

Justification and the Triune God

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Date: 18 November 2019

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[0:00] Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ. Well, we're going to dig tonight even deeper into this marvelous doctrine of justification by faith. Jesus Christ. This came, by the way, from the mind of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that gave us justification by faith in eternity past.

We couldn't dream that up. There's no way people could dream that up. And the day came when the Lord, the same God that is in Triunity, the one true God, used a man to rescue this doctrine literally from the clutches of a perverted religious system that denied justification and forbade men. Is that a good word? Forbade? It's a good word. It works. Forbade men from even being able to examine God's Word to grasp its eternal truths, including justification.

Forbade men from being able to obey the Bible. They forbade them. They chained the Bible to the pulpit. Now, it is important to look at this doctrine from a theological perspective.

[1:38] And we've done that, and we're going to do it some more in the next weeks. It is also important to examine it from the historical perspective.

And we're going to do that over the next several weeks. And there's no denying the fact that this is really important and interesting history. The justification that God wrote in His mind came up with in eternity past was lost for centuries with devastating results.

And it impacted the world. It impacted the world.

Another reason is that justification in many quarters of the church in our day, 21st century, has once again been lost.

It's once again been lost. Not just justification to other doctrines. I told you the story of my boss at City Hall, Ed Gordon, who was also a full-time pastor at Trinity Baptist.

[2:53] And he was entertaining a person that was a pastor of a large church in this town. Mainline denomination, not Baptist.

And Ed said, how do you deal with the atonement? The pastor said, I've never heard that word. He had a PhD from his seminary.

That's one of the essentials. So that's another reason for us to study this. We don't want it ever slip away from us. God forbid that that would happen.

Even among conservative and evangelical churches, a good number of the members and the clergy cannot articulate the teaching or the meaning of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. They can't do it. But the attempts to restore justification to its rightful place among the great and essential doctrines of the church caused a division.

[4:02] And the division involved Roman Catholicism and what became known as Protestantism. And that era of history was given the name of the Reformation.

Now, by that very word, you can kind of piece that together. It was a reforming of what had happened to the church for about a thousand years.

A long time. And lest we believe otherwise, this was not a friendly division among friends.

This was not a debate among friends. This division was, in fact, very bloody. Many lost their lives through some of the most horrendous and gruesome executions along the way.

And not just a few. Thousands of people. I gave Pastor Mike a latest book from VOM tonight, a reprint of Fox's Book of Martyrs. We do that every five years or so because we add the people that have died in the last couple of years.

[5:17] And they're in there in the very last chapters. There was, in fact, a monarch in England by the name of Mary.

And in Scotland, the birthplace for my wife's ancestors and some of mine, she's called Bloody Mary. She was called that because during her efforts to restore Catholicism to England and to Scotland, many good men were burned at the stake.

And before they were killed, they were tortured and they were beaten all at the hands of religion. In Scotland alone, and they call that the killing times, and in Scotland alone, 18,000 people were gruesomely murdered because they refused to say the words, the king, or in her case the queen, is the head of the church.

And they said, we can't say that because Christ is the head of the church.

And they proclaimed Christ to be the head of the church. And for that, over 18,000 of them lost their lives. And I've been to many of their graves.

[6:52] And some of the graves hold thousands of them. There's a parking lot in Edinburgh near Greyfriars Kirk. Kirk is a church. And it holds like a thousand people that were martyred, including John Knox.

Now, he died naturally, but they wanted to kill him. So, it was an amazing time. The church has always had to deal with controversy.

And it didn't just start in the 16th century. I mean, the first martyr listed in that book there was Stephen. And we're talking the early days of the church there.

There were struggles in the 4th century and in the 5th century and so on. And there's always been men who rose up and tried to apostatize the gospel of Christ.

And if you've been coming to our Wednesday night Bible study, we just are doing the book of Jude. And you would be quite familiar with that fact as we work through that book.

[8:01] Because that's the book on contending for the faith because of apostasy. And just to make sure you understand, an apostate is someone who has been exposed to the truth, maybe even considered it, and then rejected it.

Backed away and said, no, there's something else out there, something better for me. That's what an apostate is.

But in all those controversies of the 1st, the 2nd, the 4th, the 5th centuries, they pale when compared to what was going on in the 16th century.

Because the battle lines were being drawn. The doctrine of justification by faith alone and Christ alone had to be rescued.

It was going away. And it's the essential. And God raised up a monk by the name of Martin Luther.

[9:09] He believed that this doctrine was so important that he was willing that the church that he understood and he knew should be rent asunder.

He was willing to do that. He believed that for the sake of the salvation of thousands, and actually you could probably say millions, because even this church is a product of the Reformation.

We could trace our roots back. And he did it for the sake of millions of people who would not have been exposed to the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the city of Geneva, Switzerland, I've seen with my own eyes the Reformation wall in that city. It contains many statues of men that were instrumental in the Reformation.

At the center were John Calvin, who was a Frenchman, but he preached in Geneva. William Farrell, Theodore de Bezzi, and John Knox of Scotland.

[10:14] And John Knox preached in Geneva. But the most important thing on that wall, which I've seen, are not the stone images of men long dead.

It is a motto that is engraved nearby. And this motto became the battle cry of the Reformation. And it is the words, post tenebrous lux. And that is Latin for after darkness light. After darkness light.

And that phrase is absolutely true. True. The civilized world was gripped in the darkness of unbelief for hundreds and hundreds of years.

And the church at Rome wanted it that way. They wanted that. Remember those words because many thousands died to bring light in the midst of this overpowering darkness.

[11:18] Luther was convinced that the gospel itself had fallen into darkness. And it had.

In the late Middle Ages, the gospel had been obscured by evil men for their own sake. This ushered in unprecedented corruption in the church of that day.

And we'll talk about more of that next time. But even brothels that opened so priests could have their sexual appetites satisfied.

And they had brothels with women in them and they had brothels with men in them. I need not to say any more than that. For men like Luther and many others, the Reformation represented nothing less than the recovery of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was a recovery of the gospel. The gospel had been hidden deep in the false traditions of Rome.

[12 : 23] Hidden deep. And this was what Luther wanted to restore. He wanted to bring the gospel into the forefront so that the light of the gospel could once again shine in the life of the church.

And we can't understate the fact that things had really become dark. Really, really dark. Rome feared the word of God in the hands of the common man.

It was a great fear. I mean, men were executed for translating the Bible into their own language.

English, French, German. The leaders of the church at Rome warned Luther, If you allow men to read the Bible for themselves, many churches will be created that do not adhere to Catholic doctrine and traditions, and they will not pay homage or money to the Pope.

And you know what? That was true. In fact, that statement has been proven true for all these years.

And since the Bible was rescued as a result of the Reformation, well over 2,000 Christian denominations have arisen.

Luther's position was that God made the gospel so understandable that the simplest man could understand it for himself if he had access to it.

[13 : 56] And we call it the simplicity of the gospel. Paul said, don't pervert the simplicity of the gospel. Luther was willing to set the whole world on fire so men could see justification by faith alone for themselves.

That's all Luther wanted to do. Let them read it for themselves. And Rome was willing to go to war to keep men from seeing this great doctrine, which they had basically rejected by blending it in with other asinine doctrines.

And it became twisted and perverted. It was Luther who made the statement that the church stands or falls on the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

That's Luther. Luther believed, he fully believed, if you lose this doctrine of justification, you lose Christianity.

You lose Christianity. And I'm convinced that's still true today. I'm convinced of it. There are hundreds and even thousands of churches that have no understanding of this doctrine.

[15 : 10] They will not teach this doctrine to their people. You won't hear it from the pulpits or the classrooms. Not even the pastors understand it. Is that a true biblical church?

Luther would say no. Luther would say no, that's not a church in the biblical sense. Luther also said the belief in justification by faith alone is the Lord and Prince of the church and all other beliefs flow from it.

And you can see why he believed it was the article on which the church stands or falls. Luther

fiercely held to the belief that if you don't have justification by faith, you don't have the gospel.

If you don't have the gospel, you don't have Christ. Luther knew that men could not be saved apart from the gospel. And you cannot. If you don't have the gospel, the church doesn't even have a reason to exist.

It's a club. It's literally just a club. Churches without the doctrine of justification, they don't have the gospel or understand it.

[16 : 24] And churches that lose the gospel become apostate. And if you don't have the gospel, one of the first things you will have is an apostate church.

I have a young man who used to go to our church. He's a dear brother in Christ. He's a minister. He took a church up in Ohio. The church has been there for like 150 years.

He was the second pastor that the leadership of the church allowed him to mention the name Jesus Christ from the pulpit.

And he said he wouldn't come unless he could. And he preached Jesus for about three years and then he knew his time was coming to him. They'd heard all about Jesus they wanted to hear.

Churches without the gospel are apostate. They have abandoned the faith if they ever even had it in the first place to abandon it. And they probably didn't. Luther carried it a step further.

[17 : 21] If he was with us tonight, first of all, I would sit down and give him the class. But then he would say to us, justification by faith is the article in which each of us, not just the church, each of us individually, as individuals, stand or fall.

And it is the only doctrine by which we answer the question, what must I do to be saved? And there's an answer. And there's an answer.

God is just. How can I, as an unjust person, have a right relationship with God who is supremely just?

Most people don't care about or even consider that question. They don't care. Some ask a familiar question. I have been asked this very quick question in this classroom on a Sunday morning. Forget justification. Why doesn't God just declare everyone saved? Just save everyone. And then we wouldn't have to worry about it. I've had that said.

[18:32] Well, first of all, let me say to you, if you ever hear that question, that's the wrong question. Just tell them that's the wrong question. It is not why doesn't God save everybody.

The question is why does God save anybody? Why did he save me? Why did he save you guys? That's the young, I can't figure that out.

Why me? Why me? And this is really poignant when we realize to save even one of us, it was necessary that the Son of God, who is the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer, the Sovereign King, and it was necessary that he be arrested, tortured, and crucified.

I've heard it said that if he was only going to save one of us, Jesus would have come down here and died on the cross. Because that's the only way you could be saved. Now, I want to be real careful, and don't run at me with pitchforks.

Give me time to explain it. The truth is God won't save everybody because he can't save everybody. Now, I realize we reel at that thought.

[19:48] I mean, that's for all, God can do anything. But remember that the Trinity, the divine Trinity, has put limitations on himself.

For instance, God cannot lie. There's a cannot in there. God can't lie. God can't sin. God cannot violate even one verse of his scriptures.

He can't go back on a promise. God is self-limiting. He is limited in himself. But this begs the question, why won't God just declare everyone redeemed? Well, he won't because he can't. Well, why can't he? Because he's absolutely righteous and holy. And we don't merely pass over that point. He can't because he is righteous. The only way God could redeem anyone apart from some process of justification is for God to enter into a negotiation concerning his own righteousness.

Well, I'll lower my standards a little bit, and then everybody can come in. Even those that hate me, don't want anything to do with me, don't want to be saved, don't want to be part of the church.

[21:00] He would have to reduce his righteousness, reduce his holiness, and he's not going to do that. And one reason he won't do that is he can't.

He can't. You know, you realize, I mean, God's been around for a long time, right? Eternity. You realize he hasn't increased in holiness. He hasn't increased in love. He's absolute holiness, absolute love.

To do that, to reduce his righteousness and holiness, would make him far less than the divine God of the universe. It's just unthinkable.

God has a much better way. And Paul wrote about it in Romans, telling us... By the way, Romans is the highway of justification. And Galatians is too.

Paul wrote about it in Romans, telling us that God provides a way to eternal life through justification. He doesn't compromise.

[22:02] Now, here are these words. This is Romans 3, 21 to 26. And I love the way this starts, but now. Mike, we've got to write a book. And do all the passages that say, but now, or but God.

We have to do that. But now, the righteousness of God, apart from the law, is revealed. Being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.

For there is no difference. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. How many of us? All. Everybody. Everybody.

And then he goes on, being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation.

That's an appeasement or a satisfaction. Through, by his blood. By the way, who did, who got appeased? Or satisfied? The Father. The wrath of God was satisfied by propitiation.

[23:20] Through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness. Because in his forbearance, God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time his righteousness.

That, and here, now I put these in capital letters. That means for you guys to listen in capital letters. That he might be just.

He didn't compromise that, did he? And the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

He is both just, uncompromisingly just, and a justifier. And we didn't invent that. We couldn't have invented that if we'd been around six billion years, much less 6,000.

And I know evolutionists just cringe when I say that, but that's okay. God has a way to be just, and yet he can still justify unjust people.

[24:32] It's phenomenal. By doing it that way, God can maintain his own righteousness and still redeem a people for his namesake.

And by the way, those he redeems have no righteousness of their own. They can't even conjure up faith to a level to get saved.

And of course, the great, I come back at my good Arminian friends when they say, well, we have to have faith on our own. How can a dead man have faith? You're dead in trespasses and sins.

We can't conjure it up. And Paul, Ephesians 2, you already got it memorized, 2, 8, and 9. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing.

It is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not a result of works that no one may boast. And I have people say, well, it's not of your own doing.

[25:33] Is that the grace or the faith? Yeah. Both. Both. Both. And it's not works so that we won't boast. I mean, if it was works, I promise you, because he's my dear brother, Mike Durship, could boast a lot more than I could ever boast.

But we don't have any grounds to boast, do we? Because it was grace through faith that God provided. So God is both just and the justifier.

It is by his grace and his faith and his salvation and his gift. Well, okay, but there's no such thing as a free lunch, right? What is our part in all of this?

Well, believe. Well, okay, I understand. Well, how do we bring him in the process? And my answer is a very large bucket of sins.

Turn those into him. In fact, quite honestly, I had to have several buckets. John Calvin said that justification is the hinge on which everything turns.

[26:47] And we all understand the concept of a hinge, right? When he wrote about a hinge, obviously he had in mind some sort of door. Hinges go on doors. Hinges and doors go together.

Jesus used the metaphor of a door many times when he was speaking about salvation. Many, many times.

In John 10, verse 7, this is Christ speaking. Jesus said again to them, truly, truly. Now, when he says truly, truly, that's pretty important in it. Remember, he's the way, the truth, and the life.

He's true truth, Dr. Schaeffer said. Well, here he wants to really get this to us. So this is truly, truly. I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

I am the door of the sheep. And in verse 9, John 10, I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

[27:55] And Jesus was great at the sheep metaphor. He's the shepherd. We're the sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them. They follow me. No one can snatch them out of my hands.

My Father is greater than everyone. No one can snatch them out of His hands. At one point, he told them, he said, you don't believe, told the unbelievers, talking to the Pharisees, you don't believe because you're not one of my sheep.

And you know, we reversed that in the modern witnessing. And we said, you're not one of His sheep. And therefore, you should have to become a sheep.

And if you'll say these following words, you'll be a sheep instantly. Doesn't teach that. Doesn't teach that at all. Jesus is the door through which men must enter to be saved.

You will not enter the kingdom of God without coming through the door. And it's the door He provided. And in that effectual call, everyone that's effectually called is going through that door.

[29:11] If you've been effectually called, you're going through that door. If you haven't been effectually called, you've got to be bored after 33 weeks of this. I think you've all been effectually called or you wouldn't be here.

Justification is the hinge and the door. All Christianity disappears without the door of justification. Let me say something brief, not in your notes, about the door.

I'm told that in the Greek language, it's a small door. You can't carry your wife and children through that door.

I wish I could. I wish I could. I wish I could take my granddaughters through there. I wish I could take my daughter-in-law through there. You go through one at a time.

You don't have anything on you. Remember Pilgrim's Progress? He had to leave that behind to go through the door. He had a big backpack of sin. And it's low.

[30 : 14] I'm told in the Greek language. It's not a door like this. It's low. You go through it one at a time on your knees. There's a whole lot about the door.

And we'll talk more about the door in the weeks ahead. But Christianity disappears without the door of justification. And I think it's necessary to make a further comment.

As you've probably concluded, I put much importance upon the doctrine of justification by faith alone. But let me add that you are not saved by believing in the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

As important as it is, that's not your grounds of salvation. You are saved by believing. You are saved by believing. And that's the word *pistou* in Greek. It means have faith, commit your life, trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

We're saved by Christ and His finished work on the cross alone. You're saved by the gospel of Christ. By using the words justification by faith in Christ alone, we are saying that without or apart from Jesus, you cannot be saved and you will not be saved.

[31 : 33] It simply will not happen. But we're not saved by creeds or theology or anything else. We're saved by faith alone with Christ Jesus as the object of our faith.

And let me say this, specifically the shed blood of Jesus. The fact that He went to the cross in our place and died in our place.

We should have been on the cross. Because there was no reason for Him to be on the cross. Every reason for us to be on there. Every reason for us to be on there. And I believe wholeheartedly in the substitutionary atonement.

And a lot of people have lost that. They don't even know what that means. We are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. It is not salvation by the doctrine of Christ.

It is salvation by the person of Christ. But let's consider the flip side of this. What if you reject the doctrine of justification by Christ alone?

[32 : 39] You say, well, I don't believe that. I've had people tell me, well, I believe in God, I just don't believe in Christ. Excuse me? You just cut your legs off.

But what if we reject the doctrine of justification by Christ alone? That's a different matter completely. If you deny the existence of justification by faith alone, I think that is enough to damn a person to hell.

It may not get them into heaven, but I think it will put them in hell. Why do I say that so strongly? Because when you deny justification, you deny the ground or the foundation on which God saves a soul.

The cross of Christ is on the foundation, and we believe in the blood atonement, but we've cut the ground out from underneath the cross.

Therefore, this doctrine is very important. And it has become even more important in an age of unbelief and denial.

[33 : 47] And it is very important in an age of easy believism and cheap grace. Hey, you want to go to heaven? Say these words. Repeat after me.

Okay, you're in. See you later. We used to have a guy in this church that did that. He'd come to church. He'd say, save 27 people this week. I said, you did?

Yeah. Next week, I saved 31. Next week, I saved 47. I finally said, where are they? I don't know. I said, how do you do that? He just said, well, I just go up and say, repeat these words. Now you're going to heaven.

That's not salvation. When it comes to theology, people who believe nothing are willing to negotiate anything.

Everything is on the table, including justification by faith alone and Christ alone. The doctrine of justification by faith alone defines the gospel of God put forth by the cross of Christ and revealed to

us by the Holy Spirit.

[34 : 56] So you see the Trinity at work. They're not separated here. They're one. So how is it that this obscure monk saw the doctrine of justification by faith so clearly when everyone around him, and I'm including in that popes and cardinals and archbishops and bishops and priests, they didn't see it.

They didn't see it. They didn't see it. They didn't see it. And this little obscure monk, he saw it. How is it that he saw that? He was just so obscure.

He didn't even live in Rome. He lived in Germany. And this guy is willing to go to war with the largest, wealthiest, most frightening organization in the world at that time, the church at Rome? It was massive. It had their own army. They would invade countries. It's an amazing history. And these are great questions. They're really important questions.

And we're going to start to answer them next time. We'll see you next time. Bye. Bye. Bye.