

## § 11. Doctrine of Salvation

### Lecture 17

#### The Grounds, Means, and Results of Justification

We have been talking about the doctrine of justification as a subsection of the locus on the doctrine of salvation. We've spent the lion's share of our time talking about the nature of justification as a legal act on God's part whereby he declares us righteous. Since this is the center of the debate over justification, it is appropriate that we should have spent most of our time there. But now we want to wrap up our study of justification by looking at the grounds of justification, the means of justification, and the results of justification.

Let's talk, first, about the grounds of justification. In terms of the grounds of justification, *justification is grounded first and foremost in God's free will and mercy*. God was under no obligation to forgive or pardon anybody. The fact that he would pardon anyone is the result of his own freedom of choice and his mercy.

Look at what Paul says in Titus 3:5-7, a marvelous passage on justification. There Paul writes,

. . . he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

So the reason that justification is by grace rather than by the merit of our own good works is precisely because it is rooted, as Paul says, "in God's own mercy." Given that all people are justly condemned before God, God is under no obligation to forgive anybody. The fact that he should choose to save even some is a demonstration of God's mercy toward us. I think that is the significance of Romans 9:16. There Paul says, "So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy." Whom God chooses to save is not determined by us; it is determined by God. It is God who has chosen by his own mercy to save whom he chooses to save. He has chosen to save, as I've said in the past, those who have faith in Christ Jesus. So fundamentally the justification that we experience is rooted in God's free will and mercy.

But this isn't to say that God simply blinks at sin, that he just cancels people's sin. Rather there is an atoning sacrifice for those sins that makes the extension of his mercy possible. So *secondly the grounds of justification are the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ*. Look at Romans 5:8-9:

But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

Notice the phrase here “justified by his blood.” The word “blood” here is a metaphor for the death of Christ – that atoning sacrificial death. That is why he says in verse 8 that Christ died for us. The ground of our justification lies in that self-sacrificial atoning death of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Look also at what Paul says in Galatians 3:11-14a. Paul writes,

Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for [and then quoting here from the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk] “He who through faith is righteous shall live”; but the law does not rest on faith, for [now here quoting from Leviticus] “He who does them shall live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, [quoting from Deuteronomy 21:23] “Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree” – that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles . . .

Here Paul says that while no one can be justified before God by the works of the law, nevertheless Christ has died for us – having become a curse for us. The curse of the law, the punishment of sin, that we rightly deserve was meted out upon Christ so that now God’s love and mercy is freed up to pardon and justify us.

So the grounds of justification are, first, God’s free will and mercy and then, second, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sin.

That brings us then to the means of justification. As already indicated, the means by which we are justified is faith. Faith is the channel through which we appropriate God’s forgiveness and justification. Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith . . .” Faith is the instrument, the channel, by which we receive the grace of God. Was this a human setup, this notion of salvation by grace through faith? No, for Paul goes on to say, “. . . this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – not because of works, lest any man should boast.” So it is through placing our faith in God or specifically in Christ that we appropriate the atoning death of Christ on our behalf and so receive God’s grace.

Romans 3:21-26 expands on this. This, like the passage in Titus, is, I think, one of the premier passages in the New Testament speaking of justification. Paul writes,

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from 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; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it

was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.

So who is the person that is justified by God? It is the one who has faith in Jesus. So faith is the channel by which we come to appropriate justification.

I think you can see in Paul's thinking how critical faith is as the means by which we appropriate the benefits of Christ's death and come to experience God's grace. God, in his sovereignty, has chosen to save and to justify those who have faith in Christ Jesus. So it is those who are people of faith that are the true sons of Abraham.

Finally, what are some of the results of justification?

1. First and foremost, as we've seen, *there is full pardon*. Romans 5:18: "Then as one man's trespass [speaking here of Adam] led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men." Then over in chapter 8 in verse 1 Paul says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." For those who are united with Christ by means of faith there is no condemnation. Rather there is full pardon for our sins.

2. *We are adopted as God's children*. In Galatians 4:4-5, Paul says,

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

So insofar as we are in Christ we are adopted by God into his family as children of God and therefore recipients of all the promises that God gives to those who are his sons and daughters.

3. *We become heirs of eternal life*. In Galatians 4:6-7 Paul goes on to say,

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

Similarly, in Romans 8:16-17, Paul says,

we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

What do we inherit? Paul says in Romans 6:23:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So having been forgiven of all our sins, being declared righteous, having been adopted by God as his children, we are now heirs to eternal life. We shall live with him forever. Death has been forever vanquished.

4. *We become citizens of God's Kingdom.* In Philippians 3:20, Paul says,

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice that all of these benefits are, like justification itself, legal in nature: pardon, adoption, inheritance, citizenship. There are many other benefits which are wrought by regeneration, such as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, good works, and increasing sanctification. But as a legal notion, justification brings with it legal benefits.

So I think you can see that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith is not just some academic, dry doctrine. Rather this is a doctrine that has tremendous implications. A full pardon for sin and redemption from its penalty, adoption into God's family as his children, becoming heirs of eternal life, and citizenship in God's Kingdom with all its privileges. So this is a tremendously important and encouraging doctrine that has, I think, great import for the Christian life.

Next time we will turn to a study of the doctrine of perseverance. Can those who are genuine, regenerate Christians lose their salvation? We'll raise that question the next time we meet.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Total Running Time: 14:40 (Copyright © 2020 William Lane Craig)