

DISCIPLESHIP ESSENTIALS

"Justification"

8/12/12

Verses from New Living Translation unless noted.

Most of us have been watching the Olympics this week. Every now and then Jackie and I will see a place and say, "Been there. Seen that!" Some of you weren't here at the time but this church generously sent Jackie and I on a European vacation in celebration of our twentieth year of ministry here at this church.

That was nine years ago so I understand why some of you may not remember, but for us it was a trip we'll never forget. One thing about London I remember is there are different kinds of London maps: The street map, the tourist map, the underground map of the subway. Now there's a new map of Olympic events.

Each map is accurate and correct, but each map does not give the complete picture. To see the whole, the maps would have to superimpose on top of each other. However, that would be too confusing, so we just use one 'layer' at a time.

It is similar we when we try to describe what Jesus Christ did for us when he came into our world 2000 years ago. In our Discipleship Essentials series we focus on four very meaning-filled words to depict this world-changing, eternity-altering event: grace, redemption, justification and adoption.

Two weeks ago Pastor Bryan Smith gave a message on Grace. Last week I talked about Redemption. Today the message is about Justification and next week is Adoption.

It's like a four-part mini-series, scrutinizing these words to help us understand what Jesus did. Each is accurate and correct, but the individual words do not give the complete picture.

To see the whole we need to place one 'layer' one top of the other. I hope is won't be too confusing—but in order to understand the whole, we need to separate out each splendid

concept and when we do I think we'll discover that the whole is even more astounding than the sum of its parts."

This four part section of our Discipleship Essentials is the heart of the Gospel. It is the essential truth of the Bible. It is the most unique and beautiful part of the story of Jesus. There is no more important truth in all the world.

These words we are choosing to investigate and focus on, I didn't dream up. They've been around for years. They are classics. I know they are old and take some explanation so hang with me, please.

Justification: what does this one mean? Webster says, "to show to be just, right or reasonable." If you want to know if a line is straight, take a ruler or straight edge and check it out. A carpenter uses a level to see if a stud is straight. A cook uses a measuring cup to insure just the right amount of ingredient.

A child uses an excuse to justify his action. Go back to the Garden of Eden; Adam tries to justify his sin by saying, "the woman you gave me, brought me the fruit and I ate it."



Doesn't that sound a bit like he's blaming God?

Eve says, "The serpent tricked me. That's why I ate it."

Justification: using some means or method to prove or show that something is right or true; that we are right or righteous.

Here's a second definition: to make just or right. If you justify the margins of a document, what are you doing? You are making them straight or even. You make the ends of the lines of text line up. Or, you balance the amount of space in the margin on both sides of the page.

You justify by changing something to make it right or correct. You might justify a wrong. You made a mistake so you make up for it. You spilled something so you wipe it up. You hurt someone so you apologize. You misspelled a word and you correct it.

Justification: to show that something is just or right; to make something just or right.

But, the Bible's use of the word justification is different still. It doesn't make an excuse for sin; it doesn't change God's law and say the sin is OK.

Rather the biblical definition of justification, according to the Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology, is "to pronounce, accept, and treat as just."

God takes into consideration the work of Christ for us and acquits us. God doesn't make us right but he declares us right.

I will never be sinless, but because of what Christ did for me, God treats me as sinless. Listen to this verse from Romans 3:22. "We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done."

I'll never be sinless but because of Christ, God treats me like I am. Here's an easy way to remember the Biblical definition:

Justification: just as if I'd never sinned.

Say it with me. "Justification: just as if I'd never sinned." Does that say you never sinned? No, it says if you have put your trust in Jesus Christ to take away your sins, God will treat you just as if you'd never sinned.

Now I've told you what I'm going to tell you, the end from the beginning; the message in a nut shell, but now I'm going to crack the nut and show you what's inside. (Note-taking outline)

1ST THE NEED FOR JUSTIFICATION

If you have a copy of the Bible with you, whether it's hard bound or digital, find Romans, chapter 3. This is where we'll spend most of our time.

v.23 says, "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."

Humans are united by a desire for justice. We realize that life isn't fair. Even little children holler, "That's not fair!" We come with a factory-install sense of fairness. For some reason we think life should be fair.

The Bible teaches that life isn't fair *now*, but points to a day when all wrongs will be righted and all injustices will be justified. One day God's going to straighten it all out and make things fair.

The idea of God coming to earth to bring ultimate justice offers us a sense of comfort. To those who suffer at the hands of the unjust, it is comforting to hold on to the promise that one day all will be made right.

This upside-down, crazy world will not go on in its current state forever. God will execute justice. The Bible's picture of God is of an all-powerful deity who hates sin, who is angry with the sinner because of his love.

He looks at the world and sees the trafficking of innocent children, the destructive use of drugs, the genocidal atrocities in Africa, the terrorist attacks that keep people in perpetual fear, and God—out of love for the creation that reflects him as Creator—is rightfully and gloriously angry.

Listen to me friends, the god who is truly scary is not the wrathful God of the Bible, but the god who would close his eyes to the injustice of this world, shrug his shoulders, and ignore evil in the name of "love".

What kind of love is that? A god who is never angered at sin and who lets wickedness go by unpunished is not worthy of worship.

We all want justice. But... what does that mean for our sin?

An atheist was on his deathbed. His Godly grandmother visited and asked if he made his peace with God. Smarting off he replied, "I didn't know we'd been fighting."

Here's the shocker! Before a person accepts God's offer of forgiveness through his Son, God considers them an enemy.

Colossians 1:21 "This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions."

Justification brings an end to the hostility that exists between God and man prior to knowing Jesus. The war between God's holiness and man's sinfulness is terminated and a benefit is a permanent peace with God!

Most unbelievers don't know they are God's enemy because they don't actively oppose the work of God. They feel they are neutral towards God...but there's no such thing.

Jesus said in Matthew 12:30, "Anyone who isn't with me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me."

Romans 8:7-8 "The sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God."

All unbelievers are the enemy of God. But take it a step further: God is the enemy of all unbelievers. He is angry with them and not just because of their sin but because they have rejected his Son and his offer of forgiveness.

"But God would never send anyone to hell," some argue.

Ephesians 5:6 "Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these

sins, for the terrible anger of God will fall on all who disobey him.”

Listen people – look at the world! It’s not divine judgment that is so surprising; it’s divine favor! Eternal judgment makes sense if we understand that an all-powerful loving God created a perfect world for us.

And then with God’s eyes—see the devastation and heartache the sin we brought into it has unleashed.

The Bible tells us that creation is groaning for is not the destroying fire of God, but the purging fire that will burn away everything that defaces and desecrates it, and allow God’s love to fill it once again.

Justification is necessary because we have sinned and we’re in big trouble.

2ND THE SOURCE OF JUSTIFICATION

JESUS came to justify us and he has the authority to do that. Here’s a good question: Who can forgive sin?? Who has the right to wipe the slate clean?? To say, Forget about it??

I can forgive you for wronging me. If you do something against me, I can forgive that. But what authority do I have to forgive you for wronging someone else, or much more, for wronging God? Can I say to somebody, “All your sins are forgiven”??

The people in Jesus’ day saw this problem. In Matthew 9 a young man who had been paralyzed was brought to Jesus. Jesus said to the paralyzed man, *“Take heart, son! Your sins are forgiven.”*

Some religious leaders standing in the room were shocked. “Blasphemy! This man talks like his is God!” They knew no ordinary man had the authority to forgive sin.

Jesus, reading their thoughts, says to them, “I will prove that I, the Son of Man, have the authority on earth to forgive sins.” Then

he turned to the paralyzed man and said, "*Stand up, and go home, because you are healed!*"

He demonstrated his authority to forgive sin by doing something else only God could do. He healed the man. He didn't just tell them that he was God – words are cheap. He showed them he was God. When God says, "Your sins are forgiven", you can rest assured, he has the authority.

But someone may ask, what if I still feel guilty?? Have any of you ever confessed a sin yet found that the guilt remains?? Well let me ask you a question, "If God says you're not guilty but you say you still feel guilty, who do you suppose is mistaken?"

Romans 3:24 "Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins."

Jesus has the authority to declare us not guilty. How did he get that authority?? Simple, he paid the debt.

Some years ago I was getting on a freeway in Atlanta. There are on-ramps there where you stop and wait for a break in the on-coming traffic, then floor it to get into the lane. The guy in front of me was stopped and I was stopped behind him. We were both looking at the traffic waiting for a break.

I saw one coming, quickly glanced ahead to see if he was going to go for it and he had started to move, I check again to insure we both could make it then hit the gas. What I didn't know is that for whatever reason, he had stopped again.

You can guess what happened. Now I could get out of the car and say, "Hey, look Buddy. I'm really sorry." I could be very repentant and sincere.

But, unless I or my insurance company was willing to pay for the damages, he wasn't likely to forgive me. And even if he did forgive me and drive off, someone would still have to pay for the repairs.

That's why Jesus can forgive us. He paid the price. The cross is the place where justice and love intersect. The cross is the declaration of God's hatred of sin and all the damage it does.

It is also a declaration of God amazing commitment to forgive sinners and offer them a second chance.

"Jesus Christ brought forgiveness to many through God's bountiful gift."

Romans 5:15

"Jesus Christ brought forgiveness to many through God's bountiful gift."

This gift of forgiveness is free, but never ever think of it as cheap! Though you and I don't have to pay. Someone did, and that someone is Jesus.

Maybe you have played a version this little game with your children, where you say, "I don't love you this much." (holding your hands a mere inch apart) "And I don't love you this much" (holding your hands a foot apart). "I love you this much" (holding your hands as far apart as they can go).

There were times when my children would test that love. And they could see from the look on my face that they had sinned, and that the wages of sin is death.

Fortunately, when God looks at us, his love constrains his wrath. He chooses to forgive. Someone noted that Christ's outstretched arms on the cross indicates the breadth of his love.

The most incredible fact is not how much we love God, but how much God love us?

God filled the world with beauty, and mystery, with waterfalls and sunsets and glaciers and tropical islands and pecan pie, but God said I don't just love you this much. He sent Jesus, who said, I love you this much. JESUS is the source of our justification.

3RD THE WAY OF JUSTIFICATION

Vs. 25-26 "For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus."

I have had people ask me, if we are forgiven by believing in Jesus, how were people in the OT able to receive forgiveness. Great question.

We are forgiven when we look back and put our faith in what Jesus did on the cross. They were forgiven when they looked ahead and put their faith in what he would do on the cross.

In Isaiah 53, an extraordinary OT prophecy given to Isaiah about Jesus, God describes the one who would be despised and rejected, who would carry our weakness and sorrow, and who would be wounded and crushed for our sins.

In verse 11 he says, "My righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins."

I remember seeing Mel Gibson in the movie, the Patriot; a story of the American Revolutionary War of 1776. I was struck again when Gibson's character, Benjamin Martin is sitting, distraught with grief, at the bed side of his slain son.

Now, two of his sons have been brutally killed in this war that he never wanted. Benjamin Martin, like many of us, is a man with a haunting past.

Though esteemed for his heroics during the previous French and Indian War, his conscience carried a heavy load of guilt for his own excessive brutality in battle.

A line almost missed in the opening narration of the film, Martin repeats in this emotional scene. *"I have long feared that my sins will come to visit me and that the costs will be more than I can bear."* (Benjamin Martin)

Martin seems certain that the deaths of his sons are God's just retribution for the sins of his past. He is right in thinking that his sins deserved punishment. Indeed they did, and we are too unworthy to expect God could forgive us.

D L Moody during the 1800s was an evangelist much like Billy Graham in the 1900s. During one of his great campaigns, Moody was approached by a man who had been to a number of the services and who, although convicted of his need for Christ, had kept on postponing a decision.

Now the last night had come. The appeal was over, the people were going home, the work crew was busy folding up the chairs and dismantling the platform, and Mr Moody was preparing to leave.

The man finally got up his courage. He came to the evangelist and blurted out, "Mr Moody, what must I do to be saved?" Moody looked at him. "I'm sorry sir," he said, "but you're too late."

"Too late, Mr Moody?" The man was desperate now. "Surely I'm not too late!" "Yes, sir," said Moody. "You're too late. As a matter of fact, you're two thousand years too late if you want to DO something to be saved."

"All the DOING has been DONE. But, if you would like to accept by faith what Christ did for you, there is still time. You can do that right here, right now."

4TH THE BASIS OF JUSTIFICATION

Vs. 27 & 30, "Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith... There is only one God, and

he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.”

In this ad for the U.S. Marines corps displayed on the side of a semi is a picture a sword, and above it are the words: “Earned, never given.”



If you want to become a Marine, you must be prepared to earn that name through sacrifice, hardship, and training. If you get it, you will have earned it.

But, if you want to become a Christian, you must understand God’s message of justification, you have to reject the idea of “Earned, never given” and replace it with: “Given, never earned.”

We DON’T receive God’s justification because we deserve it... we receive it only because of God’s grace and mercy.