

Martin Luther and Justification

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[0:00] We have not been together in here for teaching since the last Monday in November.

! It's been a while. Events in our run-up to the Christmas break, and some of those beyond our control, like weather, prevented us from meeting.

I want to give you a brief timeline as to the remainder of our study on this topic of salvation God's way. We're going to continue to look at the doctrine of justification by faith, by faith alone, for a few more weeks.

It's crucial. It's who we are. When that portion of our study is completed, and we'll never totally abandon it, but when it's completed, we're going to spend one or two weeks on the doctrine of adoption.

And after that, we move into the vitally important doctrine of sanctification. It'll be quite a few weeks on that topic. Then we're going to cover the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, preservation or perseverance of the saints.

[1:23] At the conclusion of that study, we will come to our final topic of salvation God's way. We'll be looking at the doctrine of glorification.

That touches on the return of Christ and our life in heaven. We'll be there for two or three Monday evenings. And then that will wrap up our study on salvation God's way.

And it'll be early to mid-May, and we'll be dismissing for the summer. So I'm already looking at various topics and praying about where we should go next.

And got some exciting possibilities. So that brings us to tonight. The last time we met, which was Thanksgiving week, met for purposes of teaching, when we adjourned that evening, we left Martin Luther on the sacred stairs of the Lateran Church in Rome.

And he was in very deep reflection, contemplating whether climbing those stairs on your knees had any special spiritual value, which good Roman Catholics were taught they did.

[2:45] He was trying, Luther himself was trying to accumulate enough indulgences, and you may remember that term, to get his grandparents out of purgatory and into heaven, but was far from satisfied that he had accomplished that task.

By the way, don't go home and get out your concordance and look at purgatory. It's not going to be in there. I pointed out last time that during his life, Luther went through a series of crises, which for whatever reason seemed to come every five years.

He had a crisis in 1505, 1510, 1515. We're going to look at that one this evening. We're not going to get into this crisis of 1520.

That was the year he was excommunicated by the Catholic Church. Neither are we going to study the year 1525. That's the year he got engaged to a former Catholic nun, Katrina von Bora.

His engagement and subsequent marriage to her set off a further firestorm within the Church of Rome. But the supreme crisis in the life of Luther, which shaped the entire Reformation, occurred in 1515.

[4:15] Now, Luther in 1510 was studying for his doctorate in theology at Erfurt, Germany. In 1515, Luther began a series of lectures on the book of Romans, which became a defining event in his life and the life of the Reformation.

And whether you realize it or not, we're a product of the Reformation, this church. In many respects, what happened to Luther touched and continues to touch every true believer who has ever lived or ever will live on this planet.

That's how far-reaching God used Luther's work. Now, Luther's struggle for much of his life was the concept of the justice of God.

And this was a very real struggle for Luther as he would think about the justice of God. The justice of God was what Luther feared more than anything else.

Actually, what every human should fear, although most do not. On more than one occasion, Luther cried out and said, You ask me if I love God?

[5:48] Sometimes I hate God. And he was basing that very black attitude on the fact that he was unable to live up to the righteous standards or the righteous demands of God.

He wanted to live a righteous life just like God did. And he wanted to live a righteous life of faith and fulfill all the demands and commands of Christ.

And try as he might, it seemed like the harder he tried, the further away he got. One thing we know for certain, though, is never ask God for justice.

Because you might get it. I've had guys say it to me. I just want justice. No, you really don't want justice. Luther, though, came to hate the idea of the justice of God.

Now, Luther found himself preparing lectures for his students on the justice of God. Don't tell me God doesn't have a sense of humor.

[6:57] You know, there's Luther and he's got to teach on the justice of God. And all of it seemed to dovetail down and culminated in a passage which said, the just shall live by faith.

And this was Luther's struggle. And here he is, the teacher. Now, in preparation for his lectures, Luther was reading the works of probably his principal mentor, St. Augustine of Hippo, who lived about a thousand years earlier.

You may pronounce that Augustine. A lot of guys do. It's actually Augustine. St. Augustine, Florida is named after St. Augustine. But Luther read in Augustine's commentaries, where Augustine said that the righteousness spoken of in Romans, chapter 1, is not that righteousness by which God is himself righteous.

Rather, it is a righteousness that God provides for his people who are not righteous. And Luther read that, and it was like his mind just to begin to peel off and spin out of control into outer space. That is perhaps the most significant concept in the whole Bible. And it's vital to everything that we have studied to this point.

[8:45] It will continue to be vital to everything we're going to study to the conclusion of salvation God's way. And again, Augustine said, the righteousness of God spoken of here is not his intrinsic righteousness by which God is perfectly holy.

Rather, it is the righteousness which comes from God and which he gives by imputation, a very vital doctrine, to those who believe.

This is the righteousness that God bestows by his grace upon those who have no righteousness of their own.

In his review of Augustine's work on Romans, we see Luther being exposed for the first time to the concept of imputation of the righteousness of Christ.

He didn't learn that in the monastery. This is all impacted by the faith that God bestows upon his people by grace.

[9:57] For by grace you are saved through faith, that not of yourselves, as a gift of God. The idea of imputation is not that somehow we are inherently righteous, or that we even inherit righteousness.

Rather, it is God who counts us as righteous. He counts as righteous all who trust in the finished work of Christ.

And by that, the all-encompassing work of Christ. Death, burial, resurrection, ascension, intercession, coronation, all of it. And that's what we mean by that.

When we are drawn to Christ in faith, that righteousness is transferred to our account.

It's amazing. And you can describe it this way. In the Bible, various translations use these words. We are counted as righteous or imputed with righteousness.

[11:03] We are credited with righteousness, which accrues to the believer by grace through faith. The great New Testament passage on this is Romans 4.3.

Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. It's interesting. I had a lady in my class yesterday morning came up to me and said, How are the Old Testament people saved? We have the cross. I said, we look back at the cross. They look forward to it. They believed the promises of God concerning the cross, concerning Christ, and it was credited to them as righteousness.

This type of righteousness was Luther's greatest discovery. And it shook the world. It shook not only the Christian world or what would become the Christian world, it shook the Roman Catholic world. This was also his moment of salvation.

[12:06] When the doors of paradise swung open and he walked in. He saw this as his conversion moment.

And we're going to talk more about that discovery in just a moment. Let me read to you a comment from Dr. Sproul, the late Dr. Sproul now, on this momentous revelation to Luther.

It's a lengthy comment from Sproul, but it's important. These are the words of R.C. Sproul. He says, Here in the Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith.

This is a verse taken from the book of Habakkuk in the Old Testament that is cited three times in the New Testament. Luther would stop short and say, What does this mean?

That there's this righteousness that is by faith and from faith to faith. What does that mean? The righteous shall live by faith. This was his struggle. Which again, and this is Sproul, which again, as I said, was the thematic verse of the whole exposition of the Gospel that Paul sets forth here in the book of Romans.

[13:31] And so the lights came on for Luther. And he began to understand that what Paul was speaking of here was a righteousness that God in His grace was making available to those who would receive it passively.

Very important. Not those who would achieve it actively, but that would receive it by faith and by which a person could be reconciled to a holy and righteous God.

We're continuing with Sproul. Now there was a linguistic trick that was going on here too. It was this. The Latin word for justification that was used at this time in church history and it is a word from which we get the English word justification.

The Latin word was *justicare*. I have no idea if I pronounced that correctly. And it came from the Roman judicial system.

And the term *justificare* is made up of the words *justice*, which is justice or righteousness and the verb or the infinity, *ficare*, which means to make.

[14:52] And so the Latin fathers understood the doctrine of justification is what happens when God, through the sacraments of the church and elsewhere, make unrighteous people righteous.

But Luther wasn't looking at the Latin. He's now looking at the Greek text and the Greek word in the New Testament, not the Latin word.

And Luther was drawn to that. And the Greek word, the *chaos*, which didn't mean to make righteous, but rather to regard as righteous.

Now that's a big difference there, right? To regard one as righteous. And Luther saw that in the Greek text and to count as righteous or to declare as righteous.

You know, we have a saying in justification. It's a legal declaration. God declares that we are righteous. He makes that declaration based upon the finished work of Christ.

[16:08] And this was the moment of awakening, this is still Sproul, for Luther. He said, you mean here Paul is not talking about the righteousness by which God Himself is righteous, but a righteousness that God gives freely by His grace to people who don't have righteousness of their own?

That was quoting Luther by Sproul. And so Luther said, whoa, you mean the righteousness by which I will be saved is not mine? He'd been working for this for a long time.

All the monks that he served with, they're working, they're mopping floors and they're, you know, whatever. And it was called a *Justitia Alium* or an alien righteousness.

And we've heard that term before, right? A righteousness that belongs properly to somebody else. It is a righteousness that is *extra nos*, meaning outside of us.

It's outside of us. Namely, the righteousness of Christ. And Luther said, when I discovered that, I was born again of the Holy Ghost.

[17:28] These are Luther's words. The doors of paradise swung open and I walked through. Boy, that's quite a conversion experience. That's quite a conversion experience.

Now that concludes Sproul for now. You'll be able to tell the difference now we're into Holland. Until Luther saw this truth, he had been in utter agony.

I mean literally in agony. He was trying his best to achieve a righteousness that could not be achieved through human effort.

You remember lessons ago we talked about his going to the confessional? Even confessing for 15 hours one time? That was all from the previous day's sins.

In a monastery. In a monastery. He had to be coveting Brother Ralph's mashed potatoes or something, but 15 hours he would confess. And he sees that he's trying to achieve this and it couldn't be attained by human effort.

[18:44] We might as well stand flat-footed on planet Earth reach up with our arms and our hands and pluck rocks from the surface of the moon. That is the utter impossibility of achieving a righteousness on our own.

I came up with that. That's amazing. Suddenly, Luther went from agony to peace with God.

For the first time in his life, he felt peace with God. This fact alone gives us some understanding to how Luther would be able to stand not only against an avalanche of criticism, we're going to see some of that probably next time, but to stand against the most powerful and quite frankly, the most dangerous religious system on Earth in that day.

And of course, I'm speaking of the Roman Catholic Church. In Luther's day, a person, including a priest, could be executed for holding such beliefs.

And Luther wasn't the first one to believe this. There had been guys for a hundred years and Rome executed them. Wycliffe, John Huss, I mean, there's all kinds of guys. Get Fox's Book of Martyrs and read it.

[20:10] If you can't get one, I'll give you one. Many had been killed and many more would be. Many more would be. One immediate benefit for Luther's discovery of justification by the righteousness provided by God was to see the Scriptures in a different light.

He saw them in a different light. almost immediately, Luther sat down in his little room and he read the Psalms. And he saw the Psalms in a totally different light now that he understood justification by faith alone and Christ alone.

But this all started when Luther was reading Romans and studying St. Augustine. and so Luther's got the scroll with a book open to Romans and he's preparing this lesson for his students and specifically this is what he read.

Romans 1, verse 16 and 17. For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

And then he goes to verse 17. For in it the righteousness of God and Luther probably read in a more ancient text a more accurate translation of that word and MacArthur points this out in his footnotes.

[21:52] For in it a righteous or the righteousness from God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written the righteous shall live by faith.

and when Luther read that the planet stopped spinning out of control. Everything stopped spinning out of control. And now I'm going to read you a long quote by Luther.

I hated the phrase the righteousness of God which according to the use and custom of all the doctors that wasn't hospital that was the learned professors where he studied.

I had been taught by them to understand it philosophically in the sense of the formal or active righteousness by which God is just and punishes unrighteous sinners.

It's that I've been brought up. If you're a sinner you've got no hope. You've got to be righteous. If you're not righteous you better figure out how to get righteous. That was the teaching. Now this is Luther.

[23:06] Although I lived an irreproachable life as a monk I felt that I was a sinner with an uneasy conscience before God nor could I believe that I had pleased Him by the satisfaction that I could offer I did not love nay in fact I hated this righteous God who punished sinners and if not with silent blasphemy and certainly with great murmuring I was angry with God saying as if it were not enough that miserable sinners should be eternally condemned by original sin with all kinds of misfortunes laid upon them through the Old Testament law and yet God adds sorrow to sorrow through the gospel and even brings His righteousness and wrath to bear on us through it.

This is what he cried out to God. Thus I drove myself mad with a desperate and disturbed conscience persistently pounding upon Paul in this passage with a parched and burning desire to know what he could possibly mean.

At last Luther said God being merciful as I meditated day and night on the connection of the words namely the righteousness of God is revealed in it as it is written the righteous shall live by faith and there I begin to understand the righteousness of God as that by which the righteous man lives by the gift of God.

It's a gift namely faith and this sentence the righteousness is revealed to refer to a passive righteousness by which the merciful God justifies us through faith as it is written the righteous shall live by faith.

At this I felt myself straightway born again and to have entered through the open gates into paradise itself from that moment the whole face of scripture was changed.

[25 : 26] And now this is Luther in the same degree as I had formerly hated the word righteousness of God even so did I begin to love and extol it as the sweetest words of all.

Thus was this place in St. Paul to me the very gate and what do we do with a gate we go through it right this was the gate which opened to paradise to heaven for Luther and for any that believes this the catalyst that brought Luther to his knees seeking God's truth over man's perverted truth was the Catholic tradition of selling indulgences Luther hated that practice and by that we mean if you acquired a sufficient number of indulgences one could purchase a relative out of purgatory and get them straight into heaven and Luther even said and taught to the consternation of the Catholic fathers that he was around that this practice by the

Catholic Church was on the same level as Simon the magician in the book of Acts same level and the more I thought about it I thought well it's going to serve our present study to read about this false convert in the 8th chapter of the book of Acts so this is inspired scripture here and by the way that is somewhere in scripture Acts chapter 8 verse 9 beginning in verse 9 but there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria saying that he himself was somebody great they all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest saying this man is the power of God that is called great I mean if anyone ever says you need to rip your clothes but he loved it and they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic but when they believed

Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus Christ they were baptized both men and women and even Simon himself believed and after being baptized he continued with Philip now if I forget to make a comment on that remind me because it's important to make a comment there but I won't do it till the end and seeing signs and great miracles performed he was amazed now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God and many of them got saved they sent to them Peter and John who came down no light weights there and they sent Peter and John who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit for he had not yet fallen on any of them but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles hands he offered them money he goes into his bank account saying give me this power also so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit well Peter knew what he was saying and Peter says may your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money you have neither part nor lot in this matter for your heart is not right before God repent therefore of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that if possible the intent of your heart may be forgiven you for I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity and

[30 : 09] Simon answered pray for me to the Lord that nothing of what you have said may come upon me and I was troubled for quite a long time about and it says he believed but the demons believe and tremble Simon I think had demon faith no evidence he ever got saved but I think he was exercising demon faith demons believe and they tremble to Luther the Roman church had become Simon the magician and boy that's that's a startling revelation particularly if you're the pope or a cardinal or you know the archbishop or bishop this was to Luther the Roman church to Luther was tantamount to selling salvation by this indulgence we'll get your family into heaven if you don't and they would even the guys that were selling these things would even take candles and burn their flesh and it really stinks and they would do this that's what your loved ones are going through right now they do stuff like that the people flock to this system wanting to spring their loved ones from purgatory and get them into heaven never mind purgatory doesn't exist we only discussed that they that's why it was created the concept they wanted to get their loved ones out of purgatory and into heaven and sadly it was not only people with financial means who did this by and large it was the

poor who would give their last coins needed to buy food for their family but instead they purchased an indulgence to get a long dead relative out of purgatory and into heaven and now they got no money to buy food for their children their wife their loved one but the priest said yeah but you got your family out of purgatory and for their part

Rome had no problem taking the money of poor ignorant and fearful people in fact Rome delighted in doing so they used this money to build new buildings in the Vatican to build cathedrals and even to raise armies to do the bidding of the Pope there were wars popes rode in front of an army they went and wiped out whole countries the greatest salesman of indulgences in the catholic church was the german domitian priest johann tetzel he was their number one salesman year after year he lived from 1465 to 1519 now the roman catholic church today does not sell indulgences that's their official position unfortunately they then add this phrase and we never did that is a blatant lie that's a blatant lie they sold them and

I'm sure raised on today's equivalent millions of dollars throughout the whole roman world and let's remember almost all the world was roman in those days when people purchased the indulgence they were given a document testifying to the same it said you've got an indulgence and there's some of those still survive!

Many in Luther's congregation did this and the poor people they loved Luther he was their preacher they would return to him with document in hand couldn't wait to show it to Luther to show him what they had done they were so proud I got my grandparents out of purgatory into heaven well of course Luther when they would come he was horrified he was so horrified there were times actually that he took he didn't have a lot of money he would take coins and reimburse them so they could buy food bread or whatever but he was so horrified he wanted to discuss this system with his fellow faculty members at the university where he taught this was the common practice another common practice when wanting to address the faculty you post your concerns concerns on a board outside the church at

Wittenberg and Luther did this and wrote his concerns in Latin meaning that only select guys could read it wanting to discuss with him privately with his fellow professors!

[35 : 38] Luther wasn't out to change the world he wanted to enter into a dialogue with the guys he taught with so he writes them in Latin because they were not for public consumption some of Luther's students saw the notice and that he had posted and they took them down and by hand they begin to copy them and they begin to distribute them and it became like a factory of these students get together and copy and they even translated them into German so that the masses of people this was all in Germany they could read them they did all of this without Luther's knowledge or permission and the document we're speaking of is widely known even to this day as the 95 theses and is credited with launching the reformation Luther tacked those on the door at the church of

Wittenberg which was the public place where you did that it was a poster board it was a poster board a copy of the theses was provided to Tetzel and Albert Albert was the ruler of Germany Tetzel was furious and Albert wasn't too happy afraid the Pope could invade Germany to put an end to it before long a copy was provided to the Pope in Rome but it had some interesting results at least initially the Pope said who cares what a drunken monk in Germany has to say that was his response to all that but in spite of the Pope's initial position the thing that Luther had done kept escalating because the students kept printing and eventually it got to the Gutenberg printing press so they did a real formula and it led to Luther being brought before the authorities of both the German government and the Catholic Church in 1521 and as we like to say the rest is history now we've almost been here 40 minutes I've been talking 40 minutes we're going to leave Luther again as we did before and we're going to leave him until we meet next Monday and we're going to see Luther brought before those Catholic authorities ¶¶