

Justification by Faith Introduction

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Date: 28 October 2019

Preacher: Tom Holland

[0:00] . I didn't do an exact count, but that is approximately 75,000 printed words ago.

Because I've got a little word count on my computer. Thus far in our study, we've looked in detail at the following aspects of the order of salvation. The decrees of God, foreknowledge, predestination, effectual call and regeneration.

That's the new birth. Conversion, which includes repentance and faith. And union with Christ. And I do not make the following statement in a joking manner, but in all seriousness.

Everything we have done to this point since September a year ago. Everything we've done and the lessons that will follow this one.

We've done to reach the topic that we begin tonight. Everything has been kind of like vectoring in. Because tonight we've got an introductory lesson on the doctrine of justification by faith.

[1:42] Critical doctrine. To believers, to the church. Absolutely critical. In the Ordo Salutis, we refer to this as our right standing before God.

And so it is. This coming Wednesday, two days from now, marks the 502nd anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther, the great reformer, the great reformer, nailing the famous 95 theses on the door at the church at Wittenberg, Germany.

That is seen as the event that launched the Reformation and changed the church and the world forever. So, this church is actually a product of the Reformation.

Because the SBC is a product of the Reformation. We all trace our roots back to Northern Europe. People fled there so they'd have freedom of worship.

They came to the New World. It makes for great historical study. Martin Luther said concerning the doctrine of justification by faith.

[3:00] I hope I can do this. Articulus sanctus vel condentus ecclesiae. And who can argue with that? Not me. That is Latin for loosely translated justification is the article of faith that decides whether the church stands or falls.

That's how critical this is, this doctrine. Now, that simplifies it. It's simple to understand what Luther meant by that. When the doctrine of justification is understood, when it is embraced, when it is preached, the church stands in the grace of God.

It can be said that that church is alive. Conversely, when the doctrine of justification is neglected, when it is denied or perverted, that church or that system where the church belongs falls from grace and its very life just drains away.

Such a church or a denomination is left in a state of darkness and death. As the Lord Himself said in the book of Revelation, the lampstand is removed.

The lampstand is removed. Now, do we have an example of a church or a denomination that renounced the true meaning of justification by faith and injected their own false system, leaving only darkness?

[4:46] And the answer to that is yes, we do. That describes the medieval Roman Catholic Church, of which Luther himself was a member and a priest.

The reformers, led by Luther, believed that Rome had apostatized from the gospel so extensively that no true Christian could continue within the ranks and try to impact change.

These were guys who were coming out of the Catholic priesthood that held fiercely to this. Now, there were two principles that defined and controlled the principles of Reformation theology.

And the first of these was the authority of Scripture. Rome said, all authority lay in the Pope.

He would tell people what the Scriptures meant. And, you know, you can go back in the Catholic Church today when they chained the Bible to the altar and people, the laity, wasn't allowed to go up there and look at it, touch it.

[6:06] And, of course, when they started translating the Bible into English and other languages, those guys, a lot of those guys were martyred. John Huss and others that were killed because they were translating the Bible from an obscure form of Latin that very few, even the priests largely didn't know what the translation said.

The Reformers rightly said that authority lay in sola scriptura in the Scriptures alone. That's where the authority is.

To them, truth flowed from the Holy Spirit, the author, and inspiration of Scripture. The other guiding and controlling principles were the doctrine of justification.

So they had the authority of Scripture and justification. The two principles were joined together.

They were and are inseparable.

If we want the fullest expression of just what the Gospel is, we look to Paul's writings as found in the book of Romans.

[7:20] That is the book on justification by faith. That is where we learned about justification in its fullest extent.

Remove all references of justification from Romans, and you are left with an empty shell. One theologian said it's Romeo without Juliet.

Since I didn't read Shakespeare, I don't know. Now, there is another important point to make in this introduction to justification. The doctrine historically, the doctrine of justification, has been the motivating theme of preaching in every movement of true revival and religious awakening within Christianity from the Reformation to the present day.

I'm speaking of true revival here. I'm not talking about the greed-driven fake revivals that mark the televangelists. Neither am I talking about revivals that supposedly occurred in the Toronto Blessing, for instance, and the things that happened in Florida a few decades back where people claimed the Holy Spirit had come in.

I've seen this real-time videos taped within those places where people were barking like dogs, where they went through the laughing revival.

[8:51] Have you heard about that? They engaged in fits of laughter, uncontrollable laughter. You can actually see Rodney Howard Brown, a very famous false prophet, teaching Oral Roberts how to do the laughing revival.

And Oral bought into it lock, stock, and barrel. Historically, true revivals or awakenings have been led by the Holy Spirit teaching the church afresh about the doctrine of justification by faith.

Now, Dr. J.I. Packer, speaking of such historic revivals, used the example in his writing of the mythical Atlas.

Remember Atlas? When you were in school and they had a picture of him holding the world up, and he was a big, strong guy. And Dr. Packer said, he said, it's sort of like Atlas carrying around the doctrine of justification by faith.

On these shoulders depends everything. It depends the doctrines of election and the doctrines of effectual calling and regeneration and repentance and prayer and the sacraments and so forth.

[10:08] They all connect back to that. All of these and more must be interpreted and understood in light of justification by faith. So how exactly does this work?

And remember, this is an introduction. We're going to be here for a while. The Word of God teaches that God elected those who would believe in eternity past.

That's inescapable. People don't like that. Even people that come to embrace that come kicking and screaming. But that's Bible. That's Bible. He did so that in due time they would be justified through faith in Christ.

And the Lord talked about that a lot in John chapter 6, John chapter 10, some other places. In John 6, He said, you can't come to Me on your own. You can't come unless the Father draws you.

He was very precise about that. When exposed to the Word, the hearts of the elect are renewed. They are drawn to Christ by effectual calling.

[11:16] And I know that's true, guys, because that happened to me. I was 30 years old. I was a police officer. I was single. I was wild. And it happened to me. And I was drawn there.

When they believe, they are justified by God. And by the way, believe is the same word for faith. And that comes from God. That's a grace gift of God. Everything the saved engage in that is biblical, such as prayer, daily repentance, the good works that God has in store for us, flows from their new position based upon justifying grace.

They've been justified by grace. We are to think of the true church as a congregation of the faithful. It is a fellowship of justified sinners.

That's what a church is. The things we do as a church, such as preaching the Word, evangelism, communion, baptism, and we can go down the line.

There's a lot more. These are expressions made possible by justifying faith. If we are to have a right view of the church, we must have a right view of the doctrine of justification.

[12 : 43] This is one of the reasons that the present study is so important as we move deeper into the order of salvation. There is another reason for justifying our study, and I got in here, no pun intended.

After I typed that, I thought, I better put no pun intended because I didn't intend one. We can justify our study. The doctrine of justification as taught by the Holy Spirit in sacred Scripture, as taught by the church fathers, and those were the guys in the second century, as taught by the Reformers and Puritans, has fallen on difficult times in our day, as so many things have.

But it's fallen on difficult times. It has fallen in many churches and denominations, and has been given the status of an unimportant second level teaching.

You can believe it. You don't have to. It's not that important. It's not a big deal. No one really understands it anyway. But the truth is that when our understanding of justification fails and falls, so falls the true knowledge of the grace of God that He reserves for His people.

Even the way of salvation is twisted and perverted. It becomes man-centered and not God-centered. When the knowledge of where grace comes from falls, so falls the church.

[14 : 20] Those were the words of Luther, the great Reformer. Luther saw the church at Rome fail because their official creed was to pervert the biblical teaching on justification.

This led immediately to a twisted and perverted view of salvation. Salvation was no longer what God said it was, but it was what popes said it was.

They would define what that meant. Now, I don't want to pick exclusively on Rome. The same thing has happened over the years to a lot of mainline Protestant denominations and churches around the world, including the United States.

Same thing has happened. When their understanding of justification dropped off the map, so did legitimate and true knowledge of salvation.

And I'm telling you, there's a thousand descriptions of salvation in our life here in America from different denominations and churches. being saved became a formula, a prayer repeated by rote instead of a move of God on the heart of one of his children.

[15 : 41] Now, to return to Dr. Packer's example, he said this, when Atlas falls, everything on his shoulders, in our case justification, comes crashing down as well.

how is it that an essential doctrine, such as justification, could be neglected by so many churches and church goers?

Again, we'll use Dr. Packer's example of Atlas. Atlas never could hover in midair like a helicopter or a hummingbird to bear the weight on his shoulders, the weight of the world.

He had to be standing on firm ground. He had to have a foundation to stand on. So does the doctrine of justification.

It's got to be built on a foundation. The very gospel becomes perverted if belief and justification fails.

[16 : 53] So what is the firm ground or foundation on which justification stands? Well, there's three. First, the divine authority of the Bible.

Second, the divine wrath against human sin. And third, the substitutionary satisfaction of Christ.

Now, why are these important?

Well, for one reason, these have largely disappeared from Protestantism in our day. And I noticed we don't even use that word in this part of the country, but when I moved back east with my parents when I was young, it was Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish.

There was no fourth thing. So let's review in some detail the firm foundation we need. And first thing we're going to look at is divine authority of the Bible.

Reform and Puritan theologians taught and fiercely held to belief that what Scripture said, God said.

[17 : 59] God said it first. And it was written down. To them, the Bible was God speaking to mankind.

God communicating with His children. How important was this to the Reformers and Puritans? Well, I'll tell you how critically important it was.

Many of them were killed by Rome rather than recant this fundamental belief. We tend to think that those things happened in the distant past, millennia ago.

Let me tell you guys, my wife and I are Scottish, she more than me, and we've been to Scotland. A couple times. In the latter part of the 17th century, 18,000 Scots lost their lives because they refused to declare the Scottish king as head of the church.

They took a stand. They said, no, we're not going to do that. They were called covenanters because they signed a national covenant that we will not do that. They called that the killing times.

[19:14] And they had the audacity of choosing to believe that Jesus was the head of the church. And they said so. Not the king. Told the king, we'll pray for you.

We'll pray God's grace be upon you. But you're not the head of the church. And they were killed for that. We went to Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh, large church, church.

And they have a huge cemetery. And they have, right next to the connected of the church, a prison. And it's an open air prison. They have bars that are about 10, 12 feet high, no roof.

You're exposed to the cold weather of Scotland. Scotland's even with Alaska, if you draw a straight line. The only reason Scotland's not Alaska is because of the warm water currents of the North Atlantic.

and her grandfathers, several of her grandfathers were in there. It was quite moving for us to see that. God speaks through the pages of the Holy Bible.

[20:19] He did it through human authors, but the words were supplied by God and thus they are divine. It is true that the scriptures are men or man bearing witness to God.

But ultimately the scriptures are God bearing witness concerning himself. The Reformation was launched because men took what God said about sin and salvation literally.

Rome did not. In fact, Rome believed the Pope had the final say on scripture interpretation. In their research, theologians learned and believed that justification by faith was at the very heart of right standing with God.

In fact, it was incorporated into the definition. Now, this has all but disappeared from the modern church landscape. Men in seminaries today have jettisoned the historic understanding of inspiration and authority of scripture.

Modern theologians balk at the thought of equating scripture with the mind of God. To them, it is relegated to a lower level of religious thought. Quite frankly, many today believe that the writers of the Bible laced it with error.

[21:42] They deny that the author is the God who cannot lie. Ironically, the Bible is most often wrong when the men espousing its errors disagree with what is being said.

It reminds me of the Jehovah Witness. They say, well, the Bible is correct in as much as it's been correctly translated. And I said, well, who determines if it's correctly translated? They said, well, we do.

Well, I'm sorry, I don't think I trust you to do that. Modern men that do believe in the existence of God often will define themselves as sons of God by creation.

By creation. They are the same ones who talk about the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The best and truest description of God is that of law giver and judge.

And that's rejected by a lot of denominations, liberal denominations, liberal churches. They will have no God over them to rule over them, and they don't want his book to rule over them either.

[22:51] Many modern Protestants see themselves as wanderers, but not sinners. It's not polite today or politically correct to say somebody's sin.

They don't see themselves as guilty criminals who must one day stand before the judge of the universe. They don't think that's going to happen. They have no inclination in describing themselves as lawbreakers.

They don't see themselves that way. They reject justification as the only means to make them right with God. Not interested in that. In their rejection of the authority of God's word, they have destroyed that part of the foundation of the doctrine of justification by faith.

But there's another thing, and that is the divine wrath against human sin, directly connected to what I just talked about. The next portion of the foundation that is being systematically destroyed is any concept of divine wrath against human sin.

Modern man does not think of God as ultimately judge, and neither does he think of God as having wrath against sin. He sort of winks at it.

[24:16] You know, he winks. The God of the Bible is not viewed as having a hatred of evil. No one looks at him in the liberal church that he will exact retribution when his law is broken.

Men and women today, including many of those in churches, are unprepared and unwilling to take seriously that mankind and sin is under wrath. The wrath of God is upon them.

In our time, we see this played out in things like the issues we see every day, issues such as abortion. And you know abortion is evolving.

We've had legal abortions since 1973. It's evolving. We've now gone from killing the unborn to killing the born. And a number of states have enacted that.

In many states, if you don't want the baby after birth, put him or her in a closet and walk away. Be gone for a few hours and the cries will be muffled and it'll be over.

[25:21] I will never forget earlier this year when that law was enacted in New York State with the unbridled support of the governor. When the new law passed, the majority gave a standing ovation as to how progressive they had become by adopting that law.

law. I have a feeling that when they are in the abyss, that applause will be echoing in their ears. For eternity, perhaps it will be interlaced with the cries of dying babies.

I do know the week that passed, there was a man that beat his girlfriend in New York City, his eight and a half month pregnant girlfriend, and she had the baby during the beating, and the baby died.

And the judge said, that's not against the law in New York. Now, they did prosecute him for beating her, but not for killing the baby, because he said, that is no longer a crime in New York State.

Amazing. Just amazing. The other issue that we live with in our day is that of homosexuality, lesbianism, and transgenderism.

[26:39] All of them condemned in God's work. Condemned in Romans 1. And you know, I heard MacArthur preach on the transgender movement. I mean, he had scriptures I don't remember reading, but it's in there.

Men are not to dress like women. Women are not to dress like men. I mean, it goes on and on.

There's all kinds of scriptures. Liberal theologians claim any statement against such sins are overstatements by the authors such as the apostle Paul.

They say, well, Paul was just too zealous. So he got a lot of that wrong. Amazing. Reformation theologians hold to God in opposition to sin and lawbreak.

And they did so for two reasons. First, the Bible teaches against sin. We all know that. Second, their own conscience, the reformers, they had a conscience and they were under conviction for their personal sins.

We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. And it really hits our conscience. Preaching against these things laid the foundation for justification which we must embrace and build on for our children and our grandchildren's sake.

[27:54] Justification is about deliverance from wrath. If we don't believe in wrath or preach on wrath, we're not going to believe on justification. It won't be necessary.

There's a third attack on the foundation on which justification stands or falls. That's the substitutionary satisfaction of Christ. At the time of the Reformation, God brought together deep teachings on the doctrine of justification and the substitutionary atonement.

And by substitutionary atonement, I mean that Christ died in our place on the cross. He was our substitute. He didn't deserve to be on that cross.

I did. You did. By taking our place, our sins were atoned for and the wrath of God was satisfied.

We read the Bible in the old English of propitiation. We don't use that much anymore. It means satisfaction or the appeasement. God's God. The entire doctrine of justification is grounded on the sin bearing work of the Lamb of God.

[29:07] We can be justified because he bore our sins. On the cross, our sins were imputed to him and his righteousness was imputed to us.

2 Corinthians 5.21 For our sake, he made him, that's the Father, made him, that's Jesus, to be sin. Not a sinner. He made him to be sin who knew no sin. So that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Amazing. And that is the great passage. on double imputation. What the theologians call double imputation. Salvation in the Bible is by substitution and exchange.

This satisfied the law and the author of the law. Justice was done and mercy triumphed. This interpretation is rejected by millions today around the world.

[30:18] In the liberal church, false churches, and millions more that are unbelievers outside the church. Rejected. They don't want to hear that. Any God who would sacrifice his son has been branded, and I've heard people do this, as a cosmic child abuser.

This is a charge leveled at God in our day. There's a word for that, and it's called blasphemy. that is an ultimate blasphemy. Modern Protestantism rejects penal substitution.

I have a book in my library, In My Place, Condemned He Stood. It's a great book by one of the reformers. But modern Protestantism rejects penal substitution, that he was our substitute.

this has undermined the foundation on which the doctrine of justification depends. Thank God we are in a church that holds to all this, and believes this, and there are many here that do.

No wonder the doctrine of justification is so widely neglected in our day. Now, this is just our first lesson on justification, and I got to 31 minutes.

[31:38] more will follow. Now, I wonder how many of you realize, I just spoke by word count almost 2,500 words on justification, and I haven't even defined it yet.

I haven't given you the definition. So, we're going to define it next time. That is my hook to get you here next Monday, providing all the snow melts or whatever's coming at us, and that's where we will head next time.

Thank you.