

Understanding How We Can Be Right with God

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- [0 : 0 0] Good job, Clark. Thank you very much. What is special about October the 31st?
- What happens, okay, Halloween, October the 31st. First thing that comes into your mind, a lot of people, Halloween. You know what that says about you, don't you?
- You're a pagan. Absolute pagan for thinking. October the 31st is all about Halloween. No, I'm joking.
- If you've got a calendar on your calendar, most likely there's little writing that says October the 31st is Halloween. But there is a much more significant celebration, observation, that we should be acknowledging on October the 31st.
- What is it? Somebody say the Reformation? October the 31st is Reformation Day. And this year, in 16 more days, this will be the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.
- [1 : 3 0] It all began on October the 31st, 1517, when a Roman Catholic monk by the name of Martin Luther, I've got to move this or I might break out into song.
- And that would clear this building quicker than a fire. A Roman Catholic monk named Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.
- Now that was like a community bulletin board. I'm sure from history or in some place, you are familiar with Martin Luther posting these 95 theses on that castle door.
- What's not always known is that was like a community bulletin board. And Luther posted that to get a discussion started mainly among scholarly people, church theologian types.
- But what those 95 theses, what those 95 protests or criticisms were was of the Roman Catholic practice of selling indulgences.
- [2 : 5 0] Now an indulgence was something like a pardon, a pardon for your sin. It was a gift of forgiveness granted by the Pope for a price.
- You heard me right. The Roman Catholic Church was selling, for all practical purposes, the forgiveness of sins. Now you think, well that couldn't happen.
- That's not possible. Well, truly it couldn't really happen, but they did it. And the people, wherever this was done, people lined up to buy their way into heaven or to pay the price for their relative to get out of purgatory.
- That was part of what the indulgences were. You can buy forgiveness from the Pope, bypass purgatory, go straight into heaven. Or for your relatives.
- I mean, you think about it. If you didn't know any better, you've got a mother or father, brother or sister who's died, and you think they're in purgatory, which by the way does not exist.
- [4 : 0 6] But you're told by the authorities from the church, if you pay this amount, you can get them out of purgatory and on into heaven. Well, one well-known preacher of that day, Johann Tetzel, he went around Germany selling indulgences.
- He was a real salesman. He knew how to attract the crowd. He had little jingles that he would say or sing. And one of them, his most well-known was this.

As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs. And that was not intended to be funny.

That was intended to say to people, you can buy your way out of purgatory or your relative's way. Well, that enraged Luther, who was a Roman Catholic monk.

But he knew that was not right. He knew that they were leading people astray. And so he wrote those 95 articles of protest.

[5 : 19] And what he wrote was so well-received that it was published and widely circulated. And Luther's protests were the sparks that ignited the fire, the fire of change that started the Protestant Reformation.

As we are approaching this significant milestone, the 500th anniversary, it's important for us to understand that the Protestant Reformation was one of the most important, most significant events, not just in the history of the church, but in the history of the world.

Over time, it changed not only the religious practices, but the political, social, and intellectual practices of Western civilization.

Now, what I want us to do today is to focus on the most important contribution of the Reformation, really to all the world, the recovery of the gospel.

Yes, the Protestant Reformation was what really brought back to the forefront the biblical truth of how a person is made right with God.

[6 : 43] What salvation really is, is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. The underlying problem in the Roman Catholic Church at that time was that they lost the gospel.

Or they changed the gospel. And that's what led to things like the selling of indulgences. They were basically teaching that salvation comes from the church.

And salvation is dependent upon how good you are, how righteous you are personally, what you do, what you don't do.

Well, the Reformers, like Luther, and the other major ones, like Calvin, Zwingli, there were many. The Reformers challenged those false teachings by calling attention to what the Bible said.

They called attention to what the Scripture clearly taught about these matters. They emphasized the authority of Scripture over the authority of the church.

[8 : 02] And they recovered the biblical gospel that salvation has always been and still is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ plus nothing.

It's all of God. What He's done for us in Christ. And our response is simply to believe it. As we prepare to observe the Lord's Supper this morning, I want us to look at the way this discovery of the gospel is usually explained.

It was recovery of the Bible's teaching about justification. How we are made right with God. If you want to look in your Bible, I'm going to put most of this on the screen, but look in Romans chapter 3, and I want to see how this important concept of being declared right with God, being justified, is the only way that anyone has ever, can ever be made right with God.

Let's read in Romans 3, verse 21, to start with. 21 through 24. But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify.

That last phrase, to which the law and the prophets testify, what Paul was writing is, saying is, the Old Testament. The Old Testament writers, they spoke about how salvation comes through faith.

[9 : 41] The Old Testament, where it all begins, Genesis chapter 12. Abraham, the father of all the faithful. Abraham believed God, it says, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Genesis 12 and Genesis 15. Abraham believed God and his faith in God's promise is the reason God declared him to be right.

Not because of what he did, but because he trusted God. But now, look at it again, verse 21. But now, apart from the law, apart from keeping the law, apart from you trying your best to do what God says, the righteousness of God, being right with God, has been made known to which the law and prophets testify, this righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Look at verse 28. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law or apart from any good works.

[10 : 57] Romans 5.1. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, declared right with God by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's think about it.

What does it mean to be justified? Justification is God's response to our faith in the Lord Jesus. That's what we've just been reading. Look at a very simple definition of what justification is, to be declared righteous, to be declared right with God.

It is important that we understand that. Every person in here, most every person in here, has some kind of interest in being right with God or you wouldn't be here, I'm going to guess.

We need to understand fully, clearly, what the Bible teaches about how anyone, you and me, can be right with God.

A person who is right with God is someone who has been declared right with God by God Himself. To be justified means to be declared righteous, to be declared right with God.

[12 : 01] But let's look at a more detailed definition from Wayne Grudem. He says justification justification is an instantaneous, legal act of God in which He, number one, thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us.

And number two, declares us to be righteous in His sight. Let's look at the second part of that definition first. Justification is a legal declaration by God. justification, justification, God declaring that you are right with Him is something that God actually does to us is not something that God does to us but something that He declares about us.

Justification, being declared right with God. That's something that God declares is true about us. It's not something that He really does to make us that way.

Now don't misunderstand. When God saves a person, He brings about a new birth. It's called regeneration. When God saves a person who turns from their sin and puts their trust in Jesus as their Savior, God brings about new life, a new way of looking at life.

He puts His Spirit in us. So in that way, we certainly are changed when we become a Christian. But we are still sinners.

[13 : 31] We're not perfect. So God declares us to be right like a judge would declare someone who stood before Him guilty or innocent.

Think about it. A judge would, if you had to go to court tomorrow and your case was going to be before the judge, he was going to make the decision. No jury, just the judge.

If He declares that you are not guilty, then legally you are not guilty, even if really and truly you are. If He says you are guilty, but you really aren't, legally you're guilty and you're going to jail.

Justification is God's declaration. And whatever God declares, it's the way it is. He's the greatest judge. If God declares that we are right in His sight, that means we're no longer guilty.

It means we no longer have to fear judgment if God declares that we're right. And unlike a human judge, God's always right. He never makes a mistake. He knows who we are, how we are, and when God declares us to be right with Him because we're trusting in His Son, Jesus is our Savior, we are right with Him.

[14 : 54] We are no longer guilty. Now, a natural question comes up, how can this be? I know most everybody in here.

And you know me. And I know you're not perfect. And if you have any slight knowledge of me, you know I'm not perfect.

So how in the world can we sit here, stand here, and think to ourselves, I'm right with God. I'm going to heaven when I die. I'm no longer held responsible for my sin.

When you know well and good that you are guilty still of sinning against God, living life your way instead of His way, being selfish a lot of the time, not pleasing God a lot of the time, well, here's how it happens.

Our justification, our being declared right with God is based on the fact that we are united with Jesus. We're one with Him.

[15 : 59] He is in us. We are in Him. Think about it this way. When we turn from our sin and put our faith and trust in Jesus, from God's perspective, we are one with Christ.

We are in Him. In Christ. Paul uses that little phrase over and over again in his letters. That means what Jesus Christ did in His life and His death, that's credited to us.

Think about it this way. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. His death is credited to us when we trust in Him.

Therefore, we are forgiven. The penalty for our sin has been paid. Jesus lived a perfect life. He perfectly obeyed God, perfectly obeyed God's law. So His perfect obedience is credited to us when we trust in Him.

Therefore, that's how we can be right with God. That's what God declares our condition to be by virtue of our faith in Christ.

[17 : 11] Look at how Paul says it in Romans 8.1. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Now, this is maybe hard to grasp hold of, but you need to understand.

You and me right now, if we're trusting in Jesus, we're one with Him. And even though we are not perfect, God declares us to be because of the perfect life of Jesus.

That's credited to us. We haven't done anything to suffer for our own sins. We haven't paid for our own sins. Jesus did, though, when He died on the cross.

He suffered the wrath of God against sin. When we trust in Jesus, the penalty for our sin has been paid. Jesus did it for us. We didn't do anything. We might picture it like this.

God accepts us based on Jesus, on the merit, the value, the love He has for Jesus. Let's put it this way.

[18 : 15] Suppose you have a daughter who marries a man that you consider unworthy of her. And some of you, I can see it right now, my daughter did that.

I was originally going to tell this in the form of, suppose you had a son who married a girl who was unworthy of your son.

But I didn't want my daughters-in-law to read anything into that. Because I'm glad that my daughters-in-law married my boys and took them away.

I'm no longer responsible. They are now responsible. No, I love my boys and love my girls. But I want you to think with me. Suppose you have a daughter or, if it's true, have a son.

You have a daughter who marries a man you consider unworthy of her. Even though that man in and of himself is unworthy, you receive him into your family because of your daughter.

[19 : 19] By the way, that's what good parents do when at all possible. When you look at that guy, you see your daughter's husband.

You focus on your daughter. He's accepted, not because of who he is, what he's done, but because he is married to your daughter.

He is united to your daughter in marriage. As Christians, our acceptance by God, our forgiveness, our right standing with him has absolutely nothing to do with who we are or what we've done.

It has every single thing to do with who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us. none of us can undo our past.

None of us can start right now being perfect. But the good thing is we don't have to. If we have truly repented of our sin, we hate it, we've turned from it, we've put our trust in Jesus' absolute confidence.

[20 : 25] He paid the penalty for our sins when he died on the cross. We're trusting him and him alone for our salvation. That our sins are forgiven. He paid the penalty. We are accepted by God.

We are right with God because Jesus is perfect. And that is credited to us. The importance of this Reformation's emphasis on justification by faith cannot be overstated.

The fact that God accepts us when we are united to Jesus by faith means some very important things that we need to think about right now just quickly. Number one, we can have confidence that our sins are forgiven.

You can be certain right now if you are united to Jesus in faith your sins are forgiven because of him. You don't have to worry about being good enough for God.

You aren't. I'm not. And never will be. But God accepts us based on the perfect life of Jesus and not our own.

[21 : 27] And this means, listen to this, we can offer genuine hope to the worst of sinners. No matter what a person has done, they can be forgiven, made right with God, accepted by God because it's Jesus.

Think with me for a moment. What if this morning you think about it personally, the worst human being you know was standing right there. The absolute worst, sorriest, low down, sinful person you know on the face of the earth was standing right there.

And over here is the best, most kind and gracious human being you know standing right there. If they both were standing there and they looked up and said to us, I'm not a Christian.

But I right now want to turn from my sin, admit it, I hate it, I'm sorry, I truly trust that Jesus died for me. I'm counting on him and him alone for my salvation. God would save them both the exact same way they don't, either one deserve it.

It's by his grace. He's going to save them because they're trusting in Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life. Even the best person you know is not perfect. And Jesus paid the penalty for the worst person you know sins.

[22 : 49] That's how we all come to faith in Christ. That's how we all experience salvation or rightness with God if we are Christians.

So when you partake of those elements of the Lord's Supper this morning, you think about what God has done for you in Christ. You think about Jesus giving up his life to die for you.

But also you think about how he lived a perfect life in this world for you. Let this be a time of real worship and thanksgiving before God. And if you're not a Christian, right now I encourage you if you want to be different, you want God to save you, you're tired of living for yourself, you will turn from your sin.

If you will do that and put your trust in Jesus and call upon him to save you, he will. And let's just all bow together right now and I want to encourage you if you're not a Christian call upon Jesus to save you, trust him.

He will. If you are a Christian, thank God for what he has done for you. Thank him for the salvation that is yours as a gift of his grace through faith in Jesus, his perfect life and his death on the cross for your sins.

[24 : 05] Let's all pray together. Dear God, help us now to respond to you appropriately. Help every Christian in here to prepare to observe the Lord's Supper together.

and in an attitude of prayer, let's get ready to do that. Thank you.