

The "Essential" of Justification

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 October 2014

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together now for a short time to Romans chapter 5, and this evening we're going to look at the words of verse 1. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's one of the great texts of scripture that contains so much that's important for us and essential to our salvation.

Last week we began a short series of studies on what we're calling essentials, things which are essential in the salvation that God has provided for us, but looking at essentials particularly from the point of view of our experiencing of salvation.

There are obviously things which are essential outwith our experience, things which, like in this chapter, we are told about. For example, the death of Christ on the cross was essential to our salvation, but that's something which took place and exists outwith ourselves, though we, of course, come to know the benefits of it.

But we're wanting to look at essentials in terms of our experience of salvation as we come to know it and to possess it. And we began last week, remember, from John 3, looking at the essential of new birth, that we must be born again.

[1 : 3 0] That's one of the great essentials of our experiencing salvation and our coming into the possession of it, or our entering, as we saw it, the kingdom of God. And tonight we're looking at the essential of justification, of our being justified, and as we'll see how that is by faith or through faith.

This kind of study and some of these studies of these essentials will involve our dismantling of some of these big words in the Bible, and I hope that especially some of the young ones can actually follow through as we dismantle them.

Something like you take, you know, those people who restore classic cars, for example. They dismantle the whole thing, including the parts of the engine.

You have it scattered all over the garage, carefully laid out, then it's all cleaned up and it's reassembled. And they have a tremendous working knowledge of these various parts as they're dismantled and put together.

That's what we want to have with regard to these essentials. We'll have to dismantle words like justification. Break it down so that we can see something of its component parts, what it involves.

[2 : 4 6] And then hopefully as we put it together again, we'll have a better understanding of what justification means. But the most important thing is not simply to understand what justification is and what it means.

It is so that you and I will come to know it and to be justified if we have not already been justified. Now it's important in looking at this that we see it refers to a formal standing before God.

Our justification is not something like our sanctification or working in us to make us holy that you find in our sanctification. Our justification is something that takes place again outside of ourselves but involving us.

And the best way, I think, of thinking of it or seeing it is to think of God as having records that he himself keeps and refers to.

Let's just think of it in that illustrative way. As if God had a record just like a book that you and I have with a record that you keep of certain things.

[4 : 01] Well, you can think of God having record books or a record book of each of our lives. And in that record book, God writes down, or we can think of God writing down.

It's all, of course, spiritual in terms of the way God sees us. Not literally in terms of an actual writing, but we're just using that as an illustration. Think of it as a record book where God is writing down what he actually thinks of us, his opinion of us, his verdict over our lives.

What we have as a formal standing in his presence. If you've been looking at some of these programs, who do you think you are?

You'll see that in the records that are being checked by those who look into the ancestry of these people who are looking to find out about their ancestors.

The last one there was an ancestry of someone who was looking back and hadn't at all much of an idea of grandparents or great-grandparents.

[5 : 11] It turned out that in the records there of a workhouse and indeed of some prisons in Victorian times and before that, there was a record of an ancestor who was obviously a criminal, who had been brought up before the court as a thief and somebody who had passed on counterfeit money.

And there was a record. You could actually see the record carefully written out, the person's name, where they lived, what they were accused of, what the sentence was that they had to serve.

The record showed clearly the verdict written over that person's life. And that's how it is without standing, without persons, without relationship to God.

God has a record in which we appear, each one of us, a list of all our names tonight, as well as every other single person in the world. Throughout the course of history, God has his own particular record of all our lives.

And in that record tonight, against your name is written, and my name is written, God's verdict. And the verdict that's written there only has two possibilities.

[6 : 36] Either justified or guilty as charged. Nothing else. There's no other possibility. That's what the word of God brings to us in these sort of passages.

That record that God has of us is a record in which we appear as our persons, are known by him, and in which his verdict, our standing, our relation, how we are in our relationship with him, that's where it's set out, our state and his verdict over us.

Now let's ask the question, first of all, when we read here, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We're going to follow the same pattern as last time, and ask the question, what makes justification unessential?

Why do we regard it as something that is essential if we are to be saved and if we are to possess salvation? Well, what makes it essential is the fact of our unrighteousness.

Another big word that we have to try and dismantle and come and put together again. What's the best way of understanding what unrighteousness is?

[7 : 56] Well, one of the best ways is to begin with its opposite. And the opposite of it is righteousness. But then you're saying, well, that's a big word as well. How do I know what righteousness means, if that's the way that I'm going to come to realize and know something more about what unrighteousness means?

It's obviously the direct opposite, or the absence of righteousness. But what is righteousness? Well, think of it this way. God has set a standard for human behavior.

Not just for Christian behavior, but for human behavior. As he created us, he set a standard of behavior for us.

Even in the Garden of Eden, when you read the Bible, and the first few chapters of the Bible, and the way that God created perfect human beings, he didn't place them in an environment without telling them that he had a standard that they had to keep to.

He told them they were allowed to eat of all the trees of the garden except one. And his standard was to test them and to see that they would be obedient to him.

[9 : 08] You will not eat of this one, for the day that you eat of it you shall die. That's the standard that God set. And now we come to know God's standard through, especially through the Bible.

But in the Bible, as you well know, there is a code of conduct summarized in what we know as the Ten Commandments, or the Moral Law.

Now the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments that you find in the Old Testament, they're not just for the people of Israel. They were not just given for the benefit of these people of Israel under Moses when they were delivered.

They are, in fact, aspects of human behavior where God sets a standard that he demands we attain to and that we keep. That is God's standard summarized.

You could say that everything else in the Bible about human behavior and what God thinks of and requires of human behavior actually has its summary in these Ten Commandments, in the Moral Law.

[10 : 17] That's where the standard is set out. That's the code of conduct that God has himself set out for us. And that's what we need to begin with in thinking of righteousness.

Now, righteousness, if you like to put it this way, righteousness, though it's not a complete definition, but righteousness is to have an exact conformity to that standard.

Righteousness is a life that is perfectly in accordance with that standard that God sets out for us in the Ten Commandments.

Summarized in the Ten Commandments. Righteousness is a complete and exact and lasting and permanent conformity. In other words, you meet that standard.

You keep that code of conduct. You don't deviate from that code of conduct. And you immediately say, that's not me. And so do I.

[11 : 21] Because, as we well know, we cannot now, as sinners, keep that code of conduct because we sin against God and that's our code of conduct broken or his code of conduct broken.

This is very interesting. And here again is something of the benefit of knowing God's truth in the way it's conveyed through the shorter catechism. We've been talking regarding Sunday school and amongst the church leaders, the elders of the catechism recently, the benefits of having known the catechism as we were going through Sunday school or taught at home or whatever.

And this is one of the benefits of it, that it actually brings in such a summarized form these great teachings of the Bible. Think of the question that the catechism puts.

What is sin? And how does it answer it? Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

In other words, the catechism is saying there are two aspects to sin. On the one hand, there's a lacking, there's a failure, there's a want of conformity to the law of God.

[12 : 39] There's a failure to match up to it, to meet its requirements. That's the first part, the first aspect of sin. And our want, our lacking, our failure to meet the standard of God is itself a sin or an aspect of our sin.

The other side of it, the other aspect of it is transgression. Any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

Because it's not just that we fail to meet the standard that's in God's law. There's more than that, isn't there? We actually break God's law.

All you've got to do is covet something. Covet something, and you've broken the Ten Commandments. If you break one, you've broken the whole law.

And if you break the whole law, even once, then you come under God's verdict, guilty as charged. That's unrighteousness.

[13 : 43] Unrighteousness means the failure to keep the law of God to meet its standard, to meet it as a standard, and also to transgress it, to break that law in any or all of the commandments.

That's unrighteousness. That's why we need this justification to set us back into a right standing before God so that the verdict that he has over us and written in his record will be changed.

Now, in other words, when you think about unrighteousness, you think about righteousness as being able to keep the law permanently, never to break it, impossible for us.

So we are unrighteous. Our unrighteousness involves the failure and also the transgression, the actual breaking of the law. And it's that that leads to our being held guilty.

In our record, opposite our name, God has placed the word guilty. That's how we stand. That's how we stand as lost sinners.

[14 : 55] That's how we stand in ourselves. That's how we stand as God sees us. That's what Romans really has been dealing with all the way through from the first chapter that we are held both accountable and guilty before God.

Now, that doesn't mean that our being guilty is the same thing as our feeling guilty. There are plenty of people in the world that say they never feel any sense of guilt in the way that they lead their lives.

They're not Christians. They don't want to be Christians. They despise some of them, the teaching of the word of God. They don't like church. They hate church. And if you say anything regarding the fact that actually God sees them as guilty, they'll say, I don't believe in God anyway.

So how can you say that I'm guilty and I don't feel guilty anyway? I'm living my life the way I've chosen to live it. You've chosen to live it your way. You can tell me that I'm guilty but I don't accept it.

Well, the fact still remains. Whatever you and I think tonight of the Bible's teaching in regard to this or any other point, it makes absolutely no difference whatsoever to what is true.

[16 : 09] Whether people choose to ignore this or to dismiss it or to come up with another solution altogether to human behavior, God's verdict and God's word stands.

You cannot actually get away from the fact that we appear in God's record as guilty by just saying well I don't accept that anyway. That's just like somebody in a court of law being sentenced by a judge being found guilty as charged with the evidence absolutely undeniable.

That person can turn around and say I don't accept the authority of this court. I don't accept that verdict to be just. I don't accept it. I just dismiss it. And he's led down to the cells. He goes on denying the reality of his guilt or her guilt that doesn't make any difference.

The record shows what is true. And our guilt also is not just a little deficit in terms of righteousness and meeting God's standard.

It's not that we're able to contribute so much ourselves that then God makes up for us and gives us the rest. unrighteousness means the absence of righteousness.

[17 : 29] It's not that we have a little bit of it and then we appeal to God and turn to God to make up the rest of it for us so that we then come to have righteousness instead of our guilt.

We have none of it. We're completely destitute of righteousness. Our standing before God is one that is complete and utter unrighteousness and therefore complete guilt as God looks upon us.

Now you may think well that's very bad news. Well actually it's very good news. It's good news in the sense that God in his kindness has revealed it to us.

just think what it would have been like without a Bible and going about thinking that the world was just what you made of it and thinking at the end of it all that either you would go to heaven or else there's nothing beyond death.

God has given us the reality the truth of it. This essential of justification has as its background the reality of our guilt our unrighteousness and here is the good news.

[18 : 45] Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. That's the second thing we're looking at. What does justification then entail?

I'm going to turn again to the short of catechism. I'm not making any apology for that because again it's a great summary of what justification is.

It is an act of God's free grace wherein he pardons all our sin and accepts us as righteous in his sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.

It's a substantial mouthful isn't it? There's a lot in that. But there are two things especially that are mentioned and referred to as making up without justification is about.

First of all it says the pardon of our sins. Because we are held guilty as charged and we have no excuse for that we can't complain about that God comes in his justification to pardon our sins.

[20 : 00] instead of being guilty the verdict of guilt is removed and in its place there is pardon.

Full pardon. Complete pardon. Think of yourself down on the sand somewhere on a beach the tide has gone out you are enjoying the sand you are writing things on the sand think of yourself as writing your name on the sand and then under your name write the word guilty when the tide comes in and you go back next day there is no sign of it it is all gone it has been wiped clean that is what God does with our record when he justifies us he pardons our sin that is what we pray for when we ask God to forgive our sins we are really asking for nothing less than that God would wipe out our guilt that he would wipe the slate clean that he would wipe the record clean that it would no longer appear on our record that we are guilty and we are assured from the Bible that that's what God does when he justifies us he forgives our sin 1 John chapter 1 verse 8 the blood of Jesus

Christ his son cleanses us from all sin there is nothing going to reappear that will form the guilty verdict or even partially the guilty verdict we once had against our name pardon takes care of it it takes away the guilt it removes it completely but it puts something else in its place instead of having the word guilty on our record we actually now have the word righteous that's very different to somebody coming to court accused of some crime or other and found not guilty that person could go away saying well I'm not guilty I'm free yes but the court has not pronounced that person to be positively righteous that's what happens when God justifies he doesn't just forgive our sin he doesn't simply merely forgive our sin and wipe the record clean he gives us something to put on our record instead of guilty and what he puts on our record instead of guilty is righteous that's what justification is think again of the catechism he pardons all our sin and accepts us as righteous in his sight think again of going down to have your name written on the sand it's not possible of course that when you go back next day and you find the tide has washed away what you wrote there your name with the word guilty you're not going to go back next day and find your name written there and the word righteous instead of it but it is on the records of God it's not simply wiped clean it's replaced with this splendid word righteous in other words

God in the standing that he gives to his his justified people when your sin is forgiven when you have this acceptance with God as righteous in that verdict it is as if you had never ever sinned at all nothing of what was on your record ever shows again it's as if it never existed it's completely eradicated and in its place is something that will never be taken from the record righteous fully acceptable and accepted by God the record has changed and how has that come about what else is involved in the way that that record has changed so remarkably so that God instead of having the word guilty before him as he looks upon our lives when we are justified we have instead this record that says righteous well think of the catechism again he pardons all our sin he accepts us as righteous in his sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone you can think of it using these three terms we are justified because of

Christ we are justified by an exchange with Christ we are justified through faith in Christ because of by through three very simple or four very simple words three very simple terms but they are so so incredibly important for our justification and our understanding of what it is let's just again see these components of it we are justified because of Christ what does that mean it means that the guilt that was against us was lifted by God and placed upon Christ's record instead that's what happened when Jesus died at Calvary that's why he died that's what made his death so necessary to our salvation because what

[25 : 59] God was doing was taking the sin that made us guilty and putting it on the son Jesus Christ to bring him condemnation to make him as Galatians puts it Paul writing to the Galatians puts it in a remarkable way there he has made him a curse for us to redeem us from the curse of the law the curse of the broken law is our condemnation our guilt how did we come to be set free from it because of the death of Christ that is the ground of our justification that's the reason why God justifies because of Christ in other words we have his righteousness put on our record and that's what it means secondly by it's not just because of Christ it's by an exchange and there is no exchange anywhere else in all existence to be compared to this exchange you can swap things yourself in the common issues of life you can give away things you don't need and you can maybe have something else back instead of them that you do need just have children do that all the time they swap magazines they swap toys they have all kinds of exchanges that way we do that as adults as well but

God arranges and carries out an amazing swap in our justification there we are on one side with sin and its guilt the guilt that's attached to it written over us there is Jesus on the other hand sinless and no guilt attached to him as you see him in himself and then you have this exchange our sin and our guilt is transferred to him and his righteousness his full acceptance with God is transferred to us what's on his record goes on to our record what's on our record went on to his that's the very heart of the gospel that's the heart of your salvation that's the essential of being justified what we deserve to have marked against us forever has been transferred to

Christ what Christ himself is as fully righteous has been transferred to our record that is why God looking at the record of his justified people sees that they have been justified through our Lord Jesus Christ it's because of him and it's by this great exchange of our sin to him and his righteousness to us and there's one great text in the bible that ought to be written on all our hearts because it's the text in the bible that really encapsulates this exchange like no other it's 2nd Corinthians 5 verse 21 he has made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him there's the great exchange him who knew no sin he made him to be sin for us he transferred our sin and guilt to him so that we might be made or become the righteousness of God in him not just any righteousness not one of our own creation but the righteousness of God not only that is created by God but that is completely conformed to God's own righteousness nothing else you see will do to be acceptable to God you need something that will perfectly and permanently meet his standard and you have that in the righteousness of Jesus and that's what is given imputed as the catechism word it's a legal term it's put on our record and thirdly yes it's because of

Christ it's by that exchange and it's through faith since we have been justified by faith or through faith we have peace with God now that's taking us to the actual receiving on our part of this justification of this righteousness how do we receive it what's required of us that we receive it that we believe in Jesus Christ that's it that's surely not as simple as that surely that's just too simple surely that's just really an offense to human intelligence that a person would come from a state of being guilty to a state of being righteous in the records of God simply through believing in

Jesus Christ yes that's it sadly for so many people it's just too good to be through well I hope for you and for me tonight it's too good not to be through it is God's way it is through faith which really is essentially trusting in Christ it's not just about believing everything that's written about him believing everything the word of God says about him trust is at the heart of belief believing in Christ is essentially trusting in him in other words you just give your whole life to him you hand over the control of your life to him you give yourself into his hand nothing else is required of you you don't need to do great works of achievement you don't try and partially keep the law yourself you don't set about doing things which God might be pleased with in order that you go some way toward your justification you simply believe in Christ and you know it's difficult them to really conclude and to realize and to fully accept that believing in

[32 : 55] Christ does indeed lead to being justified we want all kinds of spectacular experiences and spectacular things that we can see in order to verify these things well the only spectacular thing is that God creates faith in us and that by creating faith in us by his Holy Spirit we receive Christ and we receive this new state and we go on to his record as fully righteous and the outcome of that well it's there isn't it we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and that means that means ultimately peace in the relationship we have with God from which peace in our hearts and peace in our conscience flows let's begin with this relationship with God this formal standing that we have with

God that's now a relationship of peace God has nothing against us how can he have anything against us when the righteousness of his son is put on our record what did God say about his son this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased with whom I am fully satisfied and you know God says that in regard to you when the record is changed and you are justified with your sins forgiven with the righteousness of Christ written on your record God says about you as surely as he says about his own son this is my beloved son my beloved child in whom I am well pleased you can see that it is an essential you can see why it is an essential when you break it down and see all the things that are involved in it we have only done it briefly tonight but I hope it has been enough to enable us to see not only what justification is but how much we need to have it not only what it is about but how much we need to have it in place in our own lives to have that relationship with God in which there is peace between us and from which peace flows into our hearts by which we are enabled to say you know what

God is my best friend that was the name given to Abraham the man who is as we have seen the father of those who believe through faith he believed and as we read in chapter 4 it was accounted to him it was put on his record for righteousness not his faith itself but the God he believed in and the promise of God and he was called scripture tells us the friend of God tonight who is your best friend let's pray our gracious God we thank you for the grace for the love for the compassion and for the mercy that has been revealed to us in your great act of justification we thank you Lord for the way your word speaks of it so frequently for the way that it attaches such importance to it so that we would give a right place to it in our thoughts we give thanks for the reality of it that it brings us into a living relationship with you in which our sin is covered from your sight in which we are righteous in your record in which you are pleased with us for the sake of

Jesus Christ we thank you tonight for him for his righteousness for his love for his willingness to die the death which we deserved for his accomplishment of it and for the way in which in all of that he was committed to the justification of his people Lord we pray that you would fill us with a sense of urgency to know that this justification is actually on our own record too and fill us with a sense we pray of how important it is to us that we be no longer guilty but held righteous in the sight of God part us with your blessing now we pray and all of these things for Jesus sake Amen