

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES TITLE: YOU WILL CHANGE | SERMON: JUSTIFICATION & IMPUTATION

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Intro

We have been examining the Biblical truth that Christians will change. Upon conversion, Christians are catapulted into a new life in which change is inevitable. Stated simply, salvation is a process in which Christians are not only saved from their guilty status but also saved from their inward, moral corruption.

Or you can say we need not only forgiveness, but also a new way of living. Being unforgiven is a misery from which man needs rescue; but so is evil living. A sinful lifestyle is a misery, though many people don't know it. From this sinful lifestyle we need rescue as much as anything; so we rejoice that God has determined Christians will certainly change in their character and lifestyle.

So far we've seen we must change, since the judgment is according to works; and we've seen that we will change based on election, predestination, and regeneration. Now it's time to look at one more element of salvation which ensures Christians will change: Justification and Imputation. These are two different words which relate closely to the same aspect of salvation, so we'll look at them together.

Justification/Imputation

"Justification" means God declares you legally righteous in his courtroom. "Imputation" means God takes Jesus' righteous legal record and gives it to you. Both of these words address the same problem that we all have: Not only are we corrupt people who repeatedly do evil, but the evil we do has created a rap sheet a mile long! We all have a criminal record.

So, for instance, just because you promise to do better in future doesn't mean a thing regarding what you've done. Suppose today you stopped your sinning and were perfect until death; without Christ you would still go to hell because your present reformation wouldn't do anything to change your past criminal record. If you're going to be saved something has to be done about that record.

That's where justification and imputation come in. Only people with perfect legal records (in the spiritual sense) enter heaven; if you have any dirt on you you're not getting in. And don't mistake me; I'm not talking about only those things the police know about. This concerns everything you've ever done, whether men saw it or not. God saw it all. God has directly observed every evil act we've performed and he even observed the motives in our hearts as we did those acts. And God has duly noted them all. He has them written in his book. That's what I mean by a criminal record.

So how does imputation address our criminal record? In imputation God takes my criminal record and attaches it to Jesus; then Jesus is executed on the cross as if he were me. At the same time God takes Jesus' perfect record and attaches it to me; and then God blesses me and treats me as if I were as righteous as Jesus. God eliminates my criminal record; or better, he punishes it in Jesus

And justification just means God makes a new legal declaration about me. God declares me righteous. He doesn't make me righteous; that's sanctification. Justification is God declaring me righteous. And he actually does this while I'm still ungodly. Look at this:

***Romans 4:5** ⁵ But to the one who does not work, but ^abelieves in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness*

God makes this declaration while I'm still a wretched, unchanged sinner; he does it in conversion upon my exercise of faith in Christ. The moment we believe God changes our legal status in his courtroom to "Not Guilty," or "Innocent," even though our life still hasn't changed a bit!

Now it is exceedingly important that we understand justification and imputation result from faith alone, not from any obedience on our part nor from any personal change. This is important for many reasons but I just want to point out one: As a Christian, you will have good days and bad days. Some days you will feel successful, some days not. You need to know certainly your righteous standing with God is not dependent on your actions or condition, but only on your trust in God. If you have looked to God and cried for help, and trusted him as Savior, the divine righteousness has been imputed to you, and you are declared righteous in God's courtroom. Let's get this truth in the words of John Bunyan:

"One day as I was passing into the field . . . this sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. And methought, withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he wants [lacks] my righteousness, for that

was just before [in front of] him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, "The same yesterday, today and, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; so that from that time those dreadful scriptures of God left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God." (John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, [Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1978, orig. 1666], pp. 90-91)

So imputation and justification both address my guilty record of sin which must be removed if I am to escape God's anger in hell forever. And they both do this based on faith alone, not any work I perform nor any improvement in personal holiness.

However, this series is about the certainty of our improvement in personal holiness. So now that we have a description of justification and imputation, the question is this: How do they help to ensure that Christians Will Change?

And the answer is this: When the Christian understands the gift given to him in justification and imputation, his heart is filled with peace, hope, exultation, blessedness and happiness; and this experience continually lightens the heart and moves the Christian toward loving, joyful obedience to God. Let me show you two texts and a quote to fill out what I'm saying:

Romans 5:1-2 ^aTherefore, having been justified by faith, ^{1b}we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have ^aobtained our introduction by faith into this grace ^bin which we stand; and ¹we exult in hope of the glory of God.

See what experience follows from justification? Peace, exultation, hope; justification has a profound impact on the heart and mind of the Christian.

Romans 4:6-8 ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ ^{"a}BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. ⁸ ^{"a}BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT ^bTAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

This is how David explains the experience of God imputing righteousness to him: Blessedness; i.e. happiness, joy, the sense of being highly favored. The effect of imputation is intense. Now let's take a quote from Martin Luther:

“I began to understand that “the justice of God” meant that justice by which the just man lives through God’s gift, namely faith. This is what it means: the justice of God is revealed by the gospel, a passive justice with which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: ‘He who through faith is just shall live.’ Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.” – Martin Luther

Rather a strong way to put it, don't you think? "Gates of paradise"?! Is that over the top? Is Luther exaggerating? That depends. Have you ever been tortured with the pervasiveness and intractability of your sin? Have you ever had the clear impression that you are a rebel against God and even though you want to stop you can't? Have you ever felt that for all your miserable selfishness you ought to go to hell, that it would even be a sort of relief if you did, since then at least justice would be served?

If you had felt that, you would know something of Luther's Gates of Paradise. You would know what it is to open your Bible and read that believers, though ungodly and wretched, have been given the righteousness of Christ; God has declared them not guilty. Gates of Paradise, Indeed.

And you know, Gates of Paradise tend to affect a man ☺ They affect him so much that his character and behavior start to change. So what is the change? His heart is moved with affection. He stops looking on God and the world as out to get him; he begins to know that he is loved, and loved to the death.

Now this is actually a very important point, because God doesn't accept just any kind of obedience; God is looking for a heart-felt, warm, loving surrender to his will; and such an obedience cannot be given by a man who believes God is a cold and harsh slave-master. In justification and imputation we find out God is love, and that he is entirely for us. And finding that out changes our hearts toward him so that we can obey as he desires to be obeyed.

No cold obedience will ever do; no obedience while gritting our teeth and clenching our fists. No obedience that comes from just being afraid of hell. That isn't enough. Our obedience must come from love or else it is pitifully short of the mark.

But the rebel heart can't love God; actually, it must hate him, if it knows him. And much of that hate is the hatred which comes from guiltiness and shame. We know we have done wrong; we know that we are corrupt. And yet we are locked into it and we love it and hate it all at the same time; sometimes we wish we could be free, but never enough to actually leave our sin. And every day we know we are piling up more and more of the anger of God because of our silly, stupid, selfish behavior. What is the solution?

The solution is for God to remove our criminal record and give us a righteous record, even the record of Christ himself. In that act God shows himself to be love, he shuts the mouth of all who blaspheme him as evil and uncaring, he sweetens the outlook of the justified man, and God opens his heart to love God, and thereby to obey him rightly. This is the only solution. And it is a solution which ensures that a man will change in his character and behavior.

Conclusion

So here's what we have: Christians must change because we will be judged on the last day in accordance with that change; No Change equals No Salvation. But God ensures we will change when he imputes righteousness to us and justifies us on the basis of our faith. This is so because our hearts are changed as we see the love of God exercised toward us, and consequently our character and behavior begins to improve.