

Justification: Christ Our Righteousness

Galatians 2:16-17

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We read in Galatians 2:15-17, "We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles, 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. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!"

Last week, we considered together the need for justification. The Bible, regardless of heritage, lineage, or advantage, states plainly and clearly that we are all sinners in need of the justifying grace of our God found in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we must ask the question this morning: What is justification? What does it mean to be justified? And how can a sinner be just before God?

In the verses that were just read to us, we have the word "justified" appearing four times in just two verses, in verses 16 and 17. A related word appears in verse 21 of this same chapter, which is the word "righteousness." At the very heart of the text we're considering is the doctrine of justification. But then, what is at the heart of justification? At the heart of justification is the understanding, or regard if we could say, our acceptability before God. At the very heart of justification is, yes, righteousness before God, but ultimately what that leads to is a sinner's acceptability before God. It asks the question: Who are the ones that God receives as His own? Who are the ones that God takes pleasure in, or as it were, considers worthy of eternal life?

In relation to what was happening here at Antioch in Galatians chapter 2, verses 11 to 15, we find that this was a problem that was happening horizontally. The Jews were treating the Gentiles as if God had not received them. They were treating one another as if they were not part of the same family or part of the same church, as though they had not been accepted in the same manner before God. And therefore, the Jews were priding themselves in circumcision and in dietary laws and things that existed in their Judaism, which they had not yet let go of in light of the gospel

of Jesus Christ.

So, Paul shows that this vertical issue, which is your understanding of justification before God, had a very horizontal impact and effect. What Paul is basically trying to say is: How is a man accepted before God? The answer to that is justified by faith in Jesus Christ. And his argument basically is following: Then why don't you, Jews, receive these Gentiles if God receives them?

Paul shows us that this horizontal problem that existed there at Antioch and that was existing in the churches of Galatia actually stemmed from a vertical problem. I think that's a really insightful thought because it helps us understand that most of our horizontal problems are often problems of our relationship to God, our relationships to one another, unity in the church, in family, in life, in home, all these kinds of things, in the workplace. The horizontal sphere of our lives is often impacted by our view of God and our relationship to God.

What Paul does here is he establishes the grounds upon which sinners have established a true relationship with God. And then, by implication, he teaches: Why can't you get on with one another? Paul does not deal with the horizontal issue by dealing with the horizontal issue itself. He deals with the vertical issue first.

Now, justification regards our acceptability before God, but it could also be referred to as our vindication or our validation. We often use that word in our day-to-day lives, in our day-to-day setting. For example, tax time has come upon us and passed, but we ask ourselves the questions: How do I justify that expense to the tax office? Or maybe you don't do the books, but how can I justify that expense to my spouse? How can I justify that expense to my boss? If you're in a position in a workplace where you make expenditures for the company. Or as parents, you might say, "My children are trying to justify their behavior to me," and that frustrates you to no end. Because they're constantly trying to show themselves as righteous. They're constantly trying to validate what they have done. Or they're trying to explain and express themselves in such a way that they might receive acceptance.

And this happens also when we go for job interviews. And your number one goal in your job interview is to justify to your interviewers that you are worthy of the job. You need to prove to your interviewers that you are worthy of this job offer. So the way that you do that is you give them a CV, a resume. And your resume acts as your validation. It's got all your academic achievements, your references, your past performance reviews. And what you're doing by that is you're declaring yourself worthy of the job

position. You're seeking a sort of acceptance from the company so that you can basically have that job.

Now, the biblical doctrine of justification goes far deeper than that, but understanding this, at least from the basic that the word has that same meaning and connotation. So the biblical doctrine is similar in its definition. And what it is, is not about being justified before the sight of others or proving ourselves to be righteous in the sight of others. Justification has to do with what God thinks of us. Has to do with being accepted by God. It has to do with God looking upon us and considering us and then making a judgment as to whether or not we are worthy to stand in His sight or not. Seeing us and making a judgment whether or not we are righteous in His sight or whether or not we are condemned in His sight. And so, justification in the Bible sense has to do with what God thinks or says of us. It's about our performance record before God. Will God look upon our works and will He receive us into His family? In fact, it goes beyond that. Justification is judicial.

So, you think of it in terms of a courtroom, and you think of yourself on trial. And here you have God, the Judge of all the earth, who is righteous and has given His laws. And here you have yourself, who is one of His creatures, standing before Him in this courtroom when the books are being opened, as it were, and your life is being examined by the law of God, and God is considering your life in light of all your sin and about to make a verdict and about to make a judgment. He looks at the evidence, makes a verdict: innocent, guilty. Or He might say justified or condemned.

Now, the beautiful thing about this word "justified" in this text, at least, is that it's in the passive. Paul is making a very clear point here that we are not the ones who justify ourselves. It is God who justifies. Meaning, we can say whatever we like about ourselves, but ultimately, it's God who's the judge, who takes the hammer and hits it upon that desk and declares a verdict. No matter what we think of ourselves or no matter what we say of ourselves, as Romans 8 puts it to us very clearly, it is God who justifies. He's the Judge. He makes the declaration. And what we learn then is, in this courtroom setting, we have God who makes a declaration in light of our lives.

Now, one thing we need to understand is that justification has to do, as I'll get to in just a moment, has to do with our being righteous. Not just being innocent, but our being righteous. But we have to understand and comprehend this courtroom very clearly unless we make mistakes. It is the error of the Roman Catholic Church with regards to justification that fails at this point. They view justification as transformative, not declarative. You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well, they view justification

as a process. That through our faith in Jesus and through our keeping of the sacraments, God views sinners as being more and more and more and more righteous, in hope one day as they pass through purgatory, they will be able to be received as righteous. So there's this progressive transformation. What they basically confuse it with is sanctification.

But the Bible teaches us that justification is declarative; it's judicial. And what that simply means is God makes a verdict, and He states a fact, or He makes a judgment that actually does not transform the sinner in any way. That judgment has to do with our standing, has to do with our position before God. And that's important to recognize. And let me explain.

The Bible teaches in several places that there are judges that make judgment. One of the passages says in Proverbs 17:15, "He that condemns the righteous, or the just, and he that justifies the wicked, is an abomination to the Lord." And what does that tell us? Well, it tells us something very important: that it is possible for a bad judge to make a bad judgment which actually has no bearing upon the heart of that person or the moral standing of that person or the moral, if I could say, transformation of that person. For example, a judge may make a judgment regarding someone who is righteous and say that they are wicked. But let me ask you this question: does that righteous person, does that mean that that righteous person is wicked if they make a bad judgment? No. The moral state of that person or condition of that person is unchanged by the judgment. The judgment looks at the considerations and declares. And this is what God does in justification.

The transformative part is found in regeneration. The transformative part is found in sanctification. But it's very clear for us to understand that God does not look into your obedience to make His declaration as to whether or not you are righteous or not. It's declarative; it is not transformative. This can be proved because it's contrasted with condemnation. This can also be proved because the Bible teaches that people justify God.

Justification has to do with being transformative. In what ways do people justify God? For example, it says that the Pharisees, not the Pharisees, it says that the publicans and the tax collectors, they justified God. That's when they heard the preaching of John, and they believed on Christ, and all these things. They justified God. What does that mean? Did that make God more righteous? No, they didn't make God more righteous. They came to the realization that the God in heaven who saved them is righteous, is holy, is glorious, is just, and they declared that righteousness regarding that God. Nothing changed in God's holiness. Nothing changed in God's righteousness because of what the tax collectors said of Him, positive or negative.

And so it is true also in other places of scripture where David sins and he says, "O God, that You might be justified in Your words when You speak." What's David saying? That I've just made Your words much more righteous than they really are? No, not at all. He never transformed God's words for the moment, but God's words are declared to be righteous by the fact of his sin.

And so we learn very early here, at least as we consider justification, that we understand that this is declarative and it is not transformative. But then the really important question is: How can God justify sinners? That's a big statement. God declaring sinners righteous apart from inward change and internal change in their lives. Is God a bad judge? Proverbs says, "He that justifies the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." Then how is it that God can justify sinners, the wicked? Declare the sinners righteous apart from anything that the sinners do? What is He doing? Is He going contrary to His own word? No. How can God justify sinners? How can God, therefore, justify, declare righteous, the ungodly?

Now, if you're thinking to yourself the word "faith," I'm going to argue that you have begun in the wrong place. We must begin with the concept of God declaring sinners righteous, not with faith. We must begin with Christ. Verse 17 of this chapter says these words, "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ..." Justified, but I've just been saying that it's God who justifies. How is it then that Christ is the one who justifies? Well, it is God that makes a declaration as the judge regarding the sinner's righteousness, but the sinner is justified on the grounds and the work of Jesus Christ. This is the relationship. It is God who justifies, yes, but it's Christ who justifies. The one thing you can be certain of: it's not we who justify ourselves.

And so here in this text of scriptures, it says that we are justified by Christ. It is not faith that is the ultimate reason why God accepts you. You need to understand that. Otherwise, you'll be measuring your faith every day and wondering whether or not it's good enough for the acceptance of God. And the days that your faith is strong, God loves me. The days that your faith is weak, God hates me. And so the Bible teaches us that we are justified, yes, through faith. Faith is what lays hold of Christ, as we look at that now, but it is the very righteousness of Christ that is the grounds of our justification.

The only reason why God can declare the sinner righteous, the only reason why God can remain holy, just, and the justifier, is because of Jesus Christ. And this is very important for us to grasp. If we say that it's faith, we go wrong. The answer is we're justified by Christ, faith in Christ. No Jesus, no faith. A lot of people say, "I have faith in God; therefore, I'm right." You're not right if you have faith in God. You're not right with God just because you have faith. Where is your faith placed? You say, "Jesus."

I say, "What about Jesus?" What about Jesus Christ makes you safe right now in the presence of God? What about the Lord Jesus Christ that keeps, as it were, the ground from opening up under us and destroying us now in hell forevermore? What is about the Lord Jesus Christ that matters to the sinner with regards to justification?

God declares the sinner righteous not because the sinner is righteous internally and neither because the sinner just merely believes, but God declares the sinner righteous because there has been one who has been made a substitute for the sinner. There has been one who has dealt with the sin of the sinner, and that is namely the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Christ whom God has set forth, as the scripture says, as a propitiation through His blood. That simply means it is God that has given His Son, Jesus, to satisfy the wrath of God for us. The law of God, which is accumulated in our disobedience toward our guilt and toward our judgment, God has dealt with that wrath in Christ because He has dealt with that sin. In other words, God's not the kind of God who just looks away from sin and simply says, "It's all good if people violate my law; that's fine." No, He is holy. He is holy, holy, holy. He is to be feared. He is to be revered. He is to be understood not as an unjust judge that just lets things go, but one who deals with sin.

And here in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the answer that He has dealt with sin, and through Jesus Christ, we have forgiveness of sins. That's the first aspect of our justification by Christ. God cleanses our sin, erases our sin, transfers the guilt of our sin upon His Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, who goes to an old rugged cross for the sins of His people and dies for them so that they might go free. This is the mercy of God in Christ, the guilt of sin, the debt paid.

But the problem is many Christians think it ends there with our justification. "I've been forgiven. I've just got a new slate." Can I just tell you, if we get a new slate and that's all we get, we're done the next minute. He erases our sin, hallelujah. And then you think, what about the sin I committed yesterday after I believed in Jesus Christ three months ago? What happens to that one? Right? Oh, you think people just think, okay, well, He erases our slate forever. Yeah, true, but not what justification is all about. Yes, He erases our sin debt forever. He pays for all our sin, past, present, and future, but it does not end there.

You see, justification is not just about making us back to what Adam was like, where we get another go at the tree of life and see what happens. That's not what justification is about. Yes, sin debt is clear. Yes, salvation is brought. Yes, there is forgiveness of sins, but there is something positive that God accredits to our account, and that is righteousness. This is why justification is not the declaration of the sin of merely as innocent before

God. That's why some people say justification means "just as if I never sinned." Well, that's only half the story. The other half of the story is that we get a righteousness that is not our own. It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and that makes all the difference.

God doesn't just see us merely as innocent people again with another chance at eternal life. No, He sees us as positively righteous. He sees not only our debts paid but an infinite amount of righteousness accredited to our account that suffices forevermore, that God might look on us not with judgment, not with condemnation at any point of time in our lives, but He constantly, always looks upon the justified ones as He looks upon Christ Himself. We're not neutral. We're righteous in His sight.

So where does the Bible teach that? Everywhere. I'm going to give you three texts of scriptures that I'd like to read to you just in trying to get this. For He, in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For He made Him, that is, God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Not just become innocent, but we might become the righteousness of God and get it in Him, in union with Him, which means that righteousness of God is that righteousness which comes from Christ, that we are now covered by because we are in Him.

Philippians 3:8-9, Paul, the one who kept the law better than any other person that you could probably call upon or know in your life or even in that present time, he calls to account his conversion, and he says in Philippians 3:8-9, "Yet indeed I also count all things for loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I might gain Christ and listen to these words, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ." Listen to what it says here, "the righteousness which is from God by faith." It's not the righteousness of your faith that justifies you; it's the righteousness which comes from God, received by faith. It is God's righteousness in God's Son, deposited to our account so that God sees us as righteous in His sight.

Therefore, righteousness in the scripture is taught as not something to be earned by our obedience but something to be received as a gift from God. And in Romans 5:17, he says this, "For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through one, Jesus Christ." I want you to think about that for a moment, the gift of righteousness. Could anything ever be more glorious than seeing righteousness as a gift? Something freely received by faith, therefore being justified freely by His grace, we have redemption through His blood, freely by His grace, justified. Why? Because the righteousness is free. It's a gift given to us to receive by faith,

a perfect righteousness.

So how can God justify sinners? Well, God doesn't lie to Himself and just say, "Oh, they're righteous even though I know they're not righteous." No, no. God actually forgives in the blood of His Son, and God actually accredits its righteousness to our account, which is the righteousness of Christ. So that righteousness is actually ours. By regard to our standard, by regard to our standing, regard to our position with regards to our union with Christ. So it's the righteousness of God received as a gift by faith. Therefore it's Christ's righteousness covering me, but it's mine. Do you understand that? It's yours in the sense that it's yours by reason of the gift. And this is the wonder of justification, that God can look upon a sinner and in mercy, He can declare a sinner righteous because of the work of His Son.

Well, how does the sinner lay hold of this? Look at our texts of scripture together. Verse number 16, "knowing that a man is not justified, is not declared righteous by God 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." We are justified by Christ. It's His righteousness as a gift regarding our forgiveness and clothed upon with His righteousness. It is God that declares us righteous. How does the sinner receive this declaration of righteousness? They receive it through faith in Jesus Christ.

But listen to what he says here, three times, okay, so we don't miss the point. He says, "not by the works of the law." Not by the works of the law. Just in case we need to rephrase it another way, "For by the works of the law no flesh," look at you, you've got flesh here, skin, okay, "no human being shall be justified." What he's simply saying is you can go to Moses, you can go to the scriptures, you can try your very best to earn favor with God all your days and all your hours, and you can fast, and you can pray, and you can lash yourself, and you can do penance, and you can make go to confession, and you can seek baptism, and you can seek all these things, but the truth is, not by the works of the law. No one will be justified by the works of the law. Zero chance.

In fact, we will do well to understand what the scripture actually teaches us, that it's by the works of the law that we first got ourselves in this mess, by a violation of the works of the law. The law is holy, just, and good, but "for by the law is the knowledge of sin," Paul says. "I had not known sin except by the law." Listen, Adam, it's a violation of the law, the one commandment, don't eat of this tree. Adam and Eve's violation of that one law has plunged the whole human race into lawlessness and basically has put us all in rebellion against God and all in a state and condition where we

need to earn favor with God.

Now, the worst thing you can do is try now to keep all those laws in order to get that favor back. Firstly, it's too late; you're already guilty. Secondly, it will be an upward battle, and you will fall into guilt and condemnation because that law will keep pointing out your insufficiency to keep it and show you how wretched you really are.

And so what did God say to Adam? Or should I say, what did God say to Satan in the presence of Adam and Eve? There's coming a seed, the redeemer of His people, the Lord Jesus Christ. And in light of that, God took away their fig leaves, as it were, that they were wearing, seeking their own covering so that they can somehow cover the shame of their nakedness and guilt before God. And God kills an animal, as it were, and He covers them with the animal skins, as a type pointing to that seed who will have his heel bruised, but even though his heel will be bruised, he will crush the serpent's head. And by crushing the serpent's head, he will deal with sin, and he will deal with the curse of sin which has come to us through the law and our disobedience of the law. And God declared justification there in the garden through the death of His Son.

And ever since then, it has been the only hope of people, of sinners, whether Jew or whether Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised. Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. He had no other hope. Before he was circumcised, it was accounted unto him for righteousness. In fact, 430 years before the Mosaic law, it was counted unto him for righteousness. Why? Because he believed in God's Lamb who would deal with his sin once and forevermore.

And so Paul says, it's not by the works of the law that anyone should be justified. No one shall be accepted by God, validated before God, received by God by the works of the law. No, that's what gets us into the trouble. But he says three times also positively, he says, "but through faith in Jesus Christ." Once again, get the message, not by the works of the law, but contrasting faith, faith, faith, not just faith, faith in Jesus Christ who justifies. It is faith in Christ that justifies the sinner.

And therefore, the sinner may this very hour be declared righteous in the sight of God, even though he hasn't yet lived out his life. Because it's not about your performance record any longer. It's about Christ's performance record. You see the whole point? You can stand before the judge with the guilt of your sin, and Christ says, "Here, here's my resume. Lived the perfect life, never sinned, obeyed God in every particular detail, fulfilled all righteousness, love God with all my heart, all my soul, all my strength. I love my neighbor as myself. I kept all the law of God perfectly, and I died on

the cross to deal with sin that offended God so that we might go free." And you can say, "God, when you look at me, I'm done, but I've believed in Him. This is His righteousness here. Christ, open His book, read His story, and think on me, consider His righteousness, and save me."

And so Paul says, it's not by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. What is faith in Jesus Christ? It is depending solely upon Christ. It's not a matter of intellectual consent that you walk away from this place understanding that yes, I know that I'm a sinner, and I know that Christ is righteous. No, no, no, no. That's not what it means to be justified before God. To know these things is not enough. To believe in these things is what God requires of your soul. And to believe in these things means to commit yourself to them. And I'm not talking about the commitment of pursuit. I'm talking about the commitment of letting yourself go and falling on the righteousness of Christ once and for all. No longer measuring your relationship to God by what you have done or why what you haven't done. But seeing that here is righteousness, here God can accept me, here God will save me, here God will look at me as His own child as Jesus Christ Himself, and I throw myself on the righteousness of Christ as my only hope. That's faith. Falling on it. Giving yourself to it. Trusting Jesus. Ceasing from your works.

And for you, my friend, there is no other way to be accepted before God but to rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. And when you do that, the day you do that, God declares you righteous. Righteous. Except I haven't done anything, precisely. Jesus did it all for you. Surely there's got to be more to this. No. "My hope is built on nothing less but Jesus' blood and righteousness." This is it. This is the only hope of the sinner. This is the joy of the sinner. Why? Because you don't have to prove yourself to God any longer.

How often our hearts and minds are struggling to prove ourselves as worthy of God. He loves me. No, He doesn't love me. I stuffed up today. My performance is bad. Again, you're looking at the wrong performance record. That's you and the law without Christ. That's thinking in terms not of the blood of Jesus Christ and of the righteousness of Christ. That is thinking in terms of your own righteousness. But the Bible teaches us that the value of justification cannot be measured. It is the unsearchable riches of Christ for us.

So Paul goes on to say in Romans chapter 5, he says, "Therefore being justified by faith," and he says, listen to the glory of this, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." You know what Paul says? The war has ended. Peace. When you get justified by faith, you surrender your life to Jesus Christ, and the war against God ends. In fact, you have peace with

God. That's why Abraham could be called the friend of God. Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. No longer, as it were, thinking He's going to judge me and condemn me, and He doesn't love me. No, you're thinking of yourself in terms of peace with God, reconciliation. We're brought into fellowship and union with Christ. No more fear of hell. No more fear of condemnation. No more fear of destruction. Listen, in justification, God is for you. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" And Paul is saying, those He justifies, He glorifies. And if He's justified you, you can say with assurance that God is for me. He's for me. He's not against me. Even when I sin, He's for me. Do you understand that?

And when you sin, when you're angry, when you're filled with lust, when you're filled with bitterness, and you violate His law, God is still for you. How can it be? I thought He chastens us. That's exactly right. Chastening is God for you. "For whom the Lord loves, He chastens." Do you understand the moment that you believe in Jesus Christ, God is always for you, and He's never against you?

But why do you feel like God's against you? He's trying to destroy my life. He's trying to rob me of pleasure. He's trying to keep me back from good things. Things aren't going the way that I planned to be. Is God against me? God's not against you. Never for one moment is God against you. He's for us. Let me ask you this: Is He for Christ? If you answer yes to that question, then you can say He's for you if you are in Christ. You wear Christ's righteousness. God is for us.

He says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." But he goes on to say that we also have access into this grace wherein we stand. You know what he's saying? We have access. Not only is God for us, God says, "Come to Me." Some of you work in office buildings, and you have swipe cards. You can go into rooms that other people cannot go into in that office building. If I walk into your office building, I probably can't get past the reception desk. But with your card, it declares your access, that you can go places where ordinary people cannot go.

And here in God's kingdom, in relationship to God, we have access to intimate, secret fellowship, communion with God, where other people cannot go. Why do we have that access? Because of the blood of Jesus Christ. We come boldly to the throne of grace. Why? Because we have the key card. Because we receive the righteousness of Christ. We're accepted by God, and God says, "Come on, everything is yours in My kingdom. All My treasures are yours because they're all found in Jesus Christ, and you've believed on Him. Come and taste, come and eat, come and drink. Enjoy. You have access."

But how many of God's people say, "I can't approach God. I can't pray because I did this last week, and I did that last week. In fact, I can't take the Lord's supper because I did this the other week too." And you know what? It's done. You know, I'm just going to stay away from God. That's probably where He wants me anyway. That's thinking in terms outside of justification. Because of justification, we have access. And what God is telling us is, "Come, come, you're wearing Christ's righteousness. Do I receive My Son? I receive you."

The prodigal son, yes, went away far from God, but when he came to the father's house, what did he do? Put a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, a robe on his back, and said, "Let's make merry; this my son was dead, but he's alive again. He was lost, but now he is found," and he rejoiced in all the forgiveness and mercy of God. We have access.

And then he goes on to say, "and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Because of justification, we rejoice in anticipation, confident anticipation of the glory of God. What does that mean? The glory of God is going to be revealed in us. Basically, simply saying this, that God will glorify those whom He justifies. And justification basically says, "I'm not done with you yet, my son, my daughter. The fact that I have declared you righteous means that you're mine, you're in My family, you're adopted as My children, and I am glorifying you." Not giving us praise, He is transforming us after the pattern and beauty of His Son, to we when we see Him shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

And so when you sin and when you groan over sin and when you repent of a sin, what do you see? You see the glory that is to come. "These robes of flesh," the hymn writer says, "I'll drop and rise to seize the everlasting prize." That's the idea. He's not done with us. Justification says He's for us and will make us exactly internally like His Son. He will work righteousness in us.

You say, "But my conscience is troubled by sin, and I feel condemned. How am I to free myself from this troubled conscience?" I sin, and I feel that God despises me and hates me and rejects me. Whenever you feel condemned by your conscience, I encourage you to the words of scripture in Romans chapter 8, verses 33 to 34, "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."

You say, "I'm guilty. My mind is guilty. I cannot access God because I'm troubled in my mind." You know what God says? "Who shall lay any accusation that will stick to the charge of God's elect? No one. Why? God is

justified. Who can condemn you? No one can condemn you because Christ has died. He is risen, and He ever lives to make intercession for you."

What God is saying to us, there is no reason why our accused conscience should keep us from the presence of God. It's been dealt with. Conscience cleansed, and it is ours to lean upon when we sin, to say, "Jesus, You have paid the price for my sin. You have made me righteous, or declared me right. Because of Your righteousness, I'm declared righteous in God's sight, and therefore, you can come boldly to the throne of grace." Yes, with all your sin, and seek repentance, and seek healing, and seek deliverance, and you can find help in God.

Do you tell yourself that? When Satan fires a dart of accusation into your mind, or when your flesh rises up against you, do you tell yourself that? That it is God who justifies. There's no accusation, as it were, that can truly be made against me because I wear the righteousness of Christ. Do you tell yourself that Christ makes intercession for you every time you struggle with the conscious reality of your sinfulness and feel like you cannot approach God? Every time you fail as a husband, or as a mother, as a father, or you fail as a church member, or as in your relationship with God in some manner, in some way, and you feel guilt-ridden and cannot approach God, do you tell yourself, "Who is he that condemns? It is God who's justified me"?

You say, "But He cannot love me. How could He love someone like me?" You know what Paul says because of justification? He says, "Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, shall distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Yet in all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded," get that word there, "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

You can never, for a moment, if you believe in Jesus Christ, you can never, for a moment, believe the lie that God doesn't love you. Finish with this quote, John Flavel says, "Did Christ finish His work? How dangerous it is to join anything of our own to the righteousness of Christ in pursuit of justification before God. Jesus Christ will never endure this. It reflects upon His work dishonorably. He will be all or none in our justification. If He has finished the work, what need is there of our additions? And if not, to what purpose are they? Can we finish that which Christ Himself could not complete? Did He finish the work, and will He ever divide the glory and praise of it with us? No, no. Christ is no half-savior."

"It is a hard thing to bring proud hearts to rest upon Christ for righteousness. God humbles the proud by calling sinners wholly from their own righteousness to Christ for their justification." Maybe it's a matter of pride for you this morning, that you want to hang on to something small that can represent you to God that is found in yourself. And God says, "I will not share that glory with anyone else. Receive the righteousness of Christ, and that's it."