



Week 29 - Justification and the Grace of God

Justification and the Grace of God: Justification

Salvation makes us fit to stand before God through the righteousness of Christ Jesus. Paul celebrated this good news: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed” (Romans 1:16-17). The gospel of Jesus meets our deepest need, to be made right with the Living God.

“He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7).

Scripture promises justification as a free gift of His grace to those who repent and believe. Just as a judge may declare the accused “not guilty,” God declares all who are in Christ “justified.” We are pardoned from the penalty of sin, set free from the curse of sin, and freely given the righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). We are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus...” (Romans 3:24).

Dr. D. James Kennedy wrote:

“The doctrine of justification condemns every effort on the part of man to justify himself. It is God that justifieth – not man. It is an act – not a process. ... In an instant, it is complete and perfect forever. It is an act of God’s own free grace. We see that it flows from the graciousness of Almighty God. It is not because of anything that we have done. We are not justified for our works, we are not justified because of our character, we are not justified because of our virtue or our goodness, of which natural man in his unregenerate state has not one whit. We are justified purely by the grace and unmerited favor of God.”

Justification reverses God’s disposition toward sinful people (2 Corinthians 5:21). We receive His kindness, not His wrath.

Justification remits the penalty of sin (Romans 6:23). We receive His forgiveness, not condemnation.

Justification makes the righteousness of Christ our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). God looks upon us with delight, as He looks upon Jesus. We are “in Christ” as we appear before God (Ephesians 3:12).

Two Enemies of Justification: Legalism and License

Legalism asserts that we can be justified before God by following God’s laws. Many Christians subtly rely upon their rules or code of conduct as the source of their justification.

License (i.e. licentiousness) asserts that God’s mercy “frees” us to keep sinning as much as we please while still enjoying His favor. Jesus condemned legalists in first-century Judea (Luke 11:46). Paul and Jude corrected the licentious in their day (Galatians, Jude). We still face them today.

Legalists deny that salvation is God’s gift. They like to make up rules we must follow in order to be saved. Under this tyranny, justification is not by God’s grace but by our works. Legalism denies the gospel by exalting human customs above God’s grace. The lure, and the result, are spiritual elitism and pride – things God hates. Legalists ignore the cross of Christ, the true source of grace.

“You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Galatians 3:1-3)

The licentious assert that we are justified by faith and now free to do anything we want. “God will certainly forgive us” – so they think. This is popularly called “greasy grace” or “cheap grace.” The apostle Paul defended true Christianity against those who claimed Christ, yet lived unrighteously: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:1-2);

“They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed” (Titus 1:16).

The licentious ignore God’s law. True, we are not saved by the law. However, we are redeemed and empowered by grace to obey the moral law of God. Jesus did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17-20). He said, “If you love Me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Legalism and license, both enemies of the gospel, have no place in the life of a believer. Justification through faith brings the peace we so desperately need. “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...” (Romans 5:1-2).

Review:

1. Briefly explain justification.
2. What are the two enemies of justification?
3. What does “man” have to do in order to be justified? Is there a cost?