

**April 11, 2010**

**Titus 3:7**

Alright good morning – glad you are here today. Grab your Bibles, you are going to need them several times this morning – but we will start back in Titus chapter 3. While you turn there, remember that Titus is God’s blueprint for his church – what He wants His church to be and be about. Chapter 3 as a whole is about the church’s relationship with the world around us. And right in the middle of that is this section of verses that are all about doctrine and theology and truth and these verses really form the foundation of God’s church because these are the truths of salvation. And that’s where we’ve been the past several weeks. Today we move to verse 7 and I again need you to listen well and take notes and let the Holy Spirit really put these understandings in your heart today. Let’s go back and read **verses 3 through 7 of Titus 3** today. TEXT

What we see in verse 7 is Paul giving us the why of what God does – the outcome God is after. Verses 4-6 are all about what God does – in kindness, love, and mercy God comes as Jesus in all He does, through Jesus He sends the Holy Spirit who regenerates us – gives us life where there was only death – and renews us – sanctifies us throughout life to conform us to that new life. In a nutshell, verse 5 says “He saves us” and that’s what we looked at last week.

Then verse 7 Paul says God does all that “*so that...we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*” And we’ll get back to that today but before giving us the desired outcome there, Paul has the appositional phrase “*having been justified by his grace.*” And **in one sense that is a summary of all that we’ve seen so far** – a summary of all those doctrines – those “-ations” we’ve been looking at: incarnation, regeneration, sanctification, salvation. **But in the most important sense, this statement that we have been justified by his grace is a single part of the process of God saving us – in fact it is the CRUCIAL part**, if that can be said.

John Macarthur says “the doctrine of justification by faith...provides the foundation of the bridge that reconciles God and man – without that key doctrine, Christianity falls.” Historically it has been “the single most important doctrine to get right. This is the doctrine that makes authentic Christianity distinct from every other religion.”

Martin Luther preceded Macarthur in that conviction by calling it the “cardinal doctrine of the church...[It] is the head and cornerstone which alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and protects the church; without it the church of God cannot subsist one hour.”

You can see why I encouraged you to listen up today – this is really important stuff. And I wonder when we read verse 7 – having been justified by his grace – when we hear the doctrine – justification by faith alone – do most of us even know what to think? What it means?

When JI Packer explains the centrality of justification, he helps us aim our thoughts in a starting direction. He writes, “The reason why the doctrine of justification is central to the gospel is that God’s basic relationship to us as His rational creatures is that of Lawgiver and Judge, so that our standing before Him is always determined by His holy law.”

And that ought to begin to click with us because when we think of the word justice – of just – of justify – we naturally connect it with what is right – what is law – with the verdicts of a courtroom. And in fact that is what the word justify in the Bible means – to quote Packer again, it means “to declare righteous, to declare of a man on trial that he is not liable to any penalty but is entitled to all the privileges due to those who have kept the law. Justifying is the act of a judge pronouncing the opposite sentence to condemnation.” **To justify is to DECLARE RIGHTEOUS; the act of a judge declaring the opposite of condemnation.**

The apostle Paul who of course is who God is using to write this letter to Titus is the writer most responsible for laying out this doctrine of justification in the Word of God for us. And we’ll refer to

several of his statements today, but I want us to start with Jesus. Before we get into the nitty gritty, let's look at it in action through the words of Jesus. Our Savior of course taught most often in parables and stories to illustrate truths rather than just teaching them. So let's look at the one occasion that Jesus Himself actually declared someone to be justified. Turn to **Luke chapter 18** with me, let's begin in verse 9. TEXT 9-14

Now if you can put yourself in the 1<sup>st</sup> century here and imagine hearing Jesus say this – you – along with everyone else – would have been absolutely shocked. I mean big-mouth-frog-shocked – (mouth hanging open).

The theological heroes of that day were the Pharisees – the guys who lived by the most rigid legalistic standards. They fasted – they made a big show of praying and giving to the poor – and actually applied the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament more than and in more ways than Moses ever prescribed. And yet in back in **Matthew 5:20** Jesus had stunned everybody again – the whole big-mouth-frog-stunned – by saying *“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”* (mouth open) And then following it up in **verse 48** with *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* (mouth open)

Clearly he set a standard that was humanly impossible – for no one could surpass the lifestyle of the Pharisees. And yet here in Luke he blows them away with a story that seems to place a hated tax collector in a better spot spiritually than a praying Pharisee. And the point of the parable we just read is clear because of that. Jesus was teaching that justification is by faith alone. All the theology is there without having to explain it – instead Jesus paints a picture of it.

First it was a judicial act of God. The tax guy's justification was an instantaneous reality. See it? There was no process – no time lapse – no fear of purgatory. Jesus just says he went home justified before God. And he did so not because of anything he had done.

See the tax collector understood his own helplessness. He had an impossible debt he could never pay. All he could do was repent and plead for mercy. He didn't recite the works he had done – he knew even his best works were still sin. He did not offer to do anything for God – he just pleaded for God's mercy. He was looking for God to do for him what he could not do for himself. That is the very nature of the kind of repentance Jesus calls for.

And check this out – he goes away justified Jesus says, without performing any works of penance – without doing any ritual or taking part in any sacrament – without any self-meriting good works at all. His justification was complete without any of those things because it was solely on the basis of faith. Everything necessary to atone for his sin and provide forgiveness had been done on his behalf – he was justified by faith on the spot.

Which again makes quite a contrast to the smug Pharisee who was so certain that all his fasting and tithing and other works made him acceptable to God. But **while the working Pharisee remained unjustified, the believing tax collector received full justification by FAITH ALONE.**

Turn with me to Romans chapter 3 to see how God through Paul explains this truth that Jesus is illustrating. **Romans 3:20-25.** TEXT

We've talked the past couple of weeks in our study of Titus 3 about our being saved from sin and death. That our first problem is that we are dead – and God on His own because of His own kindness, love, and mercy regenerates us – gives us life. But because we were dead, we existed in sin – in a constant failure to glorify God. And that sin must be atoned for – must be paid for – must be punished in order for God to declare us “not guilty” and yet remain a just and holy God. That sin had to be dealt with and that's what verse 25 is talking about – that God the Father presented Jesus Christ – God the Son – as a sacrifice of atonement: that Jesus died for our sins.

But here's the deal. The forgiveness of sins is not all that is going on here. **In justification, God as the Judge not only declares us "NOT GUILTY" but he also declares us "RIGHTEOUS."** See being pardoned alone would leave us spiritually naked with no righteousness – just leaves us neutral so to speak. Pardon might save us from hell, but it wouldn't get us into heaven.

And that's why **our salvation** – all we've been talking about – **rests not only in Christ's atoning DEATH, but also in his LIFE of perfect obedience.** Think about it – if in order to secure our salvation all Jesus needed to do what to make atonement – to pay for our sins – then he could have come down from heaven and gone directly to the cross, right? But as RC Sproul explains, "He also had to fulfill all righteousness by submitting at very point to the law of God...Christ not only died for us, He lived for us as well."

See remember what Jesus said in Mathew 5:20 that *"Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven"*? Well back in that parable we read in Luke, Jesus says that tax collector – one of the most hated men around – was justified – was declared by God as not only not guilty – but righteous! How did such a sinner obtain a righteousness that surpassed that of the Pharisee? In other words, if the standard is divine perfection, then how could this guy – or any of us – become just in God's eyes?

The only answer is that he – and we – must receive a righteousness that is not our own. The theological word for that is imputed: righteousness was imputed to him through faith.

Whose righteousness – whose perfection – was imputed or reckoned to him? It could only be the perfect righteousness of a flawless substitute who in turn must take on the tax collector's sins and suffer the penalty of God's wrath in his place. And that is exactly what Jesus did.

**2 Corinthians 5:21** is one of the Bible's most powerful affirmations of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the account of those who believe in Him. Read it with me on the screen: *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

That is as concise as you can make the doctrine of justification. Our sins were imputed to Christ and His righteousness is imputed to us. In other words, as Charles Hodge explains, "He bore our sins; we are clothed in His righteousness...Christ bearing our sins did not make Him morally a sinner...nor does Christ's righteousness become subjectively ours, it is not the moral quality of our souls...Our sins were the judicial ground of the sufferings of Christ, so that [His sufferings] were a satisfaction of justice; and His righteousness is the judicial ground of our acceptance with God."

That's how we must understand this imputation. **How any of us who were dead in sin can be declared 'just' before a holy God: Jesus bore our sins, we are CLOTHED in His righteousness.**

Which means our attempts at good works mean nothing when it comes to justification. Justification is through faith alone because it is in and through Jesus Christ alone – which is why back in Titus 3:7 Paul writes that we have been justified by His grace alone. God is the one who justifies.

And we see that clearly in **Romans 8. Listen to verses 31-33:** *"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies."*

As John Piper explains the focus here is not on justification but on the God who justifies. It is just as clear in Greek as it is in English – verse 33 *"God is the one who justifies."* Paul could have asked in verse 32 *"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?"* and then just answered "No one! We are justified." Because that's true – that's what all this is about today – but he didn't. He asks "who can bring any charge" and then answers by saying *"It is God who justifies."* Why the emphasis on the actor instead of the act?

Because in the world of courts and justice that this doctrine comes from, the acquittal of one judge might be overturned by a higher one, right? A local judge finds you not guilty, but then on

appeal to state court, a state judge finds you guilty. Or what if a state judge finds you not guilty and then a federal judge reverses that. The point here is that above God, there are no higher courts. If God is the one who forgives you and declares you righteous, there is no one who can reverse it. And God does not lie nor change His mind for He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. **Justification is by faith alone through CHRIST alone by GOD alone. That's why Titus 3:7 says we have been 'justified by His GRACE.'**

Now let me just give you a quick summary of this so far before we look at a typical wrong response to this and two of the greatest applications for our day to day life. In Titus – after explaining our condition outside of Christ and then what God did to change it – to save us – Paul writes in verse 6 that all that means we have been justified by his grace.

**Justification - means we are declared righteous – not MADE righteous.**

**Justification is both acquittal and ACCEPTANCE – it involves both the forgiveness of sins and receiving the righteousness of Christ.**

**Justification is both exclusive and EXTENSIVE – there is no middle ground, either you are justified by God or you are not and if you are, it means that all your sins are dealt with: past, present, future.**

**Justification is instantaneous and IRREVERSIBLE – it is not a process, it is a declaration and it cannot be lost or overturned because it is declared by God and there is no higher court.**

**Justification is received THROUGH faith – not because of faith – remember faith is also a gift from God that causes us to willfully turn to Jesus Christ so having that faith is not some work that we can take credit for.**

Now – here's the deal – we are justified – declared righteous – by grace through faith – and if it is not a process but an event, then what actually changes? See **justification creates no actual change whatsoever IN a sinner's nature or character. Being justified is a divine edict – what changes is our status BEFORE God the Judge only – but it carries ramifications that guarantee other changes will follow.**

And we're used that – decrees like that are fairly common place.

For example – when Nicole and I were married, we stood before a minister and recited our vows. At the end of the ceremony, Kevin declared “By the authority vested in me by the state of Texas and in the name of Almighty God, I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

Instantly we were legally husband and wife. Just seconds before that we had been an engaged couple – now we were married. Nothing inside us actually changed when those words were spoken but our status changed before God, before the law, before our family and friends. And the implications of that simple declaration have been lifelong and life-changing – which I'm thankful for! But when Kevin spoke them, it was a legal declaration only.

And that brings up a common question and wrong response once this doctrine in definition is understood. If I've been declared righteous – once and for all – it can't be changed – it can't be lost – it covers everything I've done or will do – I'm now clothed in the righteousness of Christ before God the Father – then why should I worry about keeping the law – about living according to the Word of God – the moral law of God?

In other words, I'm saved once and for all by grace through faith, so who needs to follow the rules anymore?

The error in that perspective is it assumes that God's moral law – His Word – was ever meant as a method of salvation. It was not. **God's Word – God's law – expresses God's will for man as man. It was given to guide men in the LIFE of godliness. And the same GRACE Titus 3:7 tells us we are justified by is what enables us to live that life.** In fact think back to **Titus 2:11**: *"the grace of God that brings salvation...teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age."*

Instead of making the law obsolete, the grace by which we are justified sets us free from the control of sin so that we might live according to the law. And that's what RC Sproul explains when he writes: "Justification occurs when God declares that a person is just. That declaration takes place the moment a person puts his or her faith in Christ. Sanctification is the process that follows justification by which those who have been declared just by God are actually conformed to the image of Christ."

See **justification takes place outside sinners and changes our standing before God where SANCTIFICATION is internal and changes our state before God.** That's where we become righteous. And that internal part is obviously a process – a process that will encompass the rest of our lives. And what we have to understand in this doctrine is that **those two must be distinguished but can never be SEPARATED.** God does not justify those He does not sanctify and He does not sanctify those He does not justify. **Both are essential elements of salvation.**

Now listen – I know this is a lot to process this morning, but we have to be able to understand why that distinction is so important. If you can't have one without the other, then why even worry about defining them differently?

I'll let John MacArthur answer that: "If sanctification is included in justification, then justification is a process and not an event. That makes justification progressive, not complete. Our standing before God is then based on subjective experience [in other words how well we live according to God's Word] not by objective declaration. Justification can therefore be experienced and then lost. Assurance of salvation in this life becomes practically impossible because security can't be guaranteed. The ground of justification ultimately is the sinner's own continuing present virtue, not Christ's perfect righteousness and His atoning work."

You think that might affect your day to day life? Whether you knew you were saved and right before God because of Jesus and therefore free to follow God with your life even though you're going to make mistakes versus thinking you have to continually live up to the perfection God requires and never knowing from one moment to the next if you were still justified before Him or not?

Yeah – I think that makes a difference.

Listen – here's where this doctrine of justification gets practical for us out of Titus day to day. If we remember that **as Christians we serve God not FOR life but FROM life, as His already justified and adopted sons and daughters, it will be our joy to strive to live up to God's Word and so PLEASE our heavenly Father who loved and saved us.**

That's a life worth living – and that's what Paul is praising back in Titus. Look at it with me for one more minute. Titus 3:4-7.

There at the end of verse 7 we see the so what of all we've been talking about for the past few weeks – the desired outcome of all God does on our behalf and to us and through us – the inevitable result of being justified by his grace.

What does he say – that **"we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."**

**That hope of eternal life – the hope of inheriting all of God's blessings and promises forever is a CERTAINTY** because God's justifying declaration is the judgment of the last day brought forward into the present. It is the final verdict which will never be reversed. **Romans 8:30** says that those God *justified he also glorified.* There Paul puts "glorified" in the past tense – as if it already happened – because even though we in the moment as we live in the process of sanctification have

not yet experienced that final glorification in God's presence, what God has resolved to do is as good as done!

What that means is that **the justified man can know – can be sure – that NOTHING will ever separate him from the love his Savior and God.** I'm not justified because of what I've done – I can't lose my standing because of what I do – I can only grow in rewards because of my faithfulness in sanctification. **It is the doctrine of justification by grace through faith that means we are eternally SECURE.**

Again – that is a life worth living.

Now I know your blanks are filled in but please don't pack up. Just look up here and listen a moment.

Let me put you at ease today – that though I want us to understand these incredible doctrines of salvation on which the church – our church – is built, as JI Packer explains, the final issue **“is not can [you] state the doctrine with full biblical accuracy (that obviously demands great care) but [do you know] its reality in experience?”**

Church are you still basing your hope or even your salvation on what you do – on your comparison to people around you – on the balance between your obedience and your disobedience? Or have you given up on that and simply been declared righteous by God through the forgiveness and perfection of Jesus Christ by placing your faith in Him and Him alone? Is your pursuit of a godly lifestyle in the freedom of God's grace and from a love for your Savior – or is it something less?

Let's live as what we have been declared to be. Let's pray.