

Constituted as Righteous

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 January 2020

Preacher: Tom Holland

[0 : 00] I've got about two more weeks, maybe three, but at least two in justification by faith.

! Critically important study. Maybe the most important study in the Word of God. The term justification is forensic in nature.!

It means it's something that is of use in courts or with a judge. It pertains to legal discourse. Now, why does that term apply to justification?

Because justification has to do with a judgment that has been rendered. So we can see the connection there. It is a pronouncement or a declaration made, in this case, by the Supreme Judge of the universe.

And we're not talking about the U.S. Supreme Court. Let me just say one thing about the U.S. Supreme Court. They're not. There's another court much more powerful than them.

[1 : 15] Justification has to do with regeneration. But we must make a distinction. Regeneration is an act of God by which He redeems a lost sinner who just moments earlier was bound for hell.

Justification is not so much an act as it is a judgment rendered or a judgment declared by the Supreme Judge.

Think in terms of a judge. Think in terms of a judge. Think in terms of a judge. In earthly terms. In terms of cancer, a surgeon removes the cancerous cells so they will not continue to grow.

Because if they're allowed to grow, they will ultimately kill the patient. This happened with my wife. They were able to remove it. And she's been declared cancer-free. Praise God. In other words, the surgeon does something within us.

But the judge does something outside of us. He is in the business of giving or rendering a verdict or a pronouncement declaring us to be not guilty.

[2 : 44] Now, we're going to be real careful on our use of terms. People don't get declared innocent. They get declared not guilty and there's a difference. And we may get into that.

I lived in that world for a long time, as you all know. Not as a criminal as a law enforcement officer. He gives a declaration giving our judicial status.

It can be guilty or innocent, but it's still a declaration. More especially, not guilty. Now, everyone in here that's a follower of Christ must be concerned with the purity of the gospel.

In the 21st century, it is the role of the church to protect the true gospel from the many false gospels that abound.

And Paul told us in Galatians about that. There's many false gospels out there. And we know that to be true. If you don't just turn on television, you'll see a lot of it. The church has had that same responsibility in the 20th century.

[3 : 54] The church had that responsibility in the 15th and the 4th and the 3rd. And you can go all the way back to the foundation of the church. Every century, we've had the responsibility to protect the purity of the gospel of Jesus.

Now, it is our duty, but it is also the high privilege to protect the purity of the gospel in the 21st century. And there's something quite ironic about all this.

Many in the church have turned their backs in the 21st century on the true gospel. They can't discuss it because they don't know what it is.

They're clueless. They can't even define it. So how can we protect that which many people do not understand? Well, you know, the easy answer to that is we cannot.

Part of protecting the purity of the gospel is having the ability to distinguish between regeneration and justification.

[5 : 03] And this is what Luther had to do. And it was quite a revelation to him. And we studied that already several weeks ago. The truth is that in Luther's day, regeneration, justification, and

sanctification all had been misunderstood.

So they were all put in this one bowl and mixed around in one bowl. And the church, probably with not malice aforethought, but they perverted the gospel because they mixed all that up together. In Luther's day and in Luther's day, the doctrine of justification by faith is still the article on which the church stands for false.

And in our day, many churches and whole denominations have fallen into irrelevance because of their failure to grasp the truth of justification.

Justification means to declare or pronounce one to be righteous. Such righteousness is a state or a standing that is found in the declaration itself.

[6 : 24] Now, being declared just in the eyes of God does not in and of itself make me or you just and righteous in practice.

I was as much a sinner the day after I got saved as I was the day I got saved. And it was a great frustration to me, but it was truthful. Now, it was sinful the day before I was declared just.

And as it says in John's first epistle, in verse 8 and 10, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. So the Lord tells us right there. It hadn't gone away.

But this makes it clear that we're sinners in this life. We remain so even after salvation. But I left out that beautiful verse that goes between those two passages. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[7 : 39] That is worthy of memorization right there. Now, nothing I have said here is meant to imply that we are not to strive for holiness.

That is our Christian calling. Our Christian life is to be waged on that battlefield and it is a battle. Yeah, you might recall one of my remarks on Sunday morning when I gave the message on December 29th.

The pastor was very busy that weekend watching the chiefs. I think it was a birthday gift for Jack, wasn't it? And one of the evidences of genuine Christianity is a decreasing pattern of sin in your life and in my life.

A decreasing pattern. In this life, we strive for holiness. We don't arrive at practical holiness. But we will one day when we see Jesus in glory and we will be like him because we'll see him as he is.

In fact, in this whole series, Salvation in God's Way, the last thing we will study is glorification in heaven. Now, go back to my example of an earthly judge.

[9 : 00] When a judge declares a person to be righteous in terms of what he finds in the case, he does not give to the person righteous standing.

The judge does not make that person righteous. That is why a human judge is called upon to justify the righteous and condemn the wicked based upon Deuteronomy 25.1, which we read last week.

But a human judge and the divine judge of the universe are two different things. Two different things. The justification we are dealing with is God's justification of the ungodly.

I'm so happy God justifies the ungodly. That gives me hope. God does not justify those who are righteous. Jesus said, I didn't come to save the righteous.

Of course, then he whispered, if there were any. I came to save the lost. Seeking to save the lost. Now, at this point, I want to inject an obvious truth.

[10 : 14] Let God be true and all men liars. God has this to say about righteous people. And I got that in quotation marks. Here's what God had to say through the Apostle Paul.

None is righteous. How many are righteous? None. Thank you, buddy. None is righteous. I knew who that was without looking.

None is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they become worthless. No one does good. Not even one. Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asp is under their lips.

Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. And their paths are ruin and misery. And the way of peace they have not known.

[11 : 18] And then this summary statement, there is no fear of God before their eyes. That's Romans chapter 3, verses 10 to 18. Paul gives this stinging indictment of the entire human race.

And the whole human race is contained there. And let me say this. This was not original with Paul. Every word he uses here to describe the human family is a quote from the Old Testament.

So it was in existence long before the Apostle Paul came along. Now let me return to my earlier thought. God does not justify the godly, if there were any.

God justifies the ungodly. It is a justification of persons who are wicked and under God's condemnation and curse. But all this begs an answer to a very serious question.

How can God do this? Now we could take the easy way to say, well, he's God. He can do anything he wants to. But let's not go the easy route. God's judgments flow from truth.

[12:36] Because God is true truth. I got that from Francis Schaeffer in his writings. God is true truth. God's judgment is one of perfect equity.

And by equity, I mean it is always just and it is always right. Remember when Abraham had a visit from the Lord Jesus Christ, a pre-incarnate appearance called a theophany or a Christophany in the Old Testament.

And he said, shall I tell Abraham what I'm about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah? The cry has come up to me and I'm going to go down there. If it's true, I'm going to destroy them. And Abraham went into that debate, you know, well, if you find 50 righteous and you know, remember all that.

But at one point, Abraham said this, shall not the judge of all the universe do what is just? And the Lord is in the business of exercising perfect equity.

Can I support this? Well, let's try. Psalm 98, verse 8, the Lord cometh to judge the earth with righteousness, shall he judge the world and the people with equity.

[13:51] In Isaiah 11, 4, with righteousness shall he judge the poor and reprove with equity. This was utterly amazing for various reasons.

God justifies the ungodly. Let me give a proof text for that. Romans 4, 5, and to the one who does not work, trying to work for his salvation, do enough things to get God's attention, and then God says, well, I got to save him.

To the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Reflect on this passage, the next passage, for the remainder of the week and beyond. This again is in Romans chapter 3. Picking up where we left off with Paul earlier.

This is verse 19 to I think 24. Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

[15:04] For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

But now, and anytime you see but now, or but God, pay attention, but now, the righteousness of God has been made, has been manifested, it's been revealed, apart from the law.

Although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, for there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is not in your notes, but I just feel this urge to add this. You know, I often go back and I'm reading through the Bible right now and I'm in Exodus to the giving of the law. And I've said this in here before.

And this is not King James, this is my translation. But Moses is going up and down the mountain visiting with God. And the people sent Moses up and says, tell God if you'll give us a list of rules and commandments to live by, we'll live up to them.

[16:32] So Moses goes up and he says, well, people down there would like you to give them some commandments, some rules, some laws to live by. And they said, whatever you give, they'll live up to every single one of them.

Now, while he was saying that, they were dinner making a golden calf, but we won't get into that tonight. And they said, Moses told God, he said, they'll live up to every one of them.

And God said, you know what you're talking about? Don't you remember how I bore you on eagle's wings out of Egypt? What's he saying there? Don't you remember I dealt with you by grace?

See, before there was the Mosaic covenant, there was the Abrahamic covenant, which is a covenant of grace. They were under grace. They just didn't feel like it when they were in slavery, but they were under grace.

And that's when Moses said, my translation, everything you give us, we will do all of it. He said, okay, I'll do that. Get off this mountain.

[17:38] Get your shoes off. This is holy ground. Now, get off this mountain. You go down there and you tell the people to abstain from relations with their wives and to clean themselves up, clean their garments, clean their bodies.

Tell them not to approach the foot of this mountain or I will kill them. Tell them to tie up their animals because if an animal gets loose and approaches the base of this hill, I will kill the animal. And the people said they looked up and they saw fire and black smoke and there was thunder and lightning and an earthquake.

What did they see? What happened? What's different? That's God under law, not under grace. Now they're getting a dose of God under law.

Again, I threw that in for free. Men do not have the luxury of declaring someone righteous who is in fact wicked. For a man to declare a wicked man righteous would be an abomination to God.

But God can do what no man can do. God can justify the wicked. And amazingly, God can do this without Himself being or becoming unrighteous or wicked.

[19:07] Again, we appeal to Paul in Romans. The great chapter on justification. Romans 3.26. It was to show His righteousness.

That's God's. To show God's righteousness at the present time so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God can be both just and justifier at the same time. So, this all leads to a vitally important question. How can God be just when He justifies a sinner?

Now remember, man can't do this. But God can. Only God can. The question is how can God do this?

And the answer that we're going to give, we're going to bring in a new concept into the mix here in just a few moments. And many of these guys sitting up closer know that I'm not smart enough to come up with this.

[20:14] So I'm grateful to the late Dr. John Murray, one of the founders of Westminster Theological Seminary, for his work in this area. He was born in 1898, died in 1975.

The concept of declaring a wicked sinner to be righteous seems strangely inadequate to a finite fallen mind.

I think we all struggle with that. How do you pull that off? And there seems to be something quite involved here, much more than merely the English expression, I declare you to be just and righteous.

Doesn't it take more than that? The ability and the desire to declare a person righteous touches the mind of God.

It is also the provision of God's grace and justice which somehow meet at some point in the process.

[21:16] Perhaps they intersect His grace and His justice. Two facts stand out. In making this declaration of justification, God does what no other can do.

No other person can do this. No one. The false and imaginary gods of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, all the other isms, all the other world religions, along with false gods of various cults, can never do this.

They can't do this. First of all, they're imaginary. They can't do this. They can't do it because they're false and they don't exist. But neither could they do it if they actually existed.

Can't pull it off. To make this declaration, we tread on the exclusive ground of God. That is the first fact we come face to face with.

This is all of God and none of us. Spurgeon wrote a little book, All of Grace. There's another fact involved here. In declaring a person to be just and righteous, God does hear what He does not do anywhere else.

[22:37] He doesn't declare angels justified. He doesn't declare them righteous. He doesn't declare demons or Satan justified, obviously.

God does not justify those who are not His chosen vessels. To save an elect person, God must declare them to be righteous and He does so on the basis of His truth, on the basis of His holiness, on the basis of His righteousness, and on the basis of His grace.

Those four things working together. Now, I will admit up front, this next comment goes deep and we might not fully grasp it, but we've got to try.

The peculiarity of God's action consists in that He causes or brings about the righteous state or relation which is declared to be.

Now, I'm going to repeat that and we'll plow that a little bit, maybe this week or next, but God's action, making this declaration, consists in that God causes or brings about the righteousness we're talking about, the righteous state or relation which He declares to be.

[24 : 08] He brings it into being. We didn't bring it into being. I didn't bring it into being. I didn't know it was happening. It took me years later. I'm kind of like Luther. I found this in the Scriptures years later.

Luther had been a monk for years when he found justification by faith. Now, remember we already said that justification is forensic, meaning that's judicial.

It's a judicial declaration. I did not at salvation suddenly become righteous. Those of you who know me know that's true. The judge of the universe rendered a verdict and declared me to be righteous. And now we come to a new term that I mentioned above. And I came across this during my research for the lesson. And I've had to do a lot of thinking about it.

What God does in the case of justification is he constitutes, there's the new term, he constitutes the new and righteous judicial relation and declares it to be so by bringing it into being.

[25 : 23] God does that. God constitutes the ungodly righteous and consequently having constituted them to be righteous, he can now declare them to be righteous.

In the justification of sinners there is a declarative act and now we see there is a constitutive act as well. And we could say it this way which might be more confusing.

the declarative act of God and the justification of the ungodly is constitutive. Now we're going to get to a definition.

Whatever else we might get out of this, let's admit one thing, okay? We're treading water in the deep end of the pool here. Okay? So I thought it'd be helpful.

I'm going to look up the definition. And you know I love Webster's dictionary because Noah Webster was a follower of Christ. And I have a copy, a reprint of his 1828 dictionary and I love it.

[26 : 31] Now this may clear it up a little bit. Constitutes means to enact, to establish, to fix, to form, to give formal existence to something or someone or to make a thing what it is.

Now when God constitutes, that's what he's doing. Constitutive is to make, form, or compose. It is having the power, talking about God, it is having the power to enact or establish something, being able to institute something.

Well God's capable of doing that, isn't he? And once I saw those two words defined, it helped me greatly. It helped me greatly. Another thing that helped me greatly, and I did a diligent search for this, but I found this verse of scripture in the classic edition of the Amplified Bible.

Romans 5, 19. For just as by one man's disobedience, the many were constituted sinners, sinners, so by one man's obedience, the many will be constituted righteous.

That's in the Amplified version. Now the English Standard Version puts it this way, for as the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners, instead of constituted, made.

[28 : 08] And part of the definition of constitute is made, to make something. they were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience, and that's Christ, the many will be made righteous, constituted righteous.

By Adam's sin, we were made, or constituted, sinners. And that's in the older translation.

And the operative word here is made, used in the modern translation, as opposed to constituted in the older translation. But remember, the definition of constituted and constitutive is to make something to be, to bring it into existence.

So being constituted or being made is appropriate because they mean the same thing. We have a parallel passage in the fifth chapter of Romans, verses 17 and 18.

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

[29 : 23] The old man was Adam. The new man is the God man, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass, that was the garden, chapter 3, forbidden fruit, one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification in life for all men.

People say, that's not very fair. I wasn't in the garden. Yeah, we were. We were in the DNA of Adam and Eve. And like my wife is fond of saying, if you'd been there instead of Adam, we'd be in worse condition.

She says that to me often. In verse 17, the apostle Paul speaks of those who received the free gift of righteousness. In verse 18, Paul speaks of one act of righteousness leads to justification. And we can say with certainty that the justification unto eternal life, the apostle Paul believed, was possible only because such justification had been constituted in the elect by the Holy Spirit. Thus, God declared them to be righteous. And there's actually five phases to all of this, and they are true individually and they're true collectively.

[30 : 49] Believers have been constituted or made righteous. The righteousness consisted in us, I'm sorry, the righteousness constituted in us is a free, unearned, and unmerited gift from the triune God.

The Trinity is at work here. The righteousness we receive is none other than the righteousness of the one man, the God man, Christ Jesus.

It's His righteousness that God pours into us. righteousness. And it is a righteousness based upon His obedience, even obedience of the cross.

He went to the cross not so He could be righteous, so His children could be righteous. And Paul then gives by inspiration the summary of these great truths.

He says this, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[32 : 00] Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. And you can study that in Romans 5 21.

Now what is all this? It is none other than the great doctrine of imputation to us of the righteousness of Christ.

He imputes to us His righteousness. We impute to Him our sins, past, present, and future. This is the gospel we are to embrace.

This is the gospel we are to preach, teach, and spread throughout the world. Throughout the world. I'm going to return to the late Dr.

Murray, give you a quote. He's a great man, obviously he's great, he's Scottish. Listen to his quote. I'm going to go slow.

[33 : 08] Justification is therefore a constitutive act whereby the righteousness of Christ is imputed to our account and we are accordingly accepted as righteous in God's sight.

When we think of such an act of grace on God's part, we have the answer to our question. how can God justify the ungodly?

The righteousness of Christ is the righteousness of his perfect obedience, a righteousness undefiled and undefiable, a righteousness which not only warrants the justification of the ungodly, but one that necessarily elicits and constrains such justification.

Listen to this. God cannot help but accept into his own favor those who are invested with the righteousness of his own son.

You can chew on that. He is invested in every believer the righteousness of his son. How is he going to turn a blind eye to us?

[34 : 34] He's not. He sees the righteousness of his dear beloved son. While his wrath is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and all ungodliness of men, his good pleasure is also revealed from heaven upon the righteousness of his well-beloved and only begotten son.

in all my years of teaching and it's 40 years this year, I have never used the word epiphany either in conversation or in teaching.

I've never used it in writing until tonight. I was only vaguely aware of what it meant so I looked it up in the dictionary. Here's the definition. An epiphany is an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure.

That's what an epiphany is. This quote I just read to you from John Murray for me meets that definition.

I mean, I've dealt with this all week. I've dealt with this in my quiet time at two or three in the morning when I'm in the darkness of my upstairs room and Diane's downstairs asleep. With tears.

[35 : 57] I'd turn on the flashlight to read and reread that. This was an epiphany. This touches everything in the Christian life. You want to talk about eternal security of the believer?

Read that quote. The righteousness of Christ. You want to talk about being conformed to the image of Christ or growing in Christ likeness? Read the quote. Luther was astounded when he learned, and I put leaned, but it means learned, he learned about justification by faith alone in Christ alone. He was speechless. I was astounded when I read this quote. When we take into our minds this great quote from Dr. Murray, it makes many passages of Scripture come to life for us.

Isaiah 45, verses 24 and 25, Isaiah 61, 10, 10, Isaiah 54, 17, no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn.

This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.

Amazing. With these verses in mind, taken from what is commonly referred to as the fifth gospel, that's the book of Isaiah, it's called the fifth gospel of Christ.

[38 : 03] I'm going to close with great and inspired words from the pen of Paul, which originated in the mind of God. Paul just wrote them down. Think of that quote, think of this, and that wasn't inspired, we know that, but it was good.

This is inspired, this is the word of God, who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Home is 833. Thank you.