this was all that was on the telegram thank God for the active obedience of Christ thank God for the active obedience of Christ that's what his hope was built on as he lay dying there the active obedience of Christ and you see these are the two things that are the ground of our justification the two aspects of Christ's work is imputed to us they're made over to us they are ours in a sense as if we had done them ourselves as if we had endured a penalty ourselves as if we had fully obeyed the precepts ourselves they are made ours they're imputed to us as if we had done it ourselves and when that is done in that moment

God acquits us in a court of heaven the sentence of acquittal or the pronouncement of acquittal goes forth and says this is a justified man this man is reckoned to be righteous it's a legal declaration and this is a great distinction from the error of the Roman church it's not an infusion it's a declaration God declares us to be righteous in a court of heaven it's an act of justice the death has been paid this man has the right to go free there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus it's a glorious pronouncement the man continues to be a sinner he continues to be plagued by sin and yet at the same time he's righteous and pronounced to be righteous in the sight of God well the question we ask today in application is how we grasp the glory of this it is stupendous it's almost too good to be true the glory of this position that we have in

Christ the same John Murray I mentioned Professor Murray is speaking in one of his books about the reason why the grand article of justification does not ring bells in the innermost depths of our spirit the reason why the gospel of justification is to such an extent a meaningless sound in the world and in the church of the 20th century and he gives the reasons as this the reality of our sins and the reality of the wrath of God upon us for our sins do not come into our reckoning will not imbued with the profound sense of the reality of God of his majesty and of his holiness sin if it is reckoned with at all is little more than a misfortune or a maladjustment if the jubilee trumpet is to find its echo again in our hearts our thinking must be revolutionized by the realism of the wrath of God and the reality and gravity of our guilt before God and you see that's why we're not so enamored with this doctrine of justification by faith you see there's so little sense of guilt in our world today there's so little sense of the consciousness of sin when you think of Martin Luther in his day how even when he was in the Roman Catholic church he was obsessed with a sense of guilt he couldn't get away from this sense of guilt it was following him everywhere and he was doing everything to get rid of it and you see when the gospel came to him it was the most glorious good news because he was ready for it this is what he needed to hear but you see we've lost this sense of guilt there's a sense of hopelessness in our world today there's a sense of despair but there's very little sense of guilt amongst us there's very little sense of sin amongst us and this is why this doctrine is not so glorious or so popular or so much in demand because there's so little sense of wrongdoing all we blame it on collective guilt it's our environment it's our upbringing that has caused these things but there's a lack of personal responsibility for wrongdoing we're living in a society where the whole concept of retributive justice is almost gone and you see we can't understand why God should make these demands and that is why it is said by our

Lord when the Holy Spirit is come he will what will he do he will convince the world that that of sin and of righteousness and of judgment because these are the things we need to be convinced of we're living in cloud cuckoo land we're living in a world of unreality the real world is a world of sin

and righteousness and judgment and judgment is catching up with us but you see we're not conscious of it how are we going to be made conscious of it only when the spirit comes to convince us of it to convict us of it to make us aware of what the condition we are in and to make us see that there's no hope for us apart from justification by faith that's our only hope you see it can't be pardon pure and simple what about the justice of god what about the righteousness of god you see it's not amnesty we hear about amnesty international what is amnesty it's pardon without principle it's forgiveness which overlooks it's forgetfulness the very word comes from a greek word amnesty you see it's forgetfulness forget the past forget it but god can't forget the past god has to deal with the past but blessed be his name that past has been dealt with in christ and now we can forget our sins but he can't merely pardon us without respect to his law and to his justice god can't overlook his justice he can't overlook his righteousness and the glorious good news is this that god has not overlooked his righteousness and god has not overlooked his justice he has dealt with these things and the glorious good news is that he has dealt with them and that's the ground of our justification and therefore it's pardon on the righteousness of christ and the man who has appropriated this is the man who has passed some danger into safety the man who has passed some death into life the story is told of a traveller in switzerland arriving on horseback in the middle of the night at an inn on the shores of lake constance this man lost his way in a great snowstorm and the astonished innkeeper told him that all the roads had been impassable for days and that he had ridden not along the road but along the frozen lake and the man when he heard that news blanched and collapsed in horror at the thought of how near death he had been as his horse's hooves pounded along not the road but the frozen lake he realised how near death he had come well that's like the person without justification by faith all the time that you're in that condition you're in danger because you could go through that that frozen lake and end up in an eternal hell as long as you don't believe this doctrine of justification justification but the man who believed this doctrine of justification is a man who has come out of that danger and he's in the warmth of the inn he's in a place of safety he's in a place of comfort and he realised that the danger he was in as he crossed that lake as he sought to justify himself and to live

[29 : 21] by his good works and his own efforts in all his blindness he could have gone down to hell in that condition but now he's in a place of safety he's in a place of comfort he's in a place of life he's in a place of warmth you see and he goes on his journey humbled for what he was humbled for what has happened to him believing in the grace of God rejoicing in the grace of God he goes on thankful for this great doctrine the doctrine of imputed righteousness the righteousness of Christ imputed to us the only ground of our justification there's no other ground I stand upon his merit I know no other stand not even where glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land may he bless our meditation let us conclude this morning by singing to his praise in Psalm 89 verses 13 to 16 to the tune

Newington Psalm 89 verse 13 thou hast an arm that's full of power thy hand is great in might and thy right hand exceedingly exalted in height justice and judgment of thy throne are made the dwelling place mercy accompanied with truth shall go before thy face we stand for this Psalm and thy water shall come to socale with steep and Fi Christ Oh our earth is God grim Researchers by Sahaja earth and brought up our Oh Oh

Oh The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Rest on and abide with you this day and forevermore. Amen