

Soteriology
Lesson 17
The Position of Justification

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We're at a very, very crucial doctrine. In fact, the Reformation called it *the* doctrine of salvation and that's the issue of justification.

In Romans 3:21-31 "But now...." Boy, what a neat transition that is! After telling us how all people are condemned by the light of creation, the light of conscience, and the light of the commandments of the Lord, so that all the world is in fact guilty before God, for by the law is the knowledge of sin (cf. Romans 3:19-20).

21 But now [tremendous contrast] the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time, His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of Him which believeth in Jesus.

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

29 Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:

30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

The whole next chapter illustrates it in the life of Abraham. And then Romans 5:1 begins...

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Now a little background. You live in the twentieth century and it has been a long time since this battle was fought. Really the battle started heating up in the Roman Catholic Church by certain of its leaders, right near the end of the fifteenth century. From a technical point of view, we are five hundred years from this battle. It is often marked in 1517 A.D., when Martin Luther tacked up Ninety-five Theses as to why the indulgence system of Tetzal was wrong, that we couldn't earn the favor of God by what we do. It often is marked by that event.

Luther was a teacher at the University of Wittenberg and he was in fact, of course, one of the major leaders. But things had started to heat up even before Luther. And the foment was enormous! It dealt over the translation of the Bible. The first book ever printed off of the printing press, invented by Guttenberg, was in fact in 1450 A.D., the Bible. It was in German.

William Tyndale, wonderful story, a little book in the Christian bookstore that we have, called *God's Outlaw*. It's just fascinating book. You can read it in one sitting. It is really an exciting book. But you realize how severe was the attack against those who even insisted that the

Bible should be in the language of the common people. That common people could actually read the Bible.

There were a lot of turning points. Martin Luther was certainly one of the key turning points. He was stubborn and God needed one of those then. He might need you too, if you're like that. He became more gracious, but that's what he was like. He was very stubborn. We all remember his famous words when he said, "Here I stand, I can do no otherwise. God help me." He said, "I refuse to recant." And unless shown by Scripture he would not bow the knee to the church. He called the pope the antichrist. And it wasn't until a few years ago that people started thinking of the antichrist as someone other than the pope. You might be interested in that. Even J. A. Seiss, three hundred years after the Reformation, wrote the *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, a book on Revelation, excellent book. He also states that he believes the antichrist is the pope. That was the view of the Reformers and the denominations that immediately broke from each other over small matters. And the gospel was spread around the world and became a great missionary enterprise. The power of Rome had been temporarily broken, as it were.

Now unfortunately, in this particular century the lines that divided us at that time are being wiped out and erased by a sense of toleration. It goes something like this: "Well, you know there are Christian people who are Catholics. It might even be possible that somebody in a Buddhist family has come to know the Lord." Are there people who are Roman Catholics that are Christians? Well of course! But they all call themselves Christians. Are there true born again believers who are still in the Roman Catholic Church? Yes, there are. Is that an argument for wiping out the line of demarcation? Excuse me. No.

Or here's another one. "Well, you know, I'm staying in this church because I want to exercise whatever good there is." Yet God said, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:17). Concerning the false church, He said, "Come out from among them my people."

Now, is the Roman Catholic Church a false church? Well, it was the only Western church before the Reformation. So all those good people we talk about in the Middle Ages and early church history, just remember they are a part of the only Western church there is. The Roman Catholic Church probably was pagan Rome baptized, as Philip Schaff the great church historian said, but after all he was a Lutheran. We've had great decisions by the Roman Catholic Church trying to explain their position to Protestants.

I don't know if you understand what's happening. Because of the lack of clear teaching on the gospel of Jesus Christ, you can't tell anymore what they believe on salvation. They believe Jesus is the Son of God. I know that. They believe He died on the cross. I know that too. They believe He rose again from the dead. I know that too. If you take the essentials of the gospel that most of us have been talking about, then the religion in this world, the group of churches in this world that are more in agreement with us statistically, we who are fundamentalists, who believe the Bible is the Word of God, are Roman Catholics. They believe 99.44 percent of all that we believe. What's the problem? Well, it's what else they believe that they just haven't quite made clear yet.

Now like Paul said in Philippians 1, "I thank God that Christ is preached" (cf. Philippians 1:18). Do you understand me? I thank God for every man that's turned on for the Lord. But I'll tell you something folks, you'd better not have your spiritual head in the sand! We are moving very rapidly to the days the Lord predicted would happen. There's a dilution now of the gospel. We now cannot say certain things in giving an invitation at these mass meetings because we would offend some people.

It isn't enough to say that you need to receive Jesus Christ into your life to be born again. That doesn't say anything! That's known by unbelievers. They've heard us say that over and over again. That doesn't mean anything. What are you talking about? What Jesus are you talking about? What does it mean? What are you talking about? We're supposed to believe about Him?

I decided to develop a test which I'm going to give you now. This is a learning experience about the doctrine that the Reformers called the number one doctrine of salvation, justification. Now I have stated these so that it's multiple choice. There's an A and B. One of those represents the Protestant position and the other one represents the Catholic position, but of course you aren't told which one it is.

There are three issues in the Protestant Reformation. Three.

Number one, and most importantly, was justification by faith.

Number two, authority of the Scripture over church council, tradition, and pope.

And number three, the priesthood of every believer.

Let me give you an idea of where we are in this. I preached in a church back in the Middle West. It is what you would call a high church. We're talking a very high church. We're talking the whole robes bit. Very serious—we're talking about holy Eucharist. Walking up behind the choir lofts, which face each other to a high chancellery area and an altar beautifully decorated in which the pastor or they call it priest, would take it and go down. And the people would file by and they would bless each one of them and all that sort of thing. So, how did a street preacher from California get in such a church like that?

Well, they got a young pastor who heard me on the radio and he made the mistake of asking me to come. We had a lot of folks saved and God really blessed. It was a wonderful meeting. In their church service I was asked whether or not I wanted a robe to wear.

I said, "Absolutely not! I don't want to wear it."

He said, "And you will wear a suit and a tie."

I said, "Yeah, I'll go that far."

He wanted to challenge me on the matter. So he said, "If you check your Bible you'll find out the high priest was well decorated before God and it's a sign of our honoring and our worship of the Lord. And in a certain sense, even with a suit and tie, you are desecrating what God said the priest should do when he ministers."

I said, “That’s very good. I respect that. I appreciate that. It’s just too bad your theology is wrong because we fought the Reformation over this issue. We believe in the private priesthood of *every* believer. So therefore in order to really follow your view, we should have all the people wearing your robe also.

And he said, “Very good, but I’m going to still wear it.”

I said, “That’s all right! You don’t mind if I preach against it, do you?” He got real nervous. He wasn’t sure if I was kidding or not. I didn’t do that. Anyway, that church has asked me back. I’m going back. We’re not here to knock all of these different ways of doing things. Maybe that atmosphere ministers to the heart in some way that we don’t understand. Maybe you come from that. Maybe your family likes some of that tradition. Hey, don’t knock it. Don’t act like you’re an in group and everybody else is out of it. Oh no. Huh-uh. No, we need to be careful what we say. But what I simply want to illustrate is that the steps that have been removed from the Reformation even on the private priesthood of the believer are not quite far enough in a lot of denominations who say they are Protestant, but not Catholic.

If you think that’s a problem (and I’m trying to illustrate now) when you come to the authority of Scripture over church creeds and councils and traditions and pope, are we that far removed? In many denominations they wrote their own creeds. In other words, you could go back and study the history of the Protestant Reformation and find out that many of the creeds were written to answer to the Roman Catholic positions and they were discussed publicly and openly in debates. And sometimes the Catholics fared better.

And some of these creeds then dominate people’s thinking. I mean, that is Christianity to them. So instead of the authority of the Scripture it’s (listen carefully), “Scripture rightly interpreted;” which if you think about it, is the exact thing the Mormons use—that the average person cannot understand the Bible. It has to be rightly translated and rightly interpreted. And there are many Protestant groups that say the same thing. So the only one who can really interpret and understand the Bible, is one of those church leaders dressed up in those robes.

I read out of the Catholic Encyclopedia concerning the pope. It's an abomination in the sight of God! Officially, they treat him as God not man and say so. And what is said about the pope in their literature is a violation of the first commandment that God ever gave us, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:4). It's a violation of the second and third as well, and maybe more.

The following is an excerpt from article DC170-4 of the Christian Research Journal.

"The Catholic-Protestant Debate over Papal Infallibility"

According to Roman Catholic dogma, the teaching magisterium of the church of Rome is infallible when officially defining faith and morals for believers. One manifestation of this doctrine is popularly known as "papal infallibility." It was pronounced a dogma in A.D. 1870 at the First Vatican Council. Since this is a major bone of contention between Catholics and Protestants, it calls for attention here. Protestants, it calls for attention here. Roman Catholic authorities define infallibility as "immunity from error, i.e., protection against either passive or active deception. Persons or agencies are infallible to the extent that they can neither deceive nor be deceived."

When he (the pope) speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when carrying out the duty of the pastor and teacher of all Christians in accord with his supreme apostolic authority he explains a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, *operates with that infallibility* with which the divine Redeemer wished that His church be instructed in defining doctrine on faith and morals; and so such definitions of the Roman Pontiff from himself, but not from the consensus of the Church, *are unalterable*.

Then follows the traditional condemnation on any who reject papal infallibility: "But if anyone presumes to contradict this definition of Ours, which may God forbid: let him be anathema" [i.e., excommunicated]

Not only Protestants but the rest of Christendom — Anglicans and Eastern Orthodox included — reject the doctrine of papal infallibility. Protestants accept the infallibility of Scripture but deny that any human being or institution is the infallible interpreter of Scripture.

To see more on this topic visit:

<http://www.equip.org/articles/papalinfallibility>

I received in the mail from a well-meaning person, a Catholic and Protestant dialog to bring everybody together. And I read it. And I thought to myself, “The enemy is at it again.” I’m not here to knock people over the head, or Catholics, or Episcopalians, or Lutherans or whatever they are. I don’t care about Methodism. You understand? I don’t care about it. What I care about is what you understand the Bible to be teaching concerning the major doctrines. The most important one is justification by faith.

This whole issue of righteousness, which is the same as justification, is fundamental. It is the key doctrine of salvation and this is true. We learn this from Romans. And the theme of the Book of Romans is the righteousness of God. This examination is designed to clarify what the Bible actually teaches. Please circle the letter which you believe represents the correct statement. Again, I pulled the statements right out of Vatican II. And let’s just see how we do. So, will you take this test? Take some time and we’re just going to go through it one by one and I want you to think it through. Not to try to race. So, I’m going to read each statement, then you make your decision. Okay?

Number one: God gives a man right standing with Himself by—

- A. Mercifully accounting to him innocent and virtuous
- B. Actually making him into an innocent and virtuous person.

A or B? You make your selection. You make your selection on the basis of what you understand at the present time. Not what you think I might want. Please. The greatest help will come if you really write what you understand these to be, at your present understanding.

Okay, number two: God gives a man right standing with Himself by—

- A. Placing Christ’s goodness and virtue to his credit
- B. Putting Christ’s goodness and virtue into his heart

Number three: God makes the believer acceptable by—

- A. Infusing Christ’s moral excellence into his life

B. By the moral excellence found in Jesus Christ

They're not easy. I have to tell you they're not easy. But see, who in our churches is really talking about this? So, it doesn't surprise me that they seem hard.

Number four: Right standing with God is based upon—

A. Regeneration

B. Faith

Number five: We receive right standing with God by—

A. Faith alone

B. Faith which becomes active by love

Number six: We achieve right standing with God by—

A. Accepting the fact that He obeyed the law perfectly for us

B. Having Christ lived out His life of obedience in us

Number seven: We follow Christ's example—

A. To achieve right standing with God with the help of His enabling grace

B. Because His life has given us right standing with God

Number eight: When we are justified, God—

A. Declares that we are good in His sight and gives us His Spirit to make us good

B. God sends His Spirit to make us good and then declares that we are good

Now that one requires some thought.

Number nine: We have favor in the sight of God because of—

A. Christ's indwelling us

B. Christ's intercession for us

Number ten: We can fully satisfy the claims of the Ten Commandments by—

A. The power of the Holy Spirit living in us

B. Faith in the work of Jesus Christ alone

Number eleven: God pronounces us righteous because of what Jesus Christ—

- A. Has done for us
- B. Has done in us

Number twelve: As a believer grows in his faith he becomes—

- A. Increasingly more righteous
- B. More aware of the righteousness he already has

Number thirteen: Righteousness is based upon—

- A. Our faith in what Jesus Christ did for us
- B. Our faith in the life of Jesus Christ within us

Number fourteen: As we study the Word of God and pray, the Holy Spirit—

- A. Produces righteousness in us
- B. Reveals God's righteousness to us

Number fifteen: Our position in Christ is made real to us when we—

- A. Believe the righteousness of God
- B. Manifest the righteousness of God

Number sixteen: Righteousness is—

- A. An attribute of God that is manifested in the life of the believer
- B. An act of God that has been done for the believer

Number seventeen: In order to prove that you have a right standing before God, you—

- A. Need only to believe in what Christ has done for you
- B. Must live a life that is pleasing to God

Watch the words, in order to *prove* that you have a right standing before God.

Number eighteen: We are declared righteous—

- A. After we have put our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior
- B. Before the foundation of the world

Number nineteen: During the earthly life of the believer—

- A. God continues to make you righteous

B. You are never made righteous

And number twenty: You are righteous in your position before God if—

A. You practice righteousness

B. You are declared righteous by God

So now let's see whether you are a Catholic or a Protestant.

Number one: God gives a man a right standing with Himself by (A) mercifully accounting Him innocent and righteous. (A) is Protestant. (B) is Catholic.

Number two: God gives a man right standing with Himself by (A) placing Christ's goodness and virtue to his credit. (B) is Catholic.

Number three: God makes a believer acceptable by (B) the moral excellence found in Jesus Christ. (A) is Catholic.

Number four: Right standing with God is based on (B) faith. (A) is Catholic through and through, stated so right out of Vatican II.

Number five: We've received right standing with God by (A) faith alone.

Number six: We achieve right standing with God by (A) accepting the fact that He obeyed the law perfectly for us. How's everybody doing?

Watch out for seven! We follow Christ's example (B) because His life has given us right standing with God. (A) is Catholic.

Number eight: When we are justified, God (A) declares that we are good in His sight and gives us His Spirit to make us good.

Number nine: We have favor in the sight of God because of (B) Christ's intercession for us.

Number ten: We can fully satisfy the claims of the Ten Commandments by (B) faith in the work of Jesus Christ alone.

Number eleven: God pronounces us righteous because of what Jesus Christ (A) has done for us.

Number twelve: As a believer grows in his faith he becomes (B) more aware of the righteousness he already has.

Number thirteen: Righteousness is based on (A) our faith in what Jesus Christ did for us.

Number fourteen: As we study the Word of God and pray, the Holy Spirit (B) reveals God's righteousness to us.

Number fifteen: Our position in Christ is made real to us when we (A) believe the righteousness of God.

Number sixteen: Righteousness is (B) an act of God that has been done for the believer.

Number seventeen: In order to prove that you have a right standing before God you (A) need to believe in what Christ has done for you.

Number eighteen: We are declared righteous (A) after we put our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Number nineteen: During the earthly life of the believer (B) you are never made righteous.

Twenty: You are righteous in your position before God if you (B) you are declared righteous by God.

Justification or righteousness—let's talk about it!

Do you remember in our opening discussion about predestination and election there were some questions about free will. Do you remember that? You were asking me a lot about free will. In the doctrine of justification, the issue of the will of man is extremely important in determining what you believe the Bible is teaching.

Martin Luther was so aware of this that one of the most important books that was written at the time of the Reformation that very few people read anymore, it's called *The Bondage of the Will*. It's like all the books that make us think, we don't read anymore. We read the simpler ones.

I believe every one of you, especially those of you heading toward ministry, ought to read. Martin Luther wrote it, *The Bondage of the Will*. I'm holding a popular paperback translation of that. It was originally written in German.

And I think just a few little paragraphs in here will help you to understand why this is such an issue. Hard to know where to stop and start because there is so much here that is good, but I'm going to start with this paragraph.

As to myself I openly confess that I should not wish free will to ever be granted to me, even if it could be so, nor anything else to be left in my own hands. For what I know about the doctrine of justification completely eliminates it. If it's free will, I might endeavor to think of what I have done, rather than what He did. And then not merely because in so many opposing dangers and so many assaulting devils I could not stand and hold fast, in which state no man could be saved, seeing that one devil is stronger than all men.

But because even though there were no dangers, no conflicts, no devils, I would be compelled to labor under a continual uncertainty and to beat the air only. Nor would my conscience, even if I should live and work to all eternity, ever come to a settled certainty how much it ought to do in order to satisfy a holy and righteous God. For whatever work should be done, there would still remain a scrupling, whether or not it pleased God, or whether He required anything more, as is proved in the experience of all of us and as I myself learned, to my bitter cost, through so many years of my own experience in the church.

But now, since God has put my salvation out of the way of my will, and has taken it under His own will and has promised to save me, not according to any

working or manner of life, but according to His own grace and mercy, I rest fully assured and persuaded that He is faithful, will not lie, and moreover great and powerful so that no devils, no adversaries can destroy Him or it or pluck me out of His hand.

You say, "Aren't you getting a little excited?" Well, he was really excited. I'm just trying to act like he might have said it.

He said,

"No one shall pluck them out of My hand because My Father which gave Me is greater than all" (John 10:28-29). Hence it is certain that in this way if all are not saved, yet some, yea many shall be saved. Whereas by the power of free will no one whatever could be saved, but all would in fact have to perish together.

And moreover we are certain and persuaded that in this way we please God: not from the merit of our own works, or any decision of our will, but from the favor of His mercy promised unto us, solely on the basis of what He's done and no merit of our own. And this is the glorying by which all saints have their glory in God alone.

But if His righteousness [justification] were such, that it was considered to be righteousness according to human judgment or human decision, then it would no longer be divine. Even as Paul said, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and His justice and His ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33). What is man compared to God? What can our power do or our wills do when compared with His power?

But ask reason herself if she is not, from conviction, compelled to confess that she is foolish and rash for not allowing the judgments of God to be incomprehensible when she confesses that all the other divine things are incomprehensible. Why do we change on this point? In everything else we concede to God a divine majesty and yet are ready to deny it when He judges men to be lost and deserving of hell. He is just even when He promises that it shall come to pass, that when He shall reveal His glory we shall all see and palpably feel that He ever was and is just.

I don't know if you followed that. What he's basically saying is, if God did this and He is just, which is the argument behind righteousness, and if He is incomprehensible and His ways past finding out, then who of us has the right to discern whether or not He is just in allowing some to wind up in hell and just in mercifully saving others by the work of Christ alone and not their own will? The point is, in this whole book, is that free will has nothing to do with it. That's strict Roman Catholic doctrine.

Does free will mean you don't have a will? No. I mean not believing it—does it mean you don't have it? No. You have a will, but it's not free. Do you understand the argument that we're free to somehow make a determination about what Christ will do in and for us in contrast to what He doesn't do for someone else, is ridiculous! We don't have that will. We don't make that happen. But you see in modern evangelicalism, Vatican II said that the evangelicals were closer than the liberals to Catholic doctrine. They were right. Why? Because many of us believe that it's our free will that moves God's heart to declare us righteous. That is Catholicism. That's not Protestantism. Protestantism says, "No!" Our will had nothing to do with it. He declared us righteous on the basis of what Jesus did at the cross.

You see class, this is an issue. This is heavy duty. It's like central salvation talk and we have to make up our minds.

Now many people when they use 'free will' have the idea this is a biblical doctrine because we do make choices. But it's not true. The words 'free will' in English only refers to a Hebrew word connected to sacrificial offerings. It means voluntary, that's all it means. Your will is not free, the Bible teaches the opposite! As the title of this little book by Luther says, *The Bondage of Your Will*, your will is enslaved to sin and Satan. And were it not the work of Christ and the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, there's no way you would ever be saved.

If that doesn't cause you to think about the doctrine of salvation, I don't know what will. Because the truth of the matter is that many evangelicals would find what I just said a little hard to take, because they're committed to that fact that our will moves the heart of God to act. You have just attributed to yourself too much glory and this is what's tough about the subject.

There's an eight-volume set called, *History of the Christian Church* by Philip Schaff, to which I have referred. I am looking at volume seven, which is the German Reformation. I want you to listen to this.

The secret of Luther's power and influence at that time lies in his understanding of faith. It delivered him from the chaos and torment of ascetic self-mortification and self-condemnation and gave him rest and peace and made him a lordly, free man in Christ; and yet, an obedient servant of the Lord. This faith breathes through all his writings, dominates his words, and acts and sustains him in his conflicts and remained his shield and anchor 'til the hour of his death. This faith was born in the convent at Erfurt, called into public action at Wittenberg, and made him *the* Reformer of the church. By the continued study of Paul's epistles, he was gradually brought to the conviction that the sinner is justified by faith alone, without any works whatsoever on his part. He experienced this truth in his heart long before he understood it in all its bearings. He found in it that peace of

conscience which he had sought in vain by his monkish exercises. He pondered day and night over the meaning of the simple statement “the righteousness of God.” He thought it was the righteous punishment of sinners, but toward the close of his convent life, he came to the conclusion that it is the righteous by which God freely gives in Christ to those who believe in Him all they need.

Righteousness is not to be acquired by man through his exertions or merits. It is complete and perfect in Christ alone. All the sinner has to do is accept it from Him as a free gift. Justification is that judicial act of God whereby He declares the sinner free of all guilt and clothes him with the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, none of his own, on the sole condition of personal faith, which apprehends and appropriates Christ and shows His life and power as a good tree bringing forth good fruit. Faith in Luther’s system is far more than a mere assent of the mind to the authority of the church. It is a hardy trust and full surrender of the whole man to Jesus Christ. It lives and moves in Christ as its element and is constantly obeying His will and following His example. It is only in connection with this deeper conception of faith that the doctrine of justification can be fully appreciated from the Reformation ‘til the present day. Disconnected from this truth, it is a pernicious error and draws us back into the Catholic Church.

Boy is that ever the truth!

The Pauline doctrine of justification is set forth in the Epistle to the Romans and Galatians, had never before been so clearly and fully understood. Not by Augustine, not by Bernard of Clairveaux, who actually confused justification with sanctification and the growth of the believer. Herein lies the difference

between the Catholic and the Protestant views. In the Catholic system, justification is a gradual process, only conditioned by faith as long as it's accompanied by good works. In the Protestant system it's a single act of God. It is based on the merits of Christ alone.

This was a new revelation to the entire church. It shed light upon the whole Bible. All of a sudden it became a book of life and comfort, not of condemnation and death. Luther felt relieved of the terrible load of guilt by an act of God's free grace. He was led out of the dark prison of his own self-inflicted penance into the daylight and fresh air of God's redeeming love. Justification broke the fetters of legalistic slavery and filled the entire believing world with the joy and peace of our state of adoption. Something God did solely by Himself. It opened to all of us the very gates of heaven, as we marvel at what God did and saw clearly what we did not.

Henceforth the doctrine of justification by faith alone was the sum and substance of the gospel. It is the heart of theology. It is the central truth of Christianity. It is the article by which we stand or fall. It is in fact, our creed. By this standard we measure every other doctrine and every other value system and ethical imposition upon us.

It goes on and on. You can read and read and read and be greatly blessed. Hopefully, this introduction will help us to understand that in our present culture we have watered down the gospel. We have brought it down to what is called a man-centered theology. Man is very much involved. The decision of a man to receive Christ becomes paramount. The idea that we can become progressively more spiritual or righteous dominates evangelicalism. None of it is true.

You are not more righteous or spiritual twenty years after you accept Christ than the day you received Him because you don't have any righteousness of your own.

It is Catholic doctrine when they read, "it was imputed" (Romans 4:22-24), which is a word that is an accounting, mathematical term. It means, 'put to your account.' Catholics interpret it as, 'infusing within you.' So therefore, the person is becoming more righteous by what he does. So let's burn some candles and give some money and say prayers to the saints and do what we can so that the righteousness of God pouring out of the cup of grace of the church will pour into our cups more grace. And hopefully fill it to a point where we won't have to wind up in purgatory very long, but can be snatched into the eternal glory by our works or the prayers of others on our behalf who remain and pray for us after we're dead.

Watch out because modern evangelicalism is very Catholic in its approach—what it is saying.

I'm talking to a guy on the phone. He's got some real serious problems in his life. He's a Christian. And everything he says is Catholic, every last word.

"Hey man, I've been trying really hard, I'm trying to read a chapter a day. And I pray a lot. I've done everything the church wants me to do. I'm an usher. I teach Sunday school. I do it all. And I've really, progressed a lot in this whole thing. And to think this is what now is the result."

And I won't tell you about all the terrible tragedy in his life; it's not resolved yet. But the point is, before it was done he was crying like a baby on the phone.

I said, "Your problem is a lack of faith in the God of the Bible. You are declared righteous because of what Jesus did. And all you've been doing! Now you have a spirit of bitterness and anger towards God for what has happened to you, because after all, you did all these wonderful things for Him? Did you think that was earning you some special position before God? It isn't arising out of the love of your heart. It's arising out of duty and obligation. You

don't even understand what's happened to you." He argued with me for a while and finally he just gave up.

It's interesting. A lot of us can't come to the end of ourselves. Even in evangelicalism there's that fight and that struggle to say, "Listen, I've received Christ. I've been growing in the Lord. I went to...I know what..." Wait a minute! What's wrong with this? How did we shift gears?

The only way you and I are righteous before God is because He declares us righteous because of what Jesus did on the cross. It has nothing to do with what you do. And this is where the struggle continues, person after person. I think I have heard more on what I call the 'more syndrome' than I want to hear. And it's coming out of good preachers. You need to pray more. You need to read the Bible more. Well, how much is more? I need to witness more. I need to tithe more. I need to do all this, more, more, more...I'm sorry. That is not the gospel.

If we're not doing this because of our love for the Lord and our relationship to Him, folks, we're kidding ourselves. And in a crisis you're going to collapse. Oh, it's okay as long as everything's going all right and you're supported by a lot of other Christians. You hang around school, hear all this stuff and you're in a good church, but when a crisis comes and hits you, you haven't got a leg to stand on because your righteousness has been your own all along.

The only righteousness we have is what Jesus did for us at the cross. That's it. It's a declared righteousness. I am pronounced righteous in Christ.

Let's pray,

Father, thank You for Your love! Thank You for Your grace and mercy that has called us unto Yourself. Thank You Lord that we are justified and sanctified in the Lord Jesus by Your precious Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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