

## ***The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration*** ***Lesson 9: The Triumph of the Gospel***

**Statement 11.** We affirm that the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone is essential to the Gospel (Rom. 3:28; 4:5; Gal. 2:16). We deny that any person can believe the biblical Gospel and at the same time reject the apostolic teaching of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. We also deny that there is more than one true Gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).

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### **I. The Fact of Our Justification**

*Quotable:* The doctrine of justification is “the master and ruler, lord, governor and judge over all other doctrines, which preserves and governs every Christian doctrine and upholds our conscience before God . . . it is the article by which the Church stands or falls” (Martin Luther).

1. Justification is that event whereby God declares us righteous, forgives all our sin, and accepts Christ’s life and death in our stead. This is our permanent legal standing before God (Rom. 8:1-4).
2. This legal standing is instantaneous and not gradual. It is based upon God’s sheer mercy and grace. We can never earn a right standing before God (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5).
3. Justification does not mean God *makes* us righteous, but *declares* us righteous.
4. To be justified is to be foreknown, predestined, called, and ultimately glorified by God (Rom. 8:29-30). Despite our unworthiness, we have the richest heritage in the entire universe!
5. The sole ground of our justification is the life and death of Jesus Christ. Our sinfulness is covered by Christ’s sinlessness. In His life He perfectly obeyed the Law and in His death He paid its penalty. In justification God credits to our account all the merits of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).
6. As lawbreakers we are freed from the curse and consequent penalty of God’s Law. In grace and mercy God bestows on us His favor and the status of being in right relation to Him (Gal. 3:13-14; cf., Gen. 15:6).

### **II. The Means of Our Justification**

#### **A. Christ’s Obedient Life and Death: The Material Cause**

1. Jesus fulfilled God’s righteous demands in his life (Matt. 3:15; Jn. 14:31; 15:10; Heb. 7:26).
2. Jesus satisfied God’s penalty for sin in his death (Rom. 5:9, 18-19; Heb. 7:27; 1 Pt. 3:18).

#### **B. God’s Gift of Faith: The Instrumental Cause**

1. Biblical faith is the *modus operandi* of conversion and is the sum total of “belief that” and “repentance from.” Repentance is the negative side of conversion, belief the positive.
  - a) *Belief that:*  
Wholehearted trust. Belief is commitment to truth. However, belief is not merely acknowledging as true certain facts. We can believe that Jesus is God’s Son that he died on the cross for our sins, that he rose from the dead and still not be Christian. The Bible teaches that saving faith is a commitment, a giving over, or a trusting of one’s entire life to Jesus.
  - b) *Repentance from:*  
Repentance means a genuine sorrow for our sinful acts and thoughts coupled with a firm resolve to turn away from them and toward God. Repentance is **not** like making a deal with God. There is nothing we can do to bargain for God’s forgiveness. It is a gift and, like any gift, all we can do is receive it. Repentance is an attitude of the heart being disgusted/fed up with our sin, and a determination to leave it behind.
2. God’s mercy and grace is demonstrated, not only by the giving of His Son (Jn. 3:16), but also by the gift of faith and repentance (Acts 5:31; 11:18; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 2:25). God’s gift *for* us is His Son; God’s gift *to* us is the ability to believe and repent. If salvation is of grace alone (*sola gratia*), then faith and repentance must

have their source in God and not us. Consequently, repentance and belief are not independent human actions that we do to earn salvation. They are our God-enabled response to His gracious offer of eternal life.

### III. The Biblical Evidence of Our Justification

#### A. Justification in Paul

1. Faith directed toward Jesus Christ is the faith that saves (Rom. 3:22, 25-26; Gal. 2:16; Philip. 3:9).
2. Paul's epistle to the Romans explicitly states that faith alone enables one's right standing before God (Rom. 1:16-17; 3:25-30; 4:5; 5:1).
  - a) The *sola in sola fide* is affirmed when Paul states that "a [person] is justified by faith *apart from* observing the law" (Rom. 3:28).
  - b) Faith that justifies takes God at his Word (Rom. 4:16-25). Faith believes what is humanly unbelievable, hopes in what is humanly hopeless, and rests confidently in the ultimate Promise Keeper.
3. Paul insists that the believers in Galatia are justified by faith alone (Gal. 2:16; 3:8, 11, 24)
  - a) In Gal. 2:16 the expressions "justified," "observing the law" (literally "works of the law"), and "faith in Jesus [Christ]" are repeated 3 times for emphasis. There is no question what Paul is saying here or what the meaning is!
  - b) Paul stresses the means by which the Gospel is received is non-negotiable. How the benefits of the Gospel are applied is by faith alone in Christ alone!
4. Paul proclaimed to a Jewish crowd that observing the Law couldn't justify even the privileged (Acts 13:39).
5. Through faith we freely receive Christ's righteousness rather than having to work for it (Philip. 3:8b-9).

#### B. Justification in Jesus

1. The Pharisee and Tax-collector: A Biblical Case Study (Lk. 18:9-14)
  - a) There is nothing necessarily wrong with thanking God for what He has enabled us to do. What is wrong is what the Pharisee *omitted* from his prayer. While the Pharisee stood confident before God, the Tax Collector "stood at a distance" indicating his contrition and humility. A proud self-confident stance toward God will guarantee an eternal distance from Him.
  - b) The Pharisee boasted of his righteous achievements, while the Tax Collector had only his need of grace and mercy. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. The righteousness that comes from God is the fruit of sheer grace. To be justified, therefore, is to be gripped by grace.
  - c) Self-condemnation averts self-justification resulting in God's wonderful justification.

### IV. The Significance of Our Justification

1. Justification changes our relationship with God so that we're at peace with Him objectively (Rom. 5:1).
2. In justification, God exchanges our life of sin and rebellion with the perfect obedience of Christ's life and accepts the death of His Son as our eternal "PAID IN FULL."
3. Justification gives us ultimate rest and repose from all human efforts to achieve rather than receive God's gracious gift of eternal life (cf., Rom. 3:20). Our hope is not in what we do, but in who we are in Christ.
4. Forgiveness from God is a reality. Hence, the doctrine of justification settles for all time the question of our guilt before God. Because of God's declaration there is no longer any accusation brought against us that has eternal consequences (Rom. 8:33-34). Justification gives us certainty of ultimate pardon and welcoming into the kingdom of heaven (Rom. 5:9-10; 1 Cor. 6:11).
5. Justification is the inauguration of our sanctification (day to day growth in the Lord). Any act of obedience subsequent to our conversion is possible *because* we have been declared righteous (1 Cor. 1:30). Justification is to sanctification as love is to commitment.

6. Justification affects every aspect of our existence. It is God’s final and complete work for us and in us, providing pardon from our past, assurance for the present, and hope for our future.
7. The humiliation, shame, and depression that often results from inordinate guilt can be displaced by the wonderful truth that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
8. The doctrine of justification grounds us in reality. “It affirms both human sinfulness and the graciousness of God. Without sin, there is no need for justification—and without grace, there is no possibility of justification.”<sup>1</sup>
9. The doctrine of justification allows us to offer genuine hope to unbelievers that they don’t have to work to earn God’s favor; it is of faith alone in Christ alone. Eternal life is *freely* offered!

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<sup>1</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 144.

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