

Justification & Peace

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[0 : 00] Well, do you think forgiveness is important and good? Sounds like a pretty obvious question.

I know it's probably not gripping you yet, but perhaps your mind is already starting to work out when forgiveness isn't good. Like, is there a frequency limit?

They have done the same thing again. I can't forgive. Or is there a severity limit? They've caused me way too much pain.

They don't deserve forgiveness. Or are there other conditions? Like forgiveness is given for as long as the relationship is going well, but if it's starting to break down, you can call in past hurts and bring them to the surface again.

Or when has forgiveness actually occurred? When you no longer engage in the fight, but you still decide to avoid that person for the rest of your life?

[1 : 05] Or when trust and intimacy and affection even starts to be rebuilt? Well, what do people even mean by the idea of forgiveness?

Roughly speaking, everyone has some idea that forgiveness is no longer seeking justice or revenge on the person who has wronged you. But is forgiveness something that can only happen between two people where forgiveness is offered and received, or is forgiveness something that can happen just in your own mind?

I think it's more common to hear today that forgiveness is something you can do by yourself in your own mind. The top Google result, I know that doesn't bring much authority with it, top Google result. But then again, people do go to Google for direction in life, don't they? What is forgiveness?

Forgiveness, it goes to a health organisation and it says, among other things, says this, forgiveness can help free you from the control of the person who harms you.

Do you see the motivation there? It's to free you from the control. It goes on to say, and I agree with this bit, forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting or excusing the harm done.

[2 : 23] I definitely agree with that. I don't agree with this next bit. Forgiveness doesn't mean making up with the person who caused the harm. Forgiveness brings a kind of peace, talking about your peace, inner peace, that helps you get on with life.

That's a common view of forgiveness these days. Or do you wish I stopped asking these questions? Are you sick of these questions?

This simple topic of forgiveness is starting to unravel. People have so many different ideas of what it means and so many different ways of practising it.

When people say all is forgiven, how forgiven is that? What do they mean? It's really hard to know. And I realise, I'm skimming, I'm just bypassing so many other aspects that we're not looking at today.

Like the difference between genuinely forgiving but still requiring real consequences for actions. We're not going to touch on that. Or the need to rebuild trust over time.

[3 : 35] Or the fact that sometimes you can have the desire to forgive in your heart, but the person has passed away or they are unwilling to talk to you. So there's a difference there as well, an attitude of forgiveness.

Just leaving all that to the side. The main thing I want to focus on today, and the point of this whole series of key words of salvation, what we need to get straight today in our mind is, what does God mean by forgiveness?

When he says all is forgiven, what does God mean by that? When people say it, it's really hard to know. But what does God mean by that? That is, we need to know what he means.

How forgiven is that? So we're up to the third of four sermons in this series on salvation. We've looked at the problem in the first week, sin, that all of us do evil things and evil words come out of our mouths.

And the Bible says that's because our heart has a problem. We look for life outside of God. It's called idolatry. We look for other things to give us life. Fundamental to all that is we think we can rule our lives better than God can.

[4 : 50] We can play God. So our heart problem, which expresses itself in evil behaviour, it deserves God's judgement and his anger, his eternal wrath.

That's the problem. But last week we saw the solution. Redemption, what God has done. Like a prisoner of war, captive in our sin. He has bought our freedom.

If God wants us back home, he had to pay the price. And he did. The blood of his son. We are not captive anymore. We are now at home. Restored relationship to God.

Today we're looking at the result of that redemption. What is the result? And the Bible terms for that is justification and peace. So when God says all is forgiven, how forgiven is that?

So let's get into this word justification. And you're going to notice that this series in Colossians really is just a launching point.

[5 : 59] I'm spending our time in Romans today looking at, but the idea is there in Colossians. I think it says it just a little bit clearer in Romans.

So justification. It's a legal picture. We looked at redemption last week. Redemption pictures our captivity as slaves to sin being set free at a price.

Whereas justification, it pictures the final day of judgment. When each of us, we're told, have to give an account for our lives. We're in the cosmic courtroom at the end of our lives with God presiding on the bench.

And Jesus says that we're going to have to give an account for our whole lives, even every careless word that comes out of our mouth, even the ones in secret. Our whole lives.

I remember this one time when I was a youth, I made the whole youth group laugh. I said this joke and I made the whole youth group laugh.

[7 : 07] And I was enjoying my joke, all the laughter. But then my eyes locked onto one person whose look on his face just cut me. I knew that that word was really disparaging of another person.

Everyone else was laughing. One person just goes, oof. I still remember it. For some reason, it's stuck with me. I'm not going to tell you what that word was. I've got you all curious now. And whenever I make these comments, my parents call me up every week, what were you referring to? You don't need to know right now. You'll find out on the day of judgment. You'll hear it then. Every careless word. I've got a lot of careless words.

So picture the courtroom. All the evidence brought in. All of it. And there's only two verdicts. Guilty. Righteous.

Depart from me forever. Come, enter your master's joy. Now, the reason we need to...

[8 : 23] I'm not sure if you find that picture impersonal of God. But despite the fact that the Bible talks a lot about justification, the reason we need to understand this image is because of who God is at heart, who he is in his character.

Because God is completely righteous. He is just. God is so reliable. He only ever acts according to what is right.

Unlike anyone else you know, you can count on God to be totally just. And hopefully you're starting to feel the problem that that's a terrifying prospect.

If you think of God and the question in your mind is, how can a loving God not forgive me? That is a wrong starting point for thinking about God.

You've got to start with who he is, his justice. How can a good, just God forgive me? That's the right question.

[9 : 31] How can the God who said in Proverbs 17, 15, he who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.

How can the God who said that in his courtroom declare me, a guilty person, righteous, forgiven? If the problem hasn't been clear enough, I'm going to use the imagery from the prophet Micah.

Listen to what Micah says. Hear what the Lord says. Arise. Picture that courtroom. Arise. Plead your case before the mountains, the mountains that were there since the beginning, so they've observed it all.

Let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the Lord and you enduring foundations of the earth, for the Lord has an indictment against his people.

And then Micah responds a few paragraphs later. With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? [10:50] Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

If God is to forgive you, if he is to acquit you of all guilt, he has to do it in a righteous way. He's got to do it in a just way because that's who he is. And that's the good news of Romans 3, of all of Scripture, but Romans 3 just says it so succinctly and clearly, unlike me. But can you turn to Romans 3, if you're following in your Bibles? I know I've had two passages previous weeks and you're probably not sure where I'm going, so today we're sticking in Romans 3, from verse 21.

Just before we read some of these verses, how would you feel if you met King David, who lived a thousand years before Christ?

[12:03] Israel's greatest king. How would you feel in his presence, as you go to shake King David's hand? Would you just be like shaking because you're in the presence of this great man?

Or would you even shake his hand? This man who took Bathsheba in his lust and then plotted the murder of Uriah, could you shake his hand?

I don't know, does it matter how remorseful he was? How could a just God say to King David, and he did, through the prophet Nathan, the Lord has put away your sin.

You shall not die. How can a just God say that? That's scandalous. Romans 3 tells us how.

Romans 3, I'm going to start reading from verse 23. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified, declared righteous, by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

[13:28] This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance, forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God put away David's sin, not by sweeping it under the rug, but by placing his sin on his son who paid the penalty. So many religions claim to provide a way to be forgiven, whether it's praying to ancestral spirits, ceremonial washings in water, building shrines to Buddha, a pilgrimage to Mecca, going again and again and again to a human priest and eating the mass to pay for your sins, or as secular Australians say, to forgive yourself.

The question is, do any of these claims of forgiveness, do they deal with it justly? Is the penalty actually paid? It's not.

None of these ways clear the conscience. They don't work. And there's a reason it doesn't work, because they don't deal with sin in a just way. When God says all is forgiven, the sins are actually dealt with.

They're actually paid for. Not by you, but by his son. Only in Jesus is all your sin forgiven.

[15:14] Now, I've got the privilege in a few weeks to preside over the marriage of Zach and Caitlin.

You're probably nervous now that I'm putting the spotlight on you. Now, during the marriage ceremony, when it's done legally and righteously, in the eyes of the state and more importantly, in the eyes of God, now I've got the privilege of making this very profound statement.

I pronounce you husband and wife. That doesn't count. All right? It's not yet. Not yet. All right? Now, people are so focused on the next bit.

You can kiss the bride, and I'm sure, Zach, it's going to be kissing for the first time, right?

Everyone's waiting for that moment. But more profound is that statement.

And I get to say it. I pronounce you husband and wife. Before I say that, Zach is Zach, Caitlin is Caitlin. But in saying those words, the very words, changes your reality.

[16:25] You are now one flesh because of those words, that declaration. You're not individuals anymore. You're one flesh. That pronouncement changes you.

Do you hear what Romans 3 is saying? That future verdict, righteous or guilty, that declaration of righteous is now in the past.

The declaration changes you. You are righteous. You are completely changed at that point through this pronouncement that has occurred when Jesus rose from the dead.

You are righteous. All your sin has been transferred to Jesus. He paid the penalty. All his righteousness, the life of obedience, is transferred to your account. When God looks at you, he sees Jesus. Righteous. The verdict of the future is already in the past. [17:36] It's done. When God says, justify it, all is forgiven, he means it.

Unlike everyone else, he means it. Today apparently is the anniversary of Martin Luther, the father of the, is he the father of Protestant?

I should probably know that as a pastor. Anyway, he nailed the 95 theses on that door. This is the anniversary, but for those who don't know the story of Luther, Martin Luther, he was a Catholic monk before that.

And he annoyed his superiors because he would just be in the confessional for hours. His superiors are like, you're confessing piccadillos.

I don't know, it's an old-fashioned term, but he was so burdened by his sin that every day he would be spending hours confessing every single sin.

[18:39] He was so tormented by this idea of a just God. Here's how he put it. I had hoped I might find peace of conscience with the fast, going without food, and the prayer and the vigils with which I miserably afflicted my body.

But the more I sweated it out like this, the less peace and tranquility I knew. And it was this passage, Roman 3, that changed everything and opened his eyes.

This is how he put it, his famous paragraph. Thereupon, I felt myself to be reborn and have gone through open doors into paradise.

Now the whole of Scripture took on a new meaning and whereas before the justice of God had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love.

This passage of Paul became to me as a gate into paradise. Because before he was trying to earn his righteousness righteousness and now he understood it's a gift.

[19:54] It's a gate of paradise. But this gift of being declared righteous, it's not automatically applied to everyone. It's only for those with faith and not just any religious faith but a very specific faith as verse 26 says.

God is just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Now this faith, it doesn't, faith isn't just a lowering of the bar.

He tried, it's not as if God tried the law with Israel and they just failed at the law because, okay, at least try a bit, try and have some faith.

That's not what's happening here. Faith is not a merit. It's not saying you do. It's a receiving thing. Even our faith is a gift. And Romans chapter 4 clearly demonstrates this with the life of Abraham that God is always, not just post-Christ but always since Abraham has counted a person righteous not based on what they do but on their faith in God's promise.

[21:08] So in chapter 4 of Romans he quotes Genesis 15, 6 Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. It's always been by faith. So what is faith?

Faith is taking God at his word despite all the evidence that makes it seem impossible. It's taking God at his word and we see this in the life of Abraham in chapter 4.

We see it described from verse 17 onwards. Paul is saying picture Abraham. What was going on in Genesis 15?

What was happening in the life of Abraham? Well Abraham was about 100 years old. His wife in the 90s never had a child. They had no heir to inherit their name, to inherit all the promises God had given that he would be a blessing to the whole world and the land and all the promises.

They had no heir to keep going in those promises. Now that must have been incredibly painful, just a hopeless situation. How would they have a child?

[22:23] But, verse 17, Abraham knew who God was. He's the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

So when God showed Abraham all the stars in the sky and said, so shall your offspring be. I love this phrase in here, in verse 18, in hope he believed against hope.

What a beautiful description of faith. In hope in what God promised to do, he believed against hope in anything he could do. That's the description of faith.

It seems impossible. He looked at all the evidence. There is no way we can have an heir. But God said, so shall it be. And he took him at his word.

That's faith. And it's God's word that creates the faith. I'm not going to add to that. If you want to know what I mean, come talk to me later.

[23 : 32] Now, as you weigh up the evidence of your life, think of all, think of your life and whether you'll be counted righteous or not. Look at, let's bring all the evidence in.

All your regret, those big sins that you just can't forget, all the half-hearted worship, all the lack of compassion for people, all the inconsistency of your zeal for living for Christ, all the feelings of guilt and shame, even how weak you feel your faith is.

It feels like a flame that is flickering, barely burning sometimes. All that evidence says impossible for you to be forgiven.

But God says justified. Faith is to take God at his word. In hope, believe against hope.

It's not the strength of your faith that matters. It's the strength of the one you have faith in. That's everything. Now, I think I'm borrowing from Carson here this next thought experiment to describe that it's all the faith of the one.

[24 : 55] It's not about how strong your faith is. So imagine in Egypt in the Passover, they hear through Moses that God is going to come and kill the firstborn throughout Egypt.

And two neighbouring Israelite families hear this message and they hear the message that you need to sacrifice a spotless lamb and paint the doorway of your house in its blood.

Now, one father is just full of joy and sacrifices the lamb in thanksgiving to God and paints the doorway and sits down and enjoys the meal at ease with the family knowing that God will keep his word and goes to sleep knowing that they can trust that God will do what he promises.

He can look into the eyes of his ten-year-old son and go, I'll see you in the morning. But then next door another father is just full of dread.

Maybe his own guilt is coming up and he does do the sacrifice of the lamb. He paints the doorway but he cannot eat. He cannot sleep.

[26 : 05] He looks at his ten-year-old son and he's just watching the chest going up and down. Is God going to keep his word? Now, both will be saved in the morning because it doesn't matter about the strength of your faith.

It matters that God keeps his word. When he offers a sacrifice in Jesus, he will keep his word.

That's all that counts. When God says all is forgiven by faith in Jesus, he means it.

he means it. So let's spend our remaining minutes just looking at a passage that was read in Romans 5, just looking at how much he means it.

So Romans 5 verse 1, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. peace isn't here about an inner feeling of tranquility.

Peace here is a relational term. We are no longer enemies. We're not trying to rule our lives anymore. We are reconciled, verse 11 says. God's justice and anger has been dealt with.

[27 : 23] We are at peace. That's the goal of justification. He doesn't give the blood of his son so that we can exit that courtroom and then go on living for ourselves.

No, he justifies us in his courtroom so that we can then go home into his home and have peace and enjoy the father again and live for him.

Because justification is already sorted, we have been justified. Past tense. It's already sorted by his grace. Nothing we do, not even the strength of our faith adds to it.

We can be 100% sure that we and God are good. Verse 2 states this, Through him, through Christ, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Now, please notice at this point, none of this is telling you what you must do. this is all saying what God has done in Jesus. It's not saying you need to obtain access by praying.

[28 : 40] It's not saying that. It's saying you have access. He's done this. You are in grace. If you're a Christian, that's where you live. You are in grace.

That's where you stand. That's all you'll ever receive from God. Now and forever is grace. grace.

And I think that's why it talks about sufferings in the next verse.

I was wondering, why talk about sufferings as the first thing? Because once you understand justification is sorted, it changes your perspective on sufferings and any other evidence that you don't have peace with God.

You can even rejoice in suffering now. Not that you love pain, but you can see a meaning to it now. There's hope now. It's a pretty wild thing for a Christian to think, I've got peace with God and yet

he's given me this medical diagnosis.

Really? You've got peace with God but your mental illness just won't get better? Really?

[29 : 57] That's what you're claiming? sure seems like punishment. Or is Martin Luther trembled before the council that told him you better retract or you will be excommunicated from the church and you'll die?

You sure you've got peace? You sure you've got peace? God says your justification is sorted at the cross and resurrection, then we can be sure that not a drop of suffering is punishment.

Not a drop. this came home to me once when I was doing the washing up. It was a bit random but it just, this is just my personal, it just came home to me afresh for some reason.

I cut myself washing up on a pair of tongs, I don't know how you do that but I did it. And sorry for this image but I was just bleeding into the sink and I was, I don't know, it just came home to me that this blood is not punishment.

Because Jesus' blood is spilled. I will never experience a drop of punishment. Discipline, yes, but that is very different.

[31 : 18] If you are disciplined because you're forgiven, because you are a legitimate child, you're disciplined. That's not punishment. Because our justification is sorted, it changes your whole view on suffering.

It's God making sure you make it home to glory. So Christian, don't look at your circumstances or what people say or what your mind says even about your peace with God.

Look at the cross. All you ever receive is grace to make sure you make it home to glory. You may not understand how but that is where you live.

You live in grace. And we've got the down payment of it. In verse 5, God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

I think that as we look at the cross, we know we are loved. The Holy Spirit testifies to us. What about the fact that I still wrestle with sin?

[32 : 31] I still sin every single day. Surely that's evidence that I'm not fully forgiven. I think that's what verses 6 to 11 in chapter 5 are about.

Verse 8, God shows, he demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus has already done the hard part.

When you're an enemy, he's now reconciled you. You're a child now. While you're a sinner, he died for you and demonstrated his love. He's done the hard part. Trust him to do the rest.

He's already paid for that sin today and that sin tomorrow. He's paid for that in the past. He's living to make sure you will get home. We're not to look at our ongoing sin as the measure of how much peace we have with God.

We're to look at the cross to tell us how much peace we have with God. Even, dare I say this, even in that moment when you are loving sin, you just don't want to do what God says and you are hardened, you just don't care and you are choosing to do what you know is wrong, even in that moment, you have peace with God.

[34 : 00] He loves you with all he has. You are robbing yourself of enjoying that peace, but that doesn't change the fact that you have peace.

I think that thought, for me at least, it ruins the enjoyment of sin. God loves me right now. So let me finish.

When God says all is forgiven, how forgiven is that? Well, you can rely on God being just. Like the prophet Micah said, not even offering your firstborn child will pay for the sin of your soul, but God's firstborn has.

He has, all his justice has been poured out on his son, and you can trust him to be just, to only give you grace from here on. He did it so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

We can walk in hope knowing that even in suffering and ongoing sin, all we've got is grace.

Because the final verdict over your life, righteous, is now in the past, when Jesus rose from the dead.

[35 : 26] We've got to take God at his word. Despite all the evidence, we take God at his word. So brothers and sisters who already do believe, such a God, such a just salvation, as Romans 12 says, in gratitude, deserves a whole life of worship.

That's how we are to respond to this. And if you haven't yet tasted such full forgiveness and peace with God, if God is giving you even a glimpse this morning into that gate of paradise, if he's giving you a glimpse, don't linger at the gate.

Why would you? What are you waiting for? Let me pray. Let's pray. Father, in light of what you've done for us, I just want to pray and say thank you.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.