

# Justification (Rora 2003)

by Ron Bailey

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*The sermon explores the concept of justification, emphasizing its legal implications and the importance of precise language in understanding faith.*

**Duration:** 53:58

**Scripture:** Psalm 23:1, Matthew 22:29, Romans 3:19-20, Romans 4:5-6, Hebrews 4:16

**Topics:** "Justification"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of sin and its definition according to James 4:17. He explains that sin is when someone knows what is good but fails to act accordingly. The speaker then delves into the background of the law court and how words like guilty, accused, condemned, and justified are related to sin. He goes on to explore the book of Romans, focusing on the themes of regeneration and adoption, which bring about a change in our nature and relationship with God. The speaker encourages the audience to revisit familiar territory and emphasizes that our experience with God is like an Archimedean spiral, constantly growing and expanding.

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## Transcript

Let's have just a brief word of prayer, shall we? Beyond the sacred page we seek Thee, Lord. We thank You again, Lord, for this remarkable gift, this book that You've given to us. And as it points to You, Lord, we pray that each one will make the journey from the signpost to that that it points to, and find in You all we need.

Help us, Lord, each one today as we gather in Your presence. Amen. A topic this morning, can you hear me? Is the sound about right? Can you hear? That sounds better, does it? Okay, good.

A topic this morning, then, is justification. And it's the second in our series, and our series is Having Begun in the Spirit. And yesterday we looked, only looked, you have to do the homework yourself, at repentance, a change in direction.

Today we're going to look at justification, a change in our legal status. Tomorrow, no, not tomorrow, Thursday, will be regeneration, a change in our nature. And on Friday will be adoption, a change in our relationship.

I'd like you to turn with me, if you will, to Romans. I know that these things will be very familiar, and that this will be familiar territory to many, but it's good to go over familiar territory. It's good to look again.

I often think that our experience in God is almost like an Archimedean spiral. They reckon that the ultimate test of a communicator is whether he can describe a spiral staircase without using his hands. I'm not going to try it.

But if you can imagine something like a spiral that goes up and out at the same time, I think often our experience of God is like that. We come back to the same kind of area, the same kind of territory, but actually on another level. We've moved up, but we need to constantly re-establish and see these things.

One of the things I want to do today is to teach you how to speak properly. And some of you will say, what a cheek. I want to teach you to speak properly because I'm convinced that if you will speak properly, it will be a tremendous help to thinking properly.

If we will use the right words for things, it really will help us to understand what God is saying. Some of you will know, those of you from an English background will know Lewis Carroll's book Alice Through the Looking Glass. And at a certain point, Alice meets up with a nursery rhyme character named Humpty Dumpty.

And they have some difficulty communicating because Humpty Dumpty has a fairly unique philosophy on life. And he says something like this, he says, When I use a word, it means what I choose it should mean, nothing less and nothing more. And Alice says, I wonder whether one word can have so many meanings.

Well, I have spent almost 40 years now married to the most wonderful woman in the world, who is a bit of a Humpty Dumpty. And life has been an adventure. I sometimes say, dear, let's not complicate our relationship by trying to communicate with each other.

I've discovered that we use words in quite a different way. For example, if I say a couple, I mean two. If you ask me for a couple of apples, you will get two apples, no more and no less.

And that's pretty much the way I run my life. Now, I had to take a long time to understand that for my wife, couple has no relationship to numbers at all. It's a sort of a general term that she uses to encourage me that everything will be alright.

I will only take a couple of minutes, dear. So, we will catch the train, the airplane, the meeting, whatever it is, it has no relationship at all to any kind of numbers. I'd like you to pop into Sainsbury's for me, I want a couple of things.

Just to reassure me, as she gives me the three false-cap pages. It has been an experience. I can remember on one occasion we were walking past someone who was selling small bunches of daffodils.

And she looked there, I think there were 20p a bunch or something like that. And she looked at these daffodils and she looked at me and she said, you know, at that price it's hardly worth not having any. And I said, life is too short for me to work that out.

If you want some daffodils, go buy some daffodils. Now, the reason I'm telling you all this is because increasingly our chorus books are actually filled with choruses written by Humpty Dumpty's. Lovely Christian Humpty Dumpty's, who use words as it suits them.

Who use words as an expression in the way that Humpty Dumpty did. Of course, those of you who are really into kind of modern philosophy will know that that is kind of one half of the equation of post-modernism. That a thing means what I mean it to mean and nothing else.

And there's no real means of communication because the thing that you hear only means what it means to you and it may not mean to you what it meant to me when I said it. So there's an utter breakdown of any kind of communication. Now, because that is increasingly the prevailing spirit of our age, I think we who have some responsibility in Bible teaching need to try to be sure that we are using words as accurately as we can so that we have some fixed points.

Otherwise, we're going to end up with a whole bundle of words that mean whatever Humpty Dumpty wants it to mean. And that way lies confusion, tremendous distress and pain for people. So I want to introduce you to a couple of words and then I'm going to ask you to really be pedantic and see if you can use these two words properly for at least one month and see what effect it has upon you.

I'll tell you what the words are in just a little while. We're going to talk about justification by faith and I can link it on to what I was saying yesterday simply by saying that when Paul writes his letter to the Romans he begins by bringing an accusation against the whole human race. The accusation he brings against the human race is that we have not lived according to the light that God has given to us.

He says, the things that may be known of God are known amongst us. And then he speaks particularly of the Gentile nations and speaks of the way in which they've known this and they've known this and they've known this but each time successively they've turned their back on the revelation. Now we are responsible for what we know.

We are not responsible for what we don't know. Let me see if I can just find very quickly something which may serve as a little definition of sin for us. This is the letter of James.

Please turn to it so that you can see what it is in the page and you can turn back to it at a later date and give some more thought to it. This is James chapter 4. James chapter 4 and verse 17. Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

That is a very useful definition of sin. To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin. In other words, if we know something and do not live and do not act in the light of that that we know, God holds us accountable.

You understand me? God does not hold you accountable for what you don't know. But what you do know, He holds you accountable for it. If you go back to the Old Testament times, you'll recall this time when Moses uses these words and he says, The secret things belong to God, but those things that are revealed are ours forever.

What he was saying is that to the Hebrew people in a unique way, God had given them knowledge. He had given them revelation and that revelation brought with it an awesome responsibility. They now had to live in the light of a clearer revelation of the mind of God than any other nation upon earth.

And there's a very sobering little comment in Amos, which says this, You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your sin. Privilege brings with it responsibility. And as Paul moves on, farther on into Romans chapter 2, he begins to speak about the one who calls himself a Jew and he says things like this, if my eye will just drop on them.

This is verse 17 of chapter 2. Behold thou art called a Jew and retest in the Lord and makest thy boast of God and knowest his will. Goes on a little bit later on to say in verse 20, still speaking of the Jew, that they think themselves to be an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, who have the form of knowledge and truth in the law. That word form really means the outline, the shape of it.

In the law, God had given a unique revelation of his own heart and mind to the people of Israel. And the Jews were proud of it. In fact, when Paul speaks later on about circumcision and asks what value it has, he says, Well, much in many ways, but chiefly to this people were given the oracles of God.

Their greatest treasure was that God had revealed his mind to them. They knew it was their greatest treasure and their greatest responsibility. And if you know something, you are held accountable by God.

And if you ought to have known it, you are held accountable by God. What do I mean by that? Well, do you recall the occasions when Jesus said to the people of Israel, Have you not read? He had given to them his word and they had a responsibility to find out what his word said. I guess this is what Wesley would have called taking every advantage of every means of grace.

What God has given to us, we must respond in that line. We must take advantage. We must develop.

We must use everything that God has revealed of himself and see the implications of that worked out in our lives. And the reason that Paul is saying all this is because he wants to bring this accusation to bring, as it says, where it is here, I think in verse... This is chapter 3 and verse 20. Sorry, verse 19.

Now we know that what things soever the law says, it says to them who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become, my A.V. says, guilty before God, literally brought to justice. What Paul is doing in the letters of the Romans is he is using the background of a law court. It's what they call forensic theology.

When God speaks to us, he finds some common point with us so that he can communicate what is in his heart to ours. And in the Bible we have three main areas from which a whole bundle of words have been taken. And it's a key thing when you're doing Bible study to think about the background that something comes from and not mix them all up together.

For example, one of the backgrounds for the people of God was the temple, the whole idea of an approach of a sinful man to a holy God. So in that language you've got all those words that come out like sacrifice and offering and holiness and cleansing and propitiation, these kind of words. They're all from that temple background.

Then you've got another background which is really like a slave market background. And from that background you've got words like ransom and redemption, the idea of a change of ownership. And then you've got another background which is the law court background.

You get it in the Old Testament as well, but you get it particularly in this letter of Paul to the Romans. The Romans gave us law. The Greeks gave us philosophy and ways of expressing things and putting things into little boxes.

And in many ways the Hebrews gave us a language of faith and expression. But it was the Roman people who gave to the nation, certainly of Europe, the basis of their law. So we'll need to remember that when we get to the point where Paul says, I speak to you who know the law.

He was speaking to people who were specialists at it. And this background has a whole bundle of words in it like guilty and accused and condemned and justified. And all these words come from that law court background.

So what I'm going to try and do is go through one of these chapters or two halves of a chapter really in the book of Romans and see what God is saying to us from this background using this particular language. You know, don't you, how God always has this amazing way of speaking to us in our language at the point of our need. So that when God wants to speak to a shepherd, he reveals truth about himself and the shepherd's testimony is, the Lord is my shepherd.

David understood that language, he knew exactly what it meant. That's the way that God speaks to us. And in this context it's the law court background and God is speaking to us in this kind of picture language.

It's important to remember it's a law court background because that's one of the trials that people like me are going through. I am pedantic, I know that. That's just the way things are.

I remember hearing a story once, one of these silly stories about someone arriving at the gates of heaven and this person arrived and knocked at the gates of heaven and Peter came, looked through the peephole and said, who is it? And the person who did the knocking said, it is I. And Peter said, oh no, not another teacher. There's a kind of a pedantry I know that kind of gets into the way that teachers do things. But it's important when we're looking at these words that we try and understand as clearly as possible what is being said.

And I want to say this thing and now you'll know why I say that we're increasingly, we're having choruses written by antidumsters. You'll find in our chorus books and you'll find maybe even in some of the modern hymns references to guilt and condemnation which have to do with feelings. I feel guilty.

I felt condemned. He made me feel condemned. He made me feel guilty.

Let me tell you, you cannot use the word feel and guilty or condemnation in the same sentence. Okay? You can't use them in the same sentence. In biblical terms, for forensic background, guilt has absolutely nothing at all to do with how you feel.

The court is not interested in how you feel. You may feel bad about what you've done. You may feel no compunction at all about what you've done.

The Bible isn't interested in it. The court isn't interested in it. It's interested in whether or not you are responsible for the thing of which you have been accused and if you are, the court will find you guilty.

There was a simple process. It worked a little bit like this. You'd start off with an accusation.

Someone would be accused of a specific crime and they would come to the court, which was really more like our magistrate's court. They didn't have a jury system in the way that we have it. So the judge, in a sense, was both judge and jury.

So they'd come to this man with the accusation and he would hear the case against that person. That would be the accusation. He would then listen to the evidence and he would make his decision.

His decision would either be that the person was guilty of the crimes of which he was accused and if he was guilty of the crimes of which he was accused, the law process would move on to the next step. And

the next step would be that the person would be declared guilty and the next step would be that the sentence would be pronounced, what was going to happen to this person as a result of his guilt and ultimately the sentence would be carried out, the execution of it. So you've got different stages.

You've got accusation, then the process of judgment, then the verdict, then the sentence and ultimately the execution, if the person was guilty. And the Bible words for this would be something like this. You'd first of all have the accusation.

If the person was guilty, if the judgment is made that he was guilty, the verdict would be declared and that would be this person is guilty. Then there would be the sentence declared and that really is the Bible word condemnation and then ultimately there would be the executing of that sentence. Now if you'll think about this, you'll understand the ruthless logic of Paul when he takes another particular route.

Let's imagine the same situation now but with slightly different details. You've got a man who is accused of something and he comes before the judge. The judge hears the evidence and makes the decision that this person is not to be held accountable for the crimes of which he is accused.

At this point, the judge would justify this person. He would declare this person just of the accusations which were made from him and the whole legal process comes to an end. That's it.

He walks from the court a free man. There is literally no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. The whole process stops in the middle.

It's finished. There is no sentence uttered. There is no sentence executed for the innocent man.

Do you understand that? Okay. And you'll understand, I hope, that it has nothing at all to do with feelings. I really don't want to be pedantic but it really is important that we understand the significance of some of these words.

You may say, well, linguists will tell me language is changing all the time and we've got to be willing to move with it. And I know that's true but the revelation of God isn't changing all the time and we've got to be prepared to stick with it. And one of the things is, let me give you a really silly illustration.

Now, I like dogs. Now, suppose I desperately want a dog but I can't have a dog so instead I get a goldfish. And to kind of comfort me in my disappointment I decide that I'm going to call this goldfish a dog.

Now, up at this point it will have no immediate effect on the goldfish. It's only me. I just decide I'm going to call this goldfish a dog.

And it's no problem. As long as I make the mental translation in my mind all the time it's fine with me. The problem comes if I go on holiday and ask someone to look after my dog and they say, fine, I'll get a book from the library.

And they get a book from the library and they discover that the best way to feed my dog is to throw it a bone every now and again and that they really must be diligent with its exercise and take it for walks into the park. Now, this now begins to have serious consequences for my goldfish. And yes, it's okay.

You can use a word to express whatever's in your heart but if you're going to communicate with the word it's very important that both people know what you mean when you say dog. And when we talk about guilt and condemnation in Bible terms it's important that we understand what we're saying. We're talking about

the way that God has illustrated what he has done for us from a judicial standpoint, from a forensic background.

We need to understand that this, and incidentally in the law and even Saint Graham has transgressed on this. Those of you who know my kind of liking for Kendrick will know what I mean by that. But on one point he refers to being cleansed from guilt.

Think about the law court background. Cleansing is from the temple background. Guilt is from the law court background.

You cannot be cleansed from guilt. You can be exonerated, and that's it. You can carry out the sentence and then you say what he's paid his debt to society and we must no longer regard him as a guilty person.

But cleansing is another picture. These pictures are so rich. The tapestry is so wonderful.

It's a tragedy that we bundle everything up together. So I want to try and tease the man. It may be almost impossible now to do it.

I can remember when I was quite young and I have a younger brother and I can remember at about three or four him going to his father, my father, who was a very clever person, very able to do all kinds of things with his hand, with a great big lump of grey plasticine and he said, unmix it dad. You know the children think parents can do just about anything. Well I'm going to try and unmix this great big grey lump of theology that we get into our choruses and see if we can find out exactly what it's talking about.

Let me take you to a verse now. This is chapter four of Romans and verse five. I'll read it as it stands.

It really follows on from the next but I think we can understand it as it is. But to him who does not work but who believes on him who justifies the ungodly his faith is counted for righteousness. That is an amazing statement.

It speaks about someone who justifies, that is to say declares not accountable, not responsible, someone who is responsible, someone who is accountable. Now this is, some people say this is just God conjuring. This is sleight of hand and Paul would be well aware of that kind of accusation that would come.

How can God do this? We are often interested in justifying ourselves. Paul was interested in justifying God. He was concerned about God's reputation and he wanted to explain the truth to us because he wanted us to understand that God at one and the same time could be both just and the justifier of those who believe on Jesus.

Let me give you a very simple but very profound working definition of what justification means. I first heard this I guess about twenty odd years ago but in fact a couple of years ago when David Pawson was here he reminded you of this. It doesn't come from these complicated theological textbooks.

It doesn't come from Strong or Burckhoff or any of these people. It comes from Papua New Guinea. In Papua New Guinea they have a form of language which is often known as pidgin English where you can identify all the words as being English but they are put together in a way that is very picturesque and often quite baffling to people who don't understand it.

And having explained this whole process of justification to people in Papua New Guinea the people in Papua New Guinea needed a word to express what justification would be and they came up with this

amazing statement God, him say, me okay. Now I want to tell you that is the best theological definition of justification I have ever read in my life. That is absolutely perfect because it begins with the only person who matters.

It does not matter who else him say. Are you following this? Be interested to know what people are doing with translating this into some other language. I'll try to be as kind as I can with you.

It doesn't matter what anybody else says. It doesn't matter what your accuser says. It doesn't matter what your enemy says.

It doesn't matter what you say. What matters is what God says. That's what matters.

And God, him say, it's not a question of God thinking and going through a mental process of judgment. It's God actually making the public declaration. God actually saying, you're alright.

In my judgment, in my court, according to my verdict and my sentence you're alright. That is justification. Now how can God possibly say me okay when God knows me? When God has taken Paul through this particular way of expression here and shown that the whole world is brought to justice and there's no difference for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

It's very, very important that we understand that we are guilty. Guilty, guilty, guilty. I'm not interested in how you feel.

This is the sentence of the court. Paul brings us into the court and we are guilty, guilty, guilty. But by some marvelous means God is able, God, him say, me, okay.

Now how can that take place? And Paul explains it, and this is why I said it's really two halves of a chapter. We need to go back a little bit into Romans chapter 3 where you've got one of the most important verses in the New Testament. It comes on the heels of all this statement about all have sinned, verse 23 and come short of the glory of God.

And then he says, being justified freely. God, him say, me, okay, freely as a gift. Not because I've bribed the judge.

Not because I've bribed the judge with some promises of how I'm going to behave in the future. Because it's a free gift. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

And this is the verse, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation. Let's break this verse up a little bit. Paul says here that God has demonstrated, he has declared, he has given an open show of something that he calls a propitiation.

Now I know that's another big theological word, but propitiation really is the price paid to remove an offense so that there can be reconciliation. We have an instinct, we human beings. We know that if we've done something that has offended someone and we are wrong, if we are guilty in that thing, we have an instinct that if we can only find the right price, we can get back into that person's good favor.

So you have the little boy who has done what his mother told him not to do and he's being rebuked and maybe punished and he goes and picks flowers in the garden and brings them back to mummy. And instinctively he's working on this principle, if I can find the right price to remove the offense, I can get back into right relationship with my mum. And those of you who sit there patronizing thinking, yeah, children are

like that.

It's exactly the same instinct when the husband buys the big box of chocolates because he's forgotten the anniversary. It's exactly the same instinct. If I can only find the right price.

And sometimes it's hard and husbands have been known to say, what can I do? What can I say? I'm sorry, I'm sorry. But it's an instinct. It's a true instinct, but it will always lead us astray unless we base the answer upon revelation.

It's the basis of all blood sacrifice. It's the basis of all heathen approach to God. If I can only find the right price, if I can only find the right words, if I can make the right sacrifice, I can appease this God, I can get back into good favor with this God.

The instinct is right. The way it works out is wrong. We need to come back.

In fact, we need to understand just how grievous is the offense. When we've understood how grievous the offense is, we'll know that there's nothing at all we could do from now until eternity that would ever be the right price to remove the offense, to reconcile us to God. And what we could not do, God has done.

We sometimes say that Jesus paid the price for our sin. In technical terms, Jesus is the price for our sin. The Father paid Him.

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. He is the propitiation. Jesus Christ is the plainly set forth price paid to remove the offense so that there can be reconciliation.

There's a lovely story. I haven't got time for all these stories, but there's this wonderful story of Jacob way back in the Old Testament who is fearful of a meeting that he's going to have with his brother. You remember this story? He schemes and plans and he creates this wonderful gift that he's going to give to Esau on the installment plan to break him down and he says, and you get his thinking, it's very plain, and he says, and then afterwards I may see his face.

He wanted to be able to look Esau in the eye and he couldn't until he thought he'd paid the right price. You often wonder how often the Bible talks about seeing God eye to eye. Every single time in the Old Testament that you hear the word presence, it actually means eye to eye.

In His presence, it really means eye to eye. All through the book of Leviticus, when it talks about people doing things in the presence of the Lord, it's all before God's eye. This whole picture of eye contact where we dare not look into the eyes of a holy God because we know what we're like, but a price has been paid.

A price has been paid which makes it possible for us and this is the story that goes right into the end of the book of Revelation, and His servants shall see His face. We can look God in the eye and say, Jesus has died. Not my contribution, not my promises, not my faith, not my repentance, not anything that I can offer, but Jesus has died and we can do it boldly and we come boldly not because of any confidence in our own attainments or promises, but we come boldly because of what Jesus has done and said and we believe that when He said He's finished, it was finished.

And you can't add anything to something which is finished. So I can make no contribution at all to this thing, but God has done it all. He has set forth Him to be a propitiation.

Through faith we must put all our trust in Him. The Bible word faith really means putting all your eggs in one basket. No plan B's, no contingencies, no alternatives if it doesn't work out, everything in the one place.

By His blood, that's Bible code for His death. It was in His death. It wasn't just in His teaching.

It wasn't in His marvellous miracles. It wasn't even in the amazing revelation of His character. It was in who He was poured out to its last drop in death.

This was God setting forth, publicly demonstrating, commending His love towards us. And that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And then He says, to declare His righteousness.

That's to say, Paul wants you to know that God has been behaving righteously all along. God hasn't been tweaking or putting spin on things. God has been dealing openly all the way along.

And He says this, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past. This word remission isn't the normal word that we have in our Bible which means to send something away. This word remission actually means to let something drop.

Norman the other day said that I come from the black country. Actually, I don't come from the black country. I lived in Birmingham for about 20 years.

But my home is North Staffordshire, the potteries. You know where all the mugs come from. That's my part of the world.

A place which is a very pleasant place now, but when I was growing up we used to call it smoke on stench. If you go to, I grew up in Burslem, and just about a quarter of a mile up the road from us was Port Vale. Now Port Vale is a football club, I'm assured.

Some people think its full name is Port Vale Nil, but it isn't, it's just Port Vale. And Port Vale is a, well if you go back to Burslem, and you begin to talk and you say, what do you think about that goal? Do you think that penalty really was justified? And I promise you that there are people of a certain generation and you can wind them up like that. No, definitely it was not justified.

Ronnie Allen should never have taken the penalty. Wes Bromwich should never have won that semi-final of the FA Cup. Never.

Now it was a disgrace. It happened in 1954, this. But they won't let it drop.

Some people are like that. Something happens and they won't let it drop. They'll hang on to it for years and years and years and years.

I remember he did this. They won't let it drop. God will.

God lets things drop. This is what the word means. God was justified in letting things drop.

He didn't hold on to them. You know that love doesn't hold on to sin. It doesn't keep an account of sin.

It doesn't reckon on sin. God let it drop. The sins that are passed through the forbearance of God.

And why did God let them drop? Well, because the penalty for all this sin had been paid potentially, eternally, in the death of Jesus Christ. We had a large family. We had seven children.

You've heard me say before, most people are content with being members of the human race. We wanted to win it. So we had a big family.

And life in a big family is pretty much life in a cube with dad at the end of it. I can remember on one occasion, we went to Madame Tussauds to see the wax exhibition. And they had this system of turnstiles where you have to pay your money and the turnstile takes one movement and one person is allowed through.

And I was with my family. This occasion I was in the middle of it. We had the four younger ones at the front and the three younger ones behind.

And we came to that turnstile and do you know, the lady behind the turnstile let every single one of the first four through. And they didn't pay a penny. Do you know why they didn't pay a penny? Because she could see me coming with the money in my hand.

And do you know why God was justified in justifying Abraham? Because he could see the man coming with the money in his hand. The eternal vision of Christ's death upon the cross in the heart of God from eternity to eternity. A fact of life that had to be worked out ultimately in time and space on our earth but an eternal truth.

And because it's an eternal truth, it has an eternal consequence that stretches from an eternity backwards and an eternity forwards. And this is what Paul is saying. God set it forth.

And that's why God could be justified in letting these things drop. Brothers and sisters, let things drop. Don't hang on to them.

They'll weigh you down. They'll destroy you and don't shut people out because of something you can remember. Sometimes it takes us a long, long time to understand that every time you shut somebody out, you lock yourself in.

You will imprison yourself by shutting somebody else out. Paul goes on to say then that because of this that's taken place, because the penalty's already been paid, because it's already been acted, the law has nothing that it can get a grip on for this person because the price is already paid. The penalty's already been delivered.

The man can walk from the court free, absolutely free. God, him say, me okay. Because of what God has done in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Paul expresses this. And he goes through the rest of this chapter here. And he makes this amazing statement in verse 5. And he speaks about a God who justifies the ungodly.

I sometimes think that evangelicals aren't entirely comfortable with that phrase. I sometimes think that people in fellowships aren't entirely comfortable with that phrase. God justifies the ungodly.

The Bible teaches justification by faith. It does not teach justification by sanctification. It does not teach that we are acceptable with God because we change.

It does not teach that we are acceptable with God because we can be born again. It says we're acceptable with God because of what Christ has done on the cross. This is this great, unchangeable, eternal fact of life.

Through the eternal Spirit, he offered himself without spot to God. And it's captured in the eternal Spirit. It's as real and effective and as fresh today as it was then.

So that if any man or woman comes to God on the basis of what Jesus has done upon the cross, he can know for certainty this word of God in his heart, God, him say, me okay. And who's going to be the judge? What right do you have to judge your life? Who are you? What do you think you know? And when Paul said on one occasion, I judge not myself. We use this language, don't we, say, well, I was feeling really condemned.

No, you're not allowed to use that for at least a month. Okay? You can say I was feeling accused, that's okay, but not condemned. The great thing about seeing that you feel accused is you immediately begin to think, who is the accuser? Who is the person who's bringing the accusation? God who died? Jesus? Who is the accuser? Are you the accuser? Is your friend the accuser? Is your expectation of salvation the accuser? Is your expectation of new birth the accuser? None of these have the right to accuse you against thee, and thee only have I sinned.

If God puts his finger on something, deal with it. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, but no one else has the right to drag you into God's court. And it's not a matter of how you feel about it, and it has nothing at all to do with which side of the bed you got out, or whether you have a liver condition, it has nothing at all to do with any of that.

It's all based on absolutely the unchanging nature of God. Listen to this little phrase, we've quoted it several times already, from John's first letter. If we acknowledge... I'm going to change it.

If we acknowledge our sins, he is loving and merciful to forgive us our sins, to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Is that what it says? No, it doesn't. It says, if we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just.

You have the unchangeable character of God to depend upon. This is what this whole thing about believing... There's this little phrase here, Abraham is the classic example. Abraham is the father of those who believe.

That's what the Bible says. Irrespective of whether they were part of the Jewish family, or the nations, Abraham is the father of all believers. In this sense, he is the prototype.

He is the first one that we have in the Bible with a full description of the consequences of his faith in God. That's often what the Bible means by a father. You remember this little account way back in Genesis where it speaks of certain people.

I always get mixed up. There was Tubal Cain and that bunch, you know, there's two or three of them. And one of them was the father of those who play instruments, and one of them was the father of those who work in metal, and one of those was the father who dwelt in tents.

And I often say, well, my father was an engineer. And he loved camping and he played a math organ. So, who was his father? Because what the Bible is doing is it's using the word father in the sense of the first of.

In fact, the descendants of all three died in the flood. So, there are no descendants, naturally, of those three people. But because they were the first, the Bible refers to them as the father.

And Abraham is the father of the faithful. And if this doesn't confuse you, I can tell you, you're going to have to become a son of Abraham before you become a son of God. You're going to have to have Abraham's faith before you have God's faith.

You're going to have to have the kind of experience that Abraham had. There was a point in Abraham's experience, we come back to this again and again, when revelation came. The Word of God came.

And it says simply in my Bible, Genesis 15 verse 6, the first time you'll meet the word faith or belief in the Bible, it says, Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. God put it to his account for righteousness because Abraham believed God. The Hebrew word for believe is amen.

Abraham amened God. God said this and this and this and Abraham said amen. Amen.

I believe it. God said it. I believe it.

And God at that moment credited to Abraham's account righteousness. And Abraham became the first of a whole bunch, a whole family of people within Judaism, outside Judaism, who would have the same faith that put all its eggs in one basket, that trusted God absolutely for its salvation. Had no plan B's.

And to those two, God credits righteousness to their account. Now, there are wonderful truths in this. We're only touching them.

David expands it. It's here in chapter 4 and verse 6. David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works. And then you've got a little description of the way that David speaks of the man who is justified by faith.

The man for whom God has credited his account with righteousness because of his faith. David says, I'll tell you something more about this man. And here it is.

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven. Now that is the word remission. That is the word sent away.

And David had in his mind and no doubt Paul had in his mind the picture that God had given to the people of Israel of the day of atonement. And a point at which symbolically, the sins of the nation were declared over an animal. They identified themselves with it.

This thing that we call the scapegoat. And they sent it away in picture language from the presence of God into the wilderness so that it would no longer be a haunting of the relationship between a man and his God. It's only picture language.

The reality could only ever come when the Spirit of God made it all real. But the truth is there in the picture. Blessed are they whose sins are remitted.

They're sent away. And whose sins are covered. That's another Old Testament picture.

It's this picture of the atonement. The mercy seat. Like that very first word we looked at, propitiation.

Technically is the propitiatory. That's to say it is the place of propitiation. Jesus is the place where the price was paid.

Wonderful. Because God said of the propitiatory the mercy seat. I will meet you there.

I'll talk with you there. I don't know who is listening to this now or in the future but here is an absolute guarantee. If you will come to Jesus Christ, God will meet with you there.

He'll talk with you there. We can't make a promise for anything else. We can't promise you that He'll talk with you if you come to our meetings.

We can't promise you that He'll talk to you if you come to the conference. We can't promise that if you sign up for something, what we can promise if you will come to Jesus, He will meet with you there. And He will talk with you there.

This is this wonderful thing. And on top of that ark they had this slab of gold called the propitiatory place or the mercy seat. And on that place blood was sprinkled once a year.

And the broken law symbolically which lay in the chest beneath it was hidden from the all-seeing eye of God by the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat. And David is taking up a picture and he says, Blessed is the man whose sins are carried away. Blessed is the man whose sins are covered.

Atoned would have been the word if he'd been speaking in Aramaic or something like that. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin. Not only does God reckon His righteousness to our account, not only does He put His righteousness in our account under our name, but what He says is that for the man who puts all his trust in God, God doesn't actually keep a record of his withdrawals.

God keeps no record of any of the debits. All that goes into this account is one massive credit. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

And nothing that you do will dent the balance. Because love takes no account of sin. It does not measure.

This is all covenant so far as we call it. This is a little beatitudes. Oh the blessednesses.

Oh the blessednesses of the man whose sins are carried away. The man whose sins are covered. The man to whom the Lord does not keep a score.

Oh the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts and we are supposed to live like Him. We are supposed to have the love of God that keeps no account of sins. That keeps no score.

That doesn't hold on to something that happened to me from that person twenty years ago. And this is Old Testament so far. It gets better than this.

Come on Thursday morning. To him that works not but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly. His faith is counted for righteousness.

Can you see why the writer to the Hebrew using the picture language of the temple should now say come boldly to the throne of grace. Not dragging your feet or the memory of your sins. Come boldly.

Come boldly. Jesus, if I may misquote, has boldly gone where no man ever went before Him. He is.

He is the first man, the first human being to have gone into the presence of a holy God. But the book of Hebrews says He appears there for us. He's not gone there to prove a point.

He's gone there to make an access. He's gone there to make a way so that we may boldly come not because of our attainment. Not because we've ultimately reached some level of what we think we should be.

Not because we've made promises. Not because we've repented enough. But because God has set forth His Son as the propitiation for our sins.

Let's pray. We don't really want to get bogged down with words, Father. But we do want to stand in truth.

And we want to garrison our minds around with the revelation of Your Word. And not have it diluted or polluted by people who will take a Bible word and use it to express a feeling. Thank You, Lord.

You have seen what He's done. And You're satisfied. Thank You, Lord.

Thank You for this wonder that people who were rebels, sinners, murderers, blasphemers, a whole list of whatever we were, can now come, stand in Your presence, having left the court of free men, and declare because Jesus has done this. Live our life without fear because God Him say, me okay. Amen.

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