

X. The Gospel of Jesus Christ in Biblical Perspective
The Majesty, Message and Ministry of the Gospel
“Justification: How Can One Be Right with God”
Romans 3:9-31
Dr. Harry Reeder
December 2, 2012 – Morning Sermon

We are in Romans 3 in our study and I'll start by reading the first half of our text. Romans 3:9-20, 23 says [9] *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that **all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,** [10] as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God. [12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” [13] “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” [14] “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” [15] “Their feet are swift to shed blood; [16] in their paths are ruin and misery, [17] and the way of peace they have not known.” [18] “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” [19] Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. [20] For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. [23] For **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I now have access to literally hundreds of channels now and basically there are about four programs that I watch. Nothing is really worth watching anymore. There is one news show that I watch, one commentary show, a series that always ends with the family sitting around the dinner table, and the history channel. That is probably not a big shock to you all and occasionally I'll watch National Geographic. Sometimes they do these travel logs. In God's Providence by being a servant of the Lord, a pastor, and with a mission church like ours, I've been given the opportunity to go to many places that I know I'd never seen when I was growing up in North Charlotte in North Carolina. Sometimes I'll be watching these travel logs on the history channel and I'll think “I've been there!” This past week they were doing a travel log on the Reformation and there they were in Geneva. I was just there for the Westminster Seminary Board meeting, standing on those steps.

Now why did I say that? It is because right now in our series the majesty, message and ministry of the Gospel we are going through the section called the ministry of the Gospel and hopefully you have kind of gotten the same experience. It's the travel log for you. If you're a Christian then I've already been going through where you have already been. He called you. He regenerated you. Today He has justified you. Next week He adopted you. Then we'll be going to the journey you are on right now of Him sanctifying you. We'll anticipate the promised end to this journey which is the beginning of everything forever and that is He glorifies you. So we are kind of walking through this. Today it's really appropriate that we are doing this series in the context of our Advent Season where our theme is “Born to Set us Free” and from what? It is our sins.

Jesus came to save His people from their sins. Jesus did not come to go to the cross to be your life coach. Jesus didn't come to give you a little boost up in your self esteem. He didn't come to add zeros to your bank account. He may trust things to you. He didn't come to get you that car. He may trust things to you as a steward but here's why He came. He came to save us from our sins – the persuasion, power, penalty and practice of them and one day the presence of them. That's what He came to accomplish. Jesus came to set us free from our sins.

In this study in this travel log of the ministry of the Holy Spirit bringing home the Gospel of grace to dead sinners and bringing them to life, we are at the lynch pin. We are at the hinge of the door of salvation. We are at the foundation of the foundation. We are at justification, answering the question in the title, 'how can a man be right with God?' Yet I know if God's not working in you, you could care less if you're reading this right now. The Gospel is absolutely unique from any and all religions of the world, yet when it's preached it's a scandal. It's despised.

Perhaps you have heard me share why it's despised. There are two reasons. The Gospel says you're a sinner and you need a Savior. We don't like to hear that. The second reason it's despised is it says you can't save yourself nor anyone else around you can save you. Your religion can't even save you. We don't like to be told we can't save ourselves or that our religion can't save us. Isn't it glorious? It doesn't tell you what you have to do to get to heaven but it tells you what God did when He came from heaven to bring you to heaven. It doesn't tell you what you have to give to get to heaven but it tells you what God gave to get you to heaven. He gave His only Son. His Son gave His life on the cross to get you to heaven. Salvation is a gift by His grace born out of His love for you. It's a scandal.

The book of Job asks five times 'how can a man be right with God.' It is all throughout the Scripture. How can man who has everything wrong with him be right with God? How can God be right with man if God is righteous and holy and man is a sinner? Yet we're not born looking for that question to be answered. We're all born with the knowledge of God. You have to work hard at being an atheist. I baptized a baby today and I know two things about that baby. Number one that baby is born with a knowledge of God, not an intimate personal saving knowledge, but a knowledge of God. You don't meet five year old atheists. Secondly, that baby is born with the same heart that Hitler was born with. That baby was born a sinner. Unless God changes your perspective the question you're always asking is 'how can you make God right with me? How can you justify God to me?'

We're willing to have a God as long as He is in our image, as long as He's the one we want to have and the one we want is not the One revealed in Scripture. We know we need to be right with God but we don't really want to know we need to be or want to be. Yet I'll take a religion that makes God right with me. We keep playing around and messing around the message to make God right to people instead of the Good News that God makes you right with Him. Today if you're asking how you can be right with God and God still be righteous then that means the Holy Spirit is working in your life today. That's this glorious doctrine of justification.

The Good News is good news but it's only good news when you understand the bad news. The bad news is that you and I are born with a bad life. We're born sinners. *All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)* We are all under sin.

There is none who is good, no not one. There is none who does righteous. We are born with the poison of asp, our feet our swift to shed blood. I'm using Hitler because we all know about him. The only reason we're not all Hitlers is because God's common grace restrains people from being as evil as they would be or could be or because God's redeeming grace saves them and gives them a new life and new heart.

We're born with a bad life because we're sinners born with a bad heart. In other words, we don't sin and become sinners. We're born sinners and that's why we sin. We sin because we're sinners. We have a sinful nature. We can't do anything but sin unless God restrains it in our life. That's why the prophet said "Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Can the leopard change his spots?" You can cover up someone's skin pigmentation in all kinds of ways but I have this Celts Irish skin. I am the blessing of all skin cancer doctors. That's what I was born with. [23] *Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil. (Jeremiah 13:23 ESV)* No, we are born sinners.

We have a bad life, a bad heart and a bad record. We were piggy backed into Adam. When Adam sinned we sinned. We get the sin nature. We get the sin heart and we have the sin life. We are sinfully living because we have a sin nature and we're sinfully indicted with a bad record. That record is a bad record for two reasons. Number one it's a bad record because of what it contains which is sin. The wages of sin is death, the judgment of God – physical death, spiritual death, eternal death – it's a place called hell that's forever. That sin is we are falling short of God. In other words, you were made for righteousness to exalt God's glory.

So we not only have a sin record for what it contains (sin – our life assassinating God's glory to institute our own glory as we exalt ourselves) but for what it doesn't contain and that's righteousness. Whether you eat or drink, whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. We are to exalt the Triune God with our lives. That's what God has called us to do. Hell is for the eternal punishment of those who assassinated the eternal glory of God. Heaven is for the righteous but I don't have righteousness. Even my "righteousness" is like filthy rags so I have a problem with my record.

That's where the Bible has Good News because the Bible proclaims the Good News of the Gospel. The Gospel is the foundation, the formation and the motivation of the Christian life. Why is it so foundational? Why is it the framework of our lives? Why does it motivate our life? It is because it contains the glorious Good News that in Christ we get a new record, a new heart and a new life. That new life is one that is lived unto Christ for the glory of the Lord. Secondly, we get a new heart and thirdly a new record. We get all of those things from the Lord.

Here is this majestic Gospel that proclaims a majestic message. The message is that man who is wrong can be right with God. Here is the royal announcement. It is to publish glad tidings for the King has won the victory. Sinners can be saved because the King over all of sin and His enemies. Now comes the ministry of the Gospel that brings dead sinners to Christ. Here is this great message that the King saves sinners but it's given to dead sinners. How can dead sinners receive the message? When you talk to physically dead people they don't respond. When you talk to spiritually dead people they don't respond. There are none who do good. There is none who understand.

Natural man is at enmity against God. He is hostile against God. God right with You? You better get right with me! You exist for me. How dare You let me be in a

broken world. You ought not to do that God! You answer to me. That is our response to life. God exists for us. We are the sum and the substance of life. It's all about us. My glory, my desires, my reliance, my self-exaltation are what I exist for. So here is this place where we are.

Here is the message that says you need to be saved and you cannot save yourself but it comes in opt to us. Who woke up this morning and wondered "How in the world did David get right with God?" The Scripture says He forgave him. What if there was a man who killed a man because he was committing adultery with his wife. She was going to have a child and to cover up his sin and get the wife he created a way to kill the man. What does justice say? He's guilty. Justice demands the verdict but let's say I'm the judge. He stands in front of me and says "Harry I just want you to know I'm sorry." I say "Oh you are? Okay let's forget about it. Go on." What kind of society is going to exist like that? So how can God possibly make us right with Him when everything is wrong with us and God still be just? How can God change my heart that I would want to know about that?

The majestic message has a ministry of the Holy Spirit where it reveals to us exactly how God takes dead sinners from the tomb of sin and death, just like He took Lazarus. "Lazarus come forth." Spiritually for all who are Christians He's done that for you. You were in the tomb of sin and death and He spoke by the Spirit of God and the Word of God and brought you out of the tomb of sin and death and into the triumph of life in Jesus Christ. How does He do that? We don't have to guess. The Bible tells us, it reveals to us how He does that.

I've created a timeline to walk you through what He does. He gives you a new life through an effectual call. You were dead in your sins and He calls you from death unto life. When He calls you He converts you so you are regenerated, born again. You get a new heart. Christianity is not you giving your heart to Jesus. Christianity is when God takes away your old heart and He gives you a new heart. Not that you are regenerated and you believe and repent in Jesus, Christ justifies you which is called justification. He gives you a new life, a new heart and a new record. That new record is glorious because what it does not contain which is sin. How did He get rid of my sin and what does it contain? It contains righteousness. How can it get righteousness when my righteousness is like filthy rags? I can't even get through the Lord's Prayer without sinning. How can it possibly be that way?

Here is the timeline. This is a travel log. Step one is a process. First, God calls you (effectual calling). Then God brings you to this event called conversion in the context of which you have been born again which includes regeneration, justification and adoption. That leads you into another process called sanctification. Past grace is what He has done. I was blind and now I saw. I was deaf then I heard. I was disinterested now I'm engaged. I was making God be justified to me and now I want to be right with Him. Something happened. That culminated in a surrender to Christ. I was converted because I've been born again. I received that new heart. *If any man is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has passed away and behold the new has come.* I'm not sinless but something changed. Everything changed. I no longer put my trust in my baptism or in my religion. I realized I needed a Savior. I knew I was a sinner. I knew my righteousness couldn't get me to heaven. I knew my obedience wouldn't earn my way to

heaven. Now I could believe and repent and have come alive in Jesus Christ. I not only have a new heart but a new record where I'm joined to Christ.

This tapestry must be understood together continually. Effectual calling is the ministry of the Holy Spirit where He uses Gospel evangelism. The Holy Spirit brings people into your life to share the Gospel which you will always reject unless He works in your heart. That's when He awakens you and that's called internal calling, when He delivers a sinner from the persuasion of sin. No longer do I hold to the arrogance of my sin or the arrogance of my irreligion or the arrogance of my religion. I let go of all of that and now it's not about me. It's not accomplished by me. I'm a sinner and need to be saved. He causes me and awakens me internally from the persuasion of sin. He gives me a new perspective with eyes to see and ears to hear which leads to my conversion.

The first aspect of conversion is regeneration. It's the Holy Spirit that takes the Word that's been preached to me and the Holy Spirit who is working in my heart. The awakened sinner is now brought to full life in Jesus Christ. He is a new creation in Jesus Christ so now you're born again by the Spirit of God and the Word of God. He delivers sinners from the power of sin so that you're no longer under the bondage of sin. Now you have been set free with a new heart so that you can receive Jesus by faith and repentance through the gift of faith and repentance where you turn from your sin and put your trust in Jesus Christ. When you have turned from your sin and put your trust in Jesus Christ there's this glorious legal trust called justification. This is foundational to the foundation of the Gospel.

What is justification? It is how a man is right with God. It is how you get a new record before God that doesn't contain sin and does contain righteousness. How can that be? Let's look back in Romans 3. I'm a sinner. There is no fear of God. Feet are swift to shed blood. Their paths are ruin and misery. The venom of asps is under their lips. All have sinned now look at Romans 3:21-26 which says [21] *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law* (It's not the law that saves me, it just shows me I need a Savior), *although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—* (The whole Old Testament was telling you that Jesus was going to come and accomplish this for you.) [22] *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

Here I am and I can't get through five minutes without sending up sins to heaven that are stored up under the wrath of God to be poured out upon me. I'm a sinner in thought, word and deed. I commit sins of omission and sins of commission. Did I wake up and think 'how in the world did Moses a murderer get right with God or Elijah a coward by right with God or Peter a traitor be right with God?' God says that He has sent His Son to make a display of righteousness because some of you are wondering how these people can be right with God. How can David be right with God? How can all these sinners be right with God? How can you be right with God and still be righteous?

The Bible says in the Old Testament several different times that He will not leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:7, Numbers 14:18 and Nahum 1:3) and the soul that

sinneth shall surely die. I will remember loving kindness and mercy and salvation to thousands and generations. How will God do that? He says He will show us how. I'm going to send My Son who will go to the cross and at the cross Jesus will show you how I am just and the Justifier of sinners, how people who are wrong with God and can't get right with God, He makes them right with God and declares them right with God.

Justification is a legal term. Its opposite is condemnation. So I am a sinner and I am under condemnation. How can I now hear the verdict justification? Condemnation is the verdict upon the guilty. I'm guilty. Justification is the verdict for the innocent. I'm not innocent because I have a sin record and I don't have righteousness. So how can God be just and justify me? How can that possibly happen? God says I'm going to show you how. It's in His Son who comes and takes your place. Your sins are placed on Him and His righteousness is then given to you.

I want to look at II Corinthians 5. II Corinthians 5 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. It deals with the ministry and message of reconciliation. It speaks of the Gospel. II Corinthians 5:17, 21 says [17] *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (You were dead and now you're alive – God called you and brought you to life). The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* (On what basis could God do that for me?) [21] *For our sake he (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* He, God the Father, made Him, who is sinless and only righteous. Me, I'm a bad record because of what I contain which is sin and what it does not contain which is righteousness. God made Christ to be sin on my behalf so that we might become forgiven? No, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

It's the word imputation. Your sins were imputed to Jesus and He embraced them. He drank the cup of wrath for you. He who hated sin became sin for you but that's not only imputation. What's the record of Jesus' life? His life was one of perfect righteousness. Alright so my sins are gone, praise the Lord! That means hell's doors are shut but I don't get into heaven unless I'm what? Heaven is not for the forgiven, heaven is for the righteous but my righteousness is like filthy rags. *He (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin* but He didn't stop here, *so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* We have been alleviated of our sins and we now become the righteousness of God in Him. So every time the Father looks at this sinner, saved by grace, what does He see? He sees the perfect righteousness of Christ.

The next words are propitiation and expiation. We don't use those words but I have good news for you. When the Bible was translated into English they didn't use them either. Tyndall tried to find a word to get this across and there wasn't one so he made up one. So if he could make up one and these Englishmen way back there could learn it then we don't have to forget it. Propitiation means satisfaction. Expiation means to take away. In other words Jesus *took away* your sin. He took away the guilt of your sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. You will not hear that verdict. Why? It is because Someone else heard it for you. At the cross the Father didn't say "This is My Son in whom I'm well pleased" but the Father poured out wrath due to me upon Him. He died the death I ought to have died and He could do so because He had lived the life I ought to have lived. So *He (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin* but He didn't stop here, *so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Jesus made a satisfactory payment which is why when He drank the cup to the bottom He said "It is finished!" The resurrection declares that I have seen the travail of my soul and God is satisfied. He is just and Justifier of the sinner, saving them by grace. In expiation He took it away. In propitiation He made a sacrifice. At the temple what would they kill for your sins? They would kill a lamb but they would send out of the city a scapegoat. I know there are all kinds of praise choruses on the Lamb of God but I'm waiting for one of the Scapegoat of God because it's important. The priest laid his hands on it in reference to the sins of the people and led him outside the camp. Your sins and my sins went on Christ, He went outside the city and at the cross He took our sins away from us.

He paid for them and removed them as far as the east is from the west. It is not the north to the south or south to the north. If you go south it's just a matter of time until you get to the north and vice versa. When you go east you never quit going east. When you go west you never quit going west. He has taken away your guilt from you and it can never come back so if you confess your sins He is faithful and just to forgive you. There is expiation, propitiation through imputation of my sin to Him and His righteousness to me, so where does that leave me? Let's look at one more passage in Colossians 2.

In Colossians 2 Paul is in prison and takes the opportunity of being in prison to give us a picture of our redemption. Colossians 2:8 says [8] *See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.* Those reading this today, God has given you a curiosity and you're looking. The answer isn't found anywhere else other than in Jesus Christ. Don't let anyone captivate you with message messages that make a god that's right to you. There is a Gospel message of how you can be right to God but there is only one message. It is the Gospel that is the power of God so don't let anyone take you captive. Then you can come to the Father through the Son Jesus Christ and how can you do that? Let's look further at this text.

Colossians 2:9-13 says [9] *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,* [10] *and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.* [11] *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,* [12] *having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.* [13] *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.*

Here is what happened to you. You were dead and God spoke. You came out of the tomb. God called you and the Gospel came to you externally. Internally the Holy Spirit gave you eyes to see, ears to hear and you were set free from the tomb of sin and death. You came forth to a new life with a new heart that is found in Jesus Christ but that's not all that you have. It's not here's a new start, try again. No, it's you come forth because you have a new life, you've been born again, made alive and God has given you a new record so you are right with Him. You are forgiven and you are declared righteous in Jesus Christ. You are not only not under condemnation but you are innocent in Jesus Christ. How did He do that? Look at the next few verses.

Colossians 2:14-15 says [14] *by canceling the record (certificate) of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.* [15] *He*

disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. You came from the prison of death to the triumph of Jesus Christ. That is what has happened to you. Very likely when Paul was in prison and had a death penalty they had a certificate, an indictment and when they took him out to kill him they nailed the indictment to him. Jesus is saying ‘Remember the indictment against you – bad heart, bad record, bad life?’ Jesus had that nailed to Him when He was nailed to the cross and He stamped it ‘Paid in Full’. More than that He gave you His righteousness so you’re not only forgiven but you’re also accepted. You are not only cleansed by the blood of Jesus who satisfied (propitiation) and took away (expiation) the sin but you are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and He has given you everlasting life.

Here is the takeaway. The ministry of the Holy Spirit delivers awakened sinners from the penalty of sins by joining them to Christ by faith for a new record. It’s a new record because it doesn’t contain sin but it does contain righteousness. It’s a new record because you have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus. It is a new record because you have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ. I would like to close by reading one of my favorite hymns on this titled “Amazing Love”.

*And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God shouldst die for me?*

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray:
I woke the dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

*Chorus:
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!*

Called – hear the ray? It woke me up in the prison. See the chains fall off, I’ve got a new heart! I have a new perspective. I’ve been taken from the persuasion of sin and brought to Christ. The power of sin has been eradicated but that’s not all. Here is the last verse of the hymn “Amazing Love.”

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,*

And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

With humility I go to the cross. Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling. Then you rise up, not arrogant, in Christ bold, I approach the eternal throne to claim Christ who has claimed me as His own. Oh the bliss of this glorious thought – my sin, not the part but the whole, is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh my soul! You come out of the cell not just forgiven but innocent with the perfect righteousness of Christ. You walk out and say that you're supposed to be guilty so how are you set free? The Judge sets you free. Did He wink? No, He displayed His righteousness. His Son went to your death for you. Now He is bringing you home and you have the Son's clothes, the Son's robes, and the Son's room. You are Mine and I am yours. You are cleansed and clothed for all eternity.

There is no room for the arrogance of our religion. You're not getting there because of your baptism or because Harry prayed with you or because you're a member of this church. Enough of this thought that it's easy to get forgiven. It's not easy to get forgiveness. It cost God His Son to get our forgiveness but He gave you more than forgiveness. He gave you His Son's righteousness. So now there is not only no condemnation but now its justification, therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. God, I confess to You what I confessed for over a week in anticipation of this study that I'm fully and completely aware of my inadequacies to do justice to what is the greatest thing I can say to people reading this. There are those reading this thanking You that they've been called, born again and justified just waiting for us to talk about adoption. They are rejoicing but there are some reading this whom Satan wants to deceive into continued sin as if sin has no payments. If this is what it cost to save us, what is it to fall into the hands of God with our sins dripping from us? Father allow them to hear today the glorious news that Jesus lived the life they were supposed to, died the death that was due to them and all the wrath that has been stored up to heaven has already been poured out upon Him and if they receive Him with the empty hands of faith, *nothing in my hands I bring simply to the cross I cling*, today they can be right with God forever. Father for those who wonder what I'm babbling about, I plead with You to send a quickening ray that they may leave the prison of their soul and see the glory of Christ, I ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.