

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: “Justified, Once and for All”

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 10/4/2009

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Introduction

In our last message we began looking at Colossians chapter one, verse fourteen, where we read this: “In Him” – that is, in Jesus Christ – “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Last time we focused on the doctrine of redemption, and we saw that the word means “release or liberation brought about by the payment of a ransom.” And we looked at three pictures of release or liberation. These three were all common uses of this Greek word for “redemption” at the time and in the culture in which Paul is writing. And they are also pictures of redemption that we find in the pages of the Word of God.

First, we saw that the person who has trusted in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation from sin and wrath, is a prisoner who has been set free. We were in bondage because of our rebellion against God. We were prisoners in the enemy camp. And we could not escape. We could not purchase our own freedom. But God through the blood of Christ redeemed us from that bondage. He paid the ransom price. He purchased our freedom for us – freedom from Satan’s dominion.

Secondly, we saw that the person who has trusted in the shed blood Christ is a criminal, condemned to death, who has been pardoned. Jesus told Nicodemus in John chapter three that every human being comes into this world already condemned. We have been condemned to eternal death because of sin. We cannot live in the presence of God. There is no hope. All that awaits us is for the death sentence to be carried

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out. But in Ephesians chapter two, beginning at verse four, we read that “God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”

And thirdly, we saw that the person who is trusting in the blood of Jesus Christ alone for salvation is a slave who has been set free from bondage. In our natural state, we are complete slaves to sin. Apart from Christ, we are under the bondage of sin. But God has redeemed the believer from that bondage.

And we also saw last time that all of this has come about because Jesus Christ went to the cross and died in the place of sinners, shedding His own blood on our behalf, so that we might be redeemed – set free, pardoned, and liberated from the bondage and penalty of sin. He takes away our death sentence by bearing that death sentence Himself. That is what God required, and that is what God Himself provided. Without the shedding of blood, Hebrews 9:22 tells us, there is no remission of sins. So Jesus Christ purchased our redemption on the cross with His own blood.

“The Forgiveness of Sins” – Justification by Faith Alone

There is one other element in Colossians chapter one, verse fourteen, that I want to call to your attention today, and that is the very last phrase of the verse: “the forgiveness of sins.” “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

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Now at first it might seem that the Apostle Paul is just repeating himself here. But Paul under divine inspiration has added this last phrase, and he's used a different Greek word, because he wants to make another point about our salvation in Christ. The word that is used for "forgiveness" here is a Greek word that means, "treating offenses just as though they had never been committed." Treating offenses just as though they had never been committed.

In other places in his epistles, Paul explains this as the doctrine of justification by faith alone. And that is where I want to focus our attention today.

First, I want to give you a capsule form of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and then I want to expand upon it by giving you some of the Scriptures that support it.

Justification by faith alone is the heart of the Gospel. There is no Gospel, indeed there is no salvation, without justification by faith alone. The Bible tells us that justification is a once-for-all judicial act of God. Justification takes place when a sinner comes to faith in Christ. At that moment, God graciously declares the guilty sinner to be not guilty before His judgment bar, where the standard is perfect holiness. God pardons the sinner. As Paul says in Colossians 1:14, that God treats our offenses against Him – offenses that have incurred the penalty of eternal death – just as if they never happened. And God the Father does this on the basis of the merits of Jesus Christ alone, imputed to the sinner. And we're going to come back to that word "imputed" because it is very, very important.

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And the Bible declares that faith, and faith alone, is the instrument of the believer's justification. This faith is absolutely naked faith – it is unadorned, unembellished, empty-handed belief in the person and work of Christ to save sinners. That faith is itself the gift of God, and has nothing to do with works, so that no one can boast that he added one little thing to the righteousness of Christ. This faith is given to the sinner, who was spiritually dead but has now been made alive, by a gracious unilateral act of God the Holy Spirit.

In justification by faith, a great legal exchange takes place. The sins of the sinner are imputed to Jesus Christ, who has made full and final atonement for them. In other words, our sins are laid upon Christ. At the same time, the perfect all-sufficient righteousness of Christ is imputed to the undeserving, hopeless sinner. The believing sinner now wears the robe of Christ's righteousness, and the believing sinner need not – and indeed cannot – add any garment of his own. To attempt to add anything to the righteousness of Christ would be to deny the sufficiency of Christ.

Now, I want to also be clear that Scripture knows nothing of what I will call "easy believism." This is the false teaching that someone can profess a "faith" in Christ that is a mere formula of words and not the result of the regenerating work of God. Listen to me carefully. Scripture does not teach "easy believism." And this is not because saving faith involves works. Just the opposite. Scripture does not teach "easy believism" because genuine saving faith is God-given faith. It is, as Paul says in Ephesians chapter two, "not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

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First Corinthians chapter two tells us that it is impossible for the natural man to believe the Gospel. Belief is not some formula of words that originates in the sinful heart of man by his own will. The person who truly believes on Jesus Christ for salvation is God's workmanship from beginning to end. The believer, Paul tells us in Ephesians two, has been created in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world to do good works – the works which God prepared beforehand for him to do *after* he has been justified by faith alone. If a sinner has truly believed – if a sinner has exercised God-given faith in Christ – then a changed life will follow as surely as day follows night. But that changed life does not justify the sinner in the sight of God. That changed life is the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification in the believer. And sanctification is the result, not the cause, of salvation.

Five Propositions

Now I've just given you the doctrine of justification by faith alone in a very quick, capsule form. But now I want to expand upon it by giving you five statements or propositions about justification, and by giving you some of the Scriptures that explain each one to us. And if you are able, you might want to grab a pencil and paper and write down the Bible references I'm going to give you in a few moments.

Proposition number one is this: Nothing less than perfect obedience of the law of God can save a sinner.

Proposition number two is that no human being can keep the requirements of God's law perfectly.

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Proposition number three is based on one and two: Because nothing but perfect obedience can save us, and because we cannot offer a perfect obedience of our own to God, this means that no man can justify himself before God by good works.

Proposition number four is this: Justification by faith alone is based upon Christ's obeying the law perfectly on behalf of the sinner, and taking the punishment for the sinner's law-breaking as the Lamb of God upon the cross.

And finally, proposition number five: God declares the sinner righteous at conversion, imputing the perfect righteousness of Christ to him. Our justification is complete and final at conversion.

Biblical Support

Now, let me come back to each of these five propositions, and give you some of the Scriptures that support them.

First, nothing less than perfect obedience of the law of God can save a sinner. And the Scripture I will cite for that point is Romans 2:13: "For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified" before God.

Secondly, no man can keep the requirements of the law perfectly. James 2:10 tells us, "Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all." Romans 3:19 tells us that "whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

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And Paul tells us that even as a believer, he could not keep the law perfectly because he is still in a sinful body and living in a sinful world. In Romans 7, beginning at verse 15, he says this: "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice."

And in Galatians 3:10 we read this: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.' "

So proposition number one and proposition number two lead us directly to proposition number three: Because nothing but perfect obedience can save us, and because we cannot offer a perfect obedience of our own to God, this means that no man can justify himself before God by his good works. To put it a different way, the keeping of the law by man is completely excluded from justification by faith. It is not even in the picture. Let me give you some Scriptures for this point.

Galatians 2:16 – "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."

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Romans chapter 3, verse 20: "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

Romans 3:27-28 – "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."

And, Romans chapter 10, verse 4: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

You cannot save yourself. You have nothing to offer to God. Apart from Christ, every one of us stands guilty before God, condemned. But praise God, He does not leave us there. Jesus Christ enters the picture.

Proposition number four: Justification by faith alone – our salvation from sin and from the wrath to come – is based upon Christ's obeying the law perfectly on our behalf, and taking the punishment for our law-breaking as the Lamb of God.

Isaiah 53:11 – "My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities."

Romans 5:17-19 – "For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For

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as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous."

Ephesians 2:8-9 – "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

Paul says, in Philippians 3:9, that his desire is to be found in Christ, "not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."

Titus 3:5-7 – "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

And this brings us to proposition number five about justification by faith alone: God declares the sinner righteous at conversion, imputing the perfect righteousness of Christ to him. Our justification is complete and final at our conversion.

Acts 13:38-39 – "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses."

And in Romans chapter 4, beginning at verse 22, Paul says that Christ's righteousness "shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our

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Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

And finally, Romans chapter 8, beginning at verse 35: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Full, complete, and settled salvation. Justification by faith in Christ alone.

Have You Been Justified?

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ today, I trust and pray that you will be living in the light of that truth, in full assurance of your salvation. And I trust and pray that you will be living a life that is worthy of the Lord.

And if you are not a believer in Christ today, let me end by giving you one more passage of Scripture to think about, and I believe that as I read these words, God Himself is speaking directly to you, right now. Second Corinthians chapter 5,

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beginning at verse 19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

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