

Justified in Christ

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[0:00] Well, good morning, everyone. What is a Christian? That's really the question that we're unpacking over the course of this series. It's an important question.

It's an important question for those of us who would say that we are Christian because it's in fact possible that you have rejected Christianity on a false assumption of what Christianity actually is about and what it means to be a Christian.

And so if you are new amongst us today, welcome. It's a great day to be in church because today we get to the heart of the Christian message today.

What it fundamentally is all about. And it's crucial because you could sit in church for decades and not understand what we're unpacking this morning.

You could call yourself a Christian for decades and not understand what it is that we're unpacking this morning. The language of the New Testament is that a Christian is someone who is in Christ.

[1:21] Ash has already said that. A Christian is someone who's united to Christ in such a way that everything that is Christ, everything that is his, all that he is, belongs to you, the Christian.

And so today we're discovering how do we get into Christ? That's the key thing that we're looking at today. And I've got four points.

Unfortunately, I didn't get it done in time late last night in order to get it on the app. So you'll just have to take notes or re-watch it later or something or get a copy.

Actually, you've got copies of it in front of you probably. Okay, first of all, I've got four points. First one is the need for justification. Verse 21, Romans 3.

But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known. Now, the word righteousness there is a word that we're not necessarily familiar with in the English language.

[2:24] We don't kind of talk about it much, really. It's not something that just flows around. But the word righteousness in Romans 3, in fact, in the book of Romans, is the same Greek word as the word justify.

Justify. Justify. So to justify your existence, if you like. And so righteousness is, another way of understanding it, is a performance record that validates you and removes barriers.

That's what righteousness is. For instance, it's similar to a resume. You have a resume, a CV, and it's a record of your employment history, your accomplishments, your experiences.

And the purpose of a resume is to open doors for me, to start a conversation, to potentially get a job.

But without the resume, you don't even get the door opened. It's about the resume is the possibility of finding acceptance, approval, of being granted something.

[3:42] An academic record is the same thing. You want to apply to get into a university, academic record does the same thing. Without the academic record, you're not going to get the door of university open to you.

Interesting enough, it happens right through all of life. All the way through life. Even on a social level, the clothes you wear, the cars we drive, the suburbs we live in, the holidays we have, all the things that are an attempt to get into an approval in a particular social group, or a family, or even in my own sense, that I fit as part of this society.

And all of our records of righteousness in their various degrees are ways of saying, please approve of me. Please accept me.

Here is my record. And everybody is doing it. Everybody is seeking righteousness, seeking justification, seeking validation, acceptance, approval.

It's not just a religious thing. One of the best pictures of this is the, it's in the epic movie, Chariots of Fire. It chronicles the rise of two Scottish sprinters up to the 1924 Olympics.

[5:07] And it was the 100 meter sprint. One of those sprinters was a guy named Harold Abrahams, who went on to win the gold medal.

And Abrahams famously said, I've got 10 lonely seconds to justify my whole existence. When he was asked, why are you training so hard?

Why are you putting all this effort into the 100? I've got 10 seconds to justify my whole existence. He ran in order to prove himself to others that he mattered.

He ran to justify himself, to know that he was worthy, acceptable. Another example, Academy Award winning filmmaker Sidney Pollack famously expressed that making movies was his way of justifying his existence.

Not long before he died, his family was pleading with him. He was sick. And they knew he was dying. They were pleading with him to stop making movies because it's killing you.

[6:11] The whole process is killing you. And this is what he said in an interview. Although the grueling filmmaking process is wearing me down, I cannot justify my existence if I'm not creating something.

Of course, the great irony of it is, because he had to keep making movies. Because he had to keep making movies, then it clearly wasn't justifying his existence. It clearly wasn't filling up that thing that was inside of him that needed justification.

We do it in all kinds of different ways. For instance, if being a parent with good and happy kids is our justification, then psychologists will tell you that's a sure way of ensuring the kids are not good and they're miserable.

If that's your justification, it will never be your justification. All self-justification is fragile.

All of it's fragile. One more movie, just one more gold medal, one more promotion, the kids being perfect, or as the late American businessman and the world's very first billionaire, John D. Rockefeller said, just one more million and I feel I'm okay.

[7:33] Just one more million. You see, the problem is, deep down, deep, deep, deep down inside of us, we all know that we should be better than we are.

And so justifying our existence for all of us is something that we do, but for all of us, it's just, it's out of reach. One more million, one more gold medal, just out of reach.

All of us want a life that counts and are worthy and are worthy enough in order to be accepted by others, approved of. All of us want that validation. Every culture and society does exactly the same thing, even if it looks different in how we might pursue that validation, that justification, that righteousness.

And that's why every culture and every religion thinks it's the same when it comes to God. To get in with the divine, to get in with a God, requires a spiritual and a moral resume of our performance that says, please validate me, please accept me, please approve of me, please justify me, please find me righteous.

And so we develop our record of righteousness and hope in the end that we will be accepted. And the problem with self-justification is that all of us know that we should be far better than we are.

[9:09] Forget about living according to anyone else's standards. Forget about living to the divine standards. Forget about living even in obedience to the Ten Commandments. Forget about all of that. None of us even live up to our own standards.

And that's why we're constantly pursuing it. In the chapter before this, in Romans 3, Paul writes, you therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you're condemning yourself.

Because you who pass judgment do the same things. And so when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think that you'll escape God's judgment?

He's saying there, there's not a single human being who is able to live up to their own convictions of what is right and wrong, let alone to God's.

How can we possibly justify ourselves, validate ourselves, if we can't live up to even our own standards?

[10:28] And it's important. Because the word justification is a word that belongs to a law court setting. Where God is viewed as the judge and we are the accused before him.

And by our own standards, the evidence is against us. Just by our own standards. And so verses 22 to 23 say that all of us stand accused.

There's no difference between Jew and Gentile. In other words, for all of humanity, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. What Paul's pointing to here is that early in Romans, he's writing that humanity, people, us, we were made by God in his likeness to bring him glory and to enjoy his glory.

And sin is the rejection of the God who has made us. And so we have lost his glory. Sin means we can't be in relationship with him.

We rebel against him. We want to live life without him. And we, therefore, do not enjoy his approval. We do not have a right standing before him.

[11:56] We are not justified before him. We stand accused and condemned before him. And earlier in chapter 3, we are told that all of us, the religious and the non-religious, are under sin.

The moral and the immoral are under sin. Our condition is all the same. Our legal standing before God is not justified.

There is no degrees of unrighteousness and justification. We are all unrighteous. And then Paul writes these words in Romans 3.

But now, for the first time ever and for the only time ever, the righteousness, the justification of God has been made known.

in other words, what he's saying here is, this is a totally new approach to getting in with God and it's just been revealed. And what has been revealed is that the righteousness of God, the justification of God, the perfect record, the validation of God has been revealed.

[13:25] revealed. And it puts an end, what it does, it puts an end to all of our striving and struggling for self-validation because the righteousness has been revealed.

world. It's a gift. And here's the gift. None of us can justify ourselves.

And verse 24 says, all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Justified freely.

Now the word freely there is really important. it's used in another place in the New Testament in John chapter 15 verse 25 when Jesus says, they hated me without a cause, without a reason.

Literally, they hated me freely. without reason, without cause. And the word freely means there in a way that is totally, completely unwarranted.

[15:01] It is something that is given or done for no reason at all. It's unwarranted. And here we penetrate into the core difference between Christianity and every other world religion.

We become, a Christian becomes acceptable and beautiful before God not by what we bring but by what Christ brings.

Not by what we do but what Christ has done. The glorious reality is expressed in one of the most significant verses in all the Bible.

I quote it regularly. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We might come the justification of God justified before God right before God perfect record before God we might have God's perfect record that's the righteousness of God Jesus Christ had no sin of his own but at the cross he took on himself all of ours.

[16:26] Romans back to Romans 3 it unpacks this for us all are justified freely without warrant without reason freely by his grace through the redemption excuse me through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood as I said justification is a legal term that's connected to the law courts the word redemption here is a word that is much more uglier it's a word that's connected to the ancient slave market the reason why humanity none of us can justify ourselves is because we're enslaved we're imprisoned we are captivated to a debt of sin against God that we can never repay we've got no ability to repay got no ability to add things to our

CV to our resume morally righteously before God no ability and in Christ Jesus freedom from that debt has come because Jesus paid for it all he atoned for it Romans 3 says through the shedding of his blood on the cross you see on the cross Jesus Christ received the wrath of God for our sin and in doing so he turned God's wrath away from us as I said a couple of weeks ago the ground's been burnt there's no more you can't light another fire there the wrath of God has been removed from us turned away you see God does not sit up there and go oh it's okay I just forgive you all he does not set aside his justice he just turns it on himself on the cross it's the place where

God's justice and love are fully satisfied and God imputes to Christ Jesus it's the great exchange he imputes to Christ Jesus our rebellious record and Jesus satisfies the debt of that rebellious record as God pours out his anger on him and punishes him for our record and because Jesus does that and fulfills it completely God legally imputes Jesus right record with God to us and so we are redeemed you see when we come to Jesus we enter into this kind of union with him and the union in Christ because of his justifying work means that everything that naturally belongs to Jesus becomes ours at the cross everything that naturally is ours becomes his and because he was successful at the cross in bringing justification for humanity everything that is his now becomes mine and yours in Christ that's what it means to be one with him the new testament language is the language of the Christ is our bridegroom and we're his bride it's the marriage the marriage union it's what we say you know I do weddings in my gig and you know your bride and bridegroom are there and they say words like with all that I am and all that I have I own you it's the great exchange I did the same 27 odd years ago or something 27 and a half years ago I think that's right yeah yes it is right in my case

I was a student I had a student debt I owed my father in law \$2,000 for our honeymoon and I had virtually no money in the bank and I said to Nat all that I am and all that I have is yours you are now bound with me in debt and that's what happens to the Christian the infinite debt is now his and he pays it you see the death and resurrection of Jesus is the marriage ceremony for the Christian Romans 4:25 says Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses and he was raised for our justification the resurrection

[22:03] I don't know if you've thought about this before but the resurrection was the act by which God said to his son who bore our sin you are justified you are justified and because the son is justified Christ is justified the verdict verdict can never will ever ever be reversed and when we're united to Christ the same is true of us our justification is participation in his justification and so the newest Christian in the world is no less justified than the most mature Christian in the world the saints who are currently in glory are no more justified than the most recent convert to

Christ we receive what is properly his and he receives what is properly ours and it is the fruit of our union we are clothed in his righteousness because we are in him justification when we read we're justified in Christ Christians have a tendency to go that means I'm forgiven that's what the word justification means justification is not less than forgiveness but it's so much more than forgiveness forgiveness says it's a negative term forgiveness it says you are you are free to go there's no more debt to pay you're free to go that's what forgiveness is justification says come come you are welcome to all that is mine all of my love all of my presence everything that is mine is yours that's justification so how do we receive it verse 22:25-26 it's all by faith we receive it by faith a person is justified approved by God validated in right standing with God by faith in Jesus

Christ now we need to be careful here because there is a bunch of common mistakes with this and they're subtle subtle mistakes it is so often that we think that the faith I have it is what the thing that justifies me it's my faith that justifies me and if I think it is my faith that saves me and justifies me what happens is I stop looking to Jesus and his work of justification and I start looking to my faith in Jesus and so every time there's a failure a sin every time I'm not able to fulfill the

Christian life it crushes me every time there's a doubt that comes in I'm stumble when I don't feel right with God I stumble when I'm not excited as I once was in the presence of Christ I stumble and that's because I'm trusting in my faith and faith has become a work so imagine someone asked you this question if there is a heaven how do I get into heaven here's three different responses that are common depending on your answer if you answer well what you need to do is try your best at being a good Christian in other words self justification self validation my own record of righteousness that is salvation by works it's salvation by my effort it is self!

justification! you will what you need to believe in God and do his will do what he says obey him in life be obedient to him in life follow him in life if that is your answer then it's a combination of salvation by self justification and salvation by faith if you answer well I believe in God with all of my heart that's how I get in that is salvation by faith as a work that is salvation by faith as a work that is you are trusting in your trust and all of these false understandings of saving faith will lead to insecurity anxiety lack of confidence pride devastation when you morally fail and both the religious person and the irreligious person at this point can be just as lost in their self justification just as lost and it is possible to sit in church for years and years and years and years and still not know what it is to be justified in

[28:27] Christ to sing the songs we just sung and then to leave here to work for your justification within a Christian framework you might know for instance that when you confess your sin God is forgiving because Jesus died on the cross for you you might be confident of that you might know that and once you confess your sin you recommit yourself to now really really living for him I gonna I'm just gonna live for him again and I'm not gonna do that again and then it happens again you confess your sin and then I'm gonna live for him again and it happens again and again and again and again and again and again what it means to be a

Christian is not to just repent of your sins but it is to repent of your false righteousness your false justification that's what it means to be a Christian saving faith is simply the attitude of coming to God with empty hands that's saving faith coming to God with empty hands and what saving faith is it's the end of one kind of faith and it's the beginning of a brand new faith a Christian is someone who stops working at their justification and they trust God's gift of justification in Jesus saving faith is a transfer of trust and it's a trust in

God's promise to save this matters so how do we experience justification it doesn't mean to live this Christian life if you like being justified in Christ August 2013 there was a Nigerian newspaper that it released the story I'm not in the habit of reading Nigerian newspapers but this was a really interesting story and really what it is it's an illustration of what so many Christians do how many so many Christians live the story was an inmate it said that he caused a bit of a disturbance in a law court the judge acquitted him of his crimes and set him free and all the charges against him were dropped and in that moment he walked at the end he walked back to the prison van and at the prison van about to hop in the prison guard said what are you doing you're free to go I don't want to I don't want to go and instead of the normal jubilation and happiness he got really annoyed and then a ruckus started it took six prison guards police officers and court officials to literally subdue the guy and throw him out of the court and then he turned up the prison knocking on the door let me back in and that's a picture of so many of us we are free in Christ and yet we find so many subtle ways of returning to the prison of self established standing before God in the divine courtroom healthy Christian discipline is this you're constantly pushing refresh on your settled status before

God that is the Christian life you are constantly pushing refresh refresh refresh justification by faith justification by faith justified I have the verdict of final acquittal I am approved of God justification in Christ justified by faith it is not a hotel pass sorry a hotel that you pass through it is the home in which you live as a Christian it's not the gateway or it's not just simply the gateway into the Christian life it is the path of the Christian life it's not the jumper cables to get the Christian life started it is the engine of the Christian life as the very first person who discipled me when I was very new to the Christian faith says

[34:13] Steve do you want to be a Christian right to the very end of your life absolutely he said as you start so you continue he said you start the Christian life with your hands empty at the foot of the cross pleading for mercy confident that your salvation is purely in Christ justification he said don't ever get up from the cross don't ever get up from the foot of the cross justification is how you start and justification is how you continue justification in Christ is not a process it's an event it's a moment in time the verdict of legal acquittal once and for all but the Christian life is fed by constantly staying there!

and ever more deeply going into the event of justification in Christ and when we do here's what happens we grow in humility verse 27 then what becomes of our boasting it's excluded by what kind of law by a law of works no but by the law of faith the very first effect of truly understanding how we're justified in Christ is the removal of all boasting and the word Paul's actually very emphatic here in the Greek language it is excluded your resume my resume my CV of moral righteousness is entirely excluded it is blank there's nothing there boasting in ourselves cannot coexist with a true grasp of what

Jesus done for us I contribute nothing to my salvation other than my colossal need for it our righteousness is credited and received which means I boast in Christ I give glory to God and free to see and be really really understand for the first time who I truly am another thing that flows from justification in Christ is grateful joy and a deep security through all the times of uncertainty my joy is not rocked because I have the praise and the approval of the praiseworthy one it also produces a greater identity and purpose in life because we're included in God's great plan for all time and space in Jesus Christ another one assurance knowing the blessing of the righteousness of Jesus

Christ being credited to me is the only way to be liberated to see who I truly am too many Christians are shocked when they fail shocked when they fail and there's plenty of non-Christians who are happy to point it out to you as well the reality is we should be shocked when we actually don't fail that's where the shock should be self-justification leads to a life of ignoring excusing or despairing over our failures and our flaws we are constantly worried about what people think about us we can't take any criticism we want to defend ourselves consistently justification by faith in Christ means there is nothing to defend it's a blank sheet

I've got nothing to offer there is no record of righteousness to defend one more justification in Christ gives us hope when hope is gone we have no hope for eternal life except that God has promised that in Christ Jesus and that we can be made right with him and that means we can face the loss of all things that we enjoy and deeply grieve those things when they're taken away and yet we can still have hope because all that is Christ's is mine I'm united with him free justification in Christ Jesus makes every difference to where we are heading but also to how we act and how we feel now in both the good times and the hard times and the!

[39 : 30] and the other things are going to be to the end of all