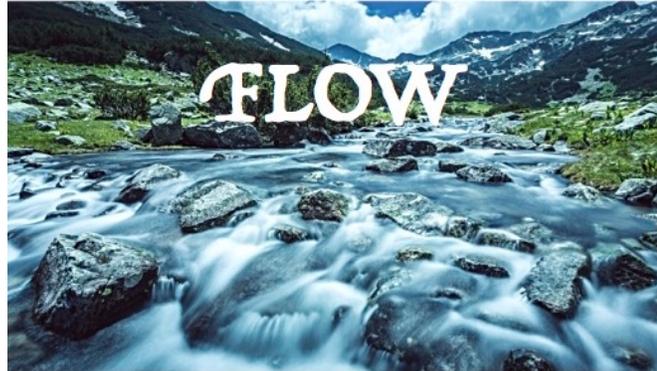


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Justification

by Pastor Mike Conan

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

Today’s lesson is the beginning of the climax of the unfolding story of Jesus in the Bible. There are four core elements to this “good news.” We will be unpacking these on Thursday and Friday this week and next. The first is justification (being made righteous before God), the second is adoption (seeing ourselves as we truly are, no longer orphans and slaves, but as children of the living God), the third is sanctification (God’s Spirit making our actions reflect our righteous standing with God) and lastly glorification (the time when all three of these things will be finalized and completed at Christ’s return.)

What is Justification?

Justification is a theological term that means at its root “justice in action,” people getting the consequences they deserve based upon the actions they have or have not committed. It is often used in a courtroom to declare consequences for violation that will allow justice to be served. In Romans 2 the Apostle Paul writes *“It is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.”* In this verse we

learn that actual actions determine our standing with God and our relationship with God.

The Bad News (and good news)

If we were to be honest, none of us want true justice based on our own actions. Romans 3:23 tells us that each of us has fallen short of “deserving” the goodness and blessing of God based on our own actions. We deserve death and wrath (God’s just consequences for sin). We all stand guilty. Justice would demand that we be punished according to the law that we live underneath. The punishment subscribed in God’s world are invoking God’s righteous anger and death. The longer we walk with God the more we see our actions are not going to measure up to God’s standard and we will plea for mercy, not justice.

Yet, God is just and he cannot violate his character or His Covenant (promises), payment must be made for violations, punishment must be given to all the disobedient. God cannot simply forgive and forget, His justice demands consequences for actions, good and bad. Enter Jesus. Jesus came and lived a perfect life and yet went to the cross and became sin for us and took the punishment for sin, death and God’s wrath. Romans 5:9 says *“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”*

Freebie on wrath: Many have a hard time picturing a God who gets angry. I don’t. When I hear the stories of injustice or extreme violation (i.e. rape, murder, racism) I myself get angry inside. I often want to smash the offenders, and frankly they deserve it. True justice demands consequences. When we try to draw the line at which violations invoke God’s consequences, we will quickly discover that no such line can exist. For all are violations of God’s good and perfect design for the world and each invoke His righteous anger from gossip to murder all are wholly displeasing to the Lord.

The only way for us to be made righteous and delivered from punishment is to trust in Jesus, repent of our sin and believe in His name. When we believe that Jesus is indeed our substitute and paid the price for us, admit our sin and ask God’s Spirit to lead us on a new path, our sin is removed from us and transferred instead to the account of Christ. And He has paid our debt in full and we now have peace with God. Paul writes in Romans 5:1 *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with*

God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus has paid our penalty, God took all of his just anger out on Christ and God is not mad at us anymore!



The Great news

The other part of Justification is the positive side. Not only do violations of God's covenant require punishment, but fidelity to the covenant (righteousness) brings blessing. Obedience to God (righteousness) pleases the Lord. It invokes His blessing upon us expressed in the power and presence of his Spirit. Yet, each of us is incapable of being good enough to earn that blessing. Christ came to be the obedient one so that we could receive the favor of God. In justification not only does our sin go to Christ's account and marked paid in full, but His righteousness is credited to our account and we are marked blessed indeed! Romans 5:19 says *"For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."*

So, if you are in Christ, you really are a new creation, the old (sin and its just consequences) is gone and the new has come (Christ's Righteousness and God's Spirit). God no longer sees you as an infidel who deserves punishment, but instead as righteous and fully deserving of His blessing based upon Christ's righteousness being given to you!

Final Thought – There is nothing more beautiful and mysterious than the gospel of Jesus Christ. The idea that God would in his infinite wisdom provide a way for his fallen images to be fully restored to him to receive blessing is amazing. The fact that this blessing is not earned by us, but instead earned by someone else is CRAZY and wonderful. Christianity is the only religion in the world based upon grace, for in Christianity believers

receive blessings that someone else earned. Every other religion you must earn your own blessing!

Questions:

Justification has been rightly called the most important thing to understand in the world. Why do we often struggle to BELIEVE and RECEIVE this good news?

How would this gospel of justification bring you freedom?

What should our response to this good news of God be?

Prayer:

Great God of the universe. Your plans are perfect, your plans are beautiful. You have made me beautifully in your image. Yet, I confess that I have not pleased you and been faithful to you in all things. I desire forgiveness and restoration in my inmost being. Please bring to me your righteousness and the blessings that flow from it. Help me to live and have my identity in all that Christ has done for me, not in my own sin or works. Amen

More Scriptures:

2 Corinthians 5:17

Galatians 2:16

Romans 5:21

More Confessional readings

From the Westminster Confessions:

Q. 33. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Of Justification

1. Those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience

to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

2. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.

3. Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for anything in them, their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

4. God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect; and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins and rise again for their justification: nevertheless they are not justified until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.

5. God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may by their sins fall under God's Fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

6. The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same.