



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Theology of the Reformers

TRANSCRIPT

“Objections to and Departures from Justification by Grace, Ancient and Modern”

[Prayer] Father, we again turn to Thee with thanksgiving and praise for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and for the work of justification which he has accomplished by virtue of the atoning sacrifice, and we praise Thee, Lord for that Thou hast made it available to us on the basis of grace, true faith.

We pray tonight as we consider again some of the things that arise out of this doctrine, that Thou wilt enable us to think clearly and come to an understanding in a deeper way of all that Thou dost desire to teach us through the Scriptures.

We pray for each one present. We ask O God that the needs that we have may be met. And now we ask that this hour may be a means of edification for each one of us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight our subject in our concluding series on justification by grace is “Objections and Departures from Justification by Grace, Ancient and Modern.” And if you have your New Testament with you, I'd like to read Romans chapter 4 verse 1 through verse 8. Romans chapter 4 verse 1 through verse 8. The apostle writes in Romans chapter 4,

“What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as favor but as what is due. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins have been covered; Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD shall not take into account.”

The importance of the doctrine of justification by grace is evident when we remember that historically, it was the radical principle out of which came the Reformation from popery. So that if justification by grace were only known for the fact that this was the essence of the significance of the reformation, it would have been important.

Theologically, the doctrine of justification by grace determines our views of Christ’s satisfaction, because it is by virtue of this doctrine that we learn that our Lord Jesus has accomplished a full payment for the penalty of sin. It also determines our views of the two natures of our Lord Jesus, and ultimately of the Trinity, because there can be no full payment for sin were our Lord not truly the God-man. He had to be man in order to be our substitute, and he had to be God in order that that sacrificial work might have that value, sufficient to pay for the penalty of all of our sins.

It is also important for the doctrine of God’ being and his attributes because it is by the doctrine of justification that we learn that God is a just God. In other words, we learn that he is holy, he is just, and that the requirements of the law must be met fully. So it has its importance for the being and attributes of God.

It is also related to the doctrine of original sin, because it stresses the fact, since justification is by grace and not by works, that man’s inability to keep the law makes it forever impossible for him to earn his salvation.

And of course it is related to the doctrine of assurance, and so you can see that the justification by grace is a doctrine that is important historically, it is important theologically. Luther was certainly right when he said, “The doctrine of justification by faith is the article of a standing and falling church.” And the church either stands or falls insofar as it bows to the teaching of justification by grace through faith.

Now we have seen that it is grounded in the imputation of God’s righteousness to the elect. That is the means by which we become righteous. We have seen that that imputation is made on the basis or on the principle of grace. That is, it is not on account of any works that we do, but it is purely by grace that that imputation of righteousness is made. And that imputation of righteousness is made possible by the penal substitution that our Lord Jesus accomplished in his death for us on the cross.

We’ve also laid stress upon the fact that it is an imputation that is received through faith. So these are the essential things: imputation, grace, penal substitution, and faith. If we can just remember those words and understand what they mean, we have, I think the essence of the doctrine of justification by grace.

Our essential position on the doctrine of justification by grace – when I say our, I mean mine and the Reformers, and I hope you’re with us, of course – our essential position on the doctrine of justification by grace may be epitomized by putting together two passages from the Bible. One of them is the passage from Job chapter 9 and verse 2 in which Job asks the question, “I know it is so of a truth, but how should man be just before God?” That’s Job’s question. How should man be just before God? And it is the Apostle Paul who, in Romans chapter 8 verse 33 gives us the answer. He says, “It is God that justifieth.” How should man be just before God? It is God that justifieth. So if you put those two passages together, one asking the question and the other answering it, you

have the essential position of the Reformers on the doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

Tonight we want to take a look at some of the objections and some of the departures from the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. And we’ll try to deal with those in the past and a few at least of the objections and departures of the present. And first of all, we want to review the position of the Roman Catholics, the position of the Romanists.

Incidentally, Augustine, who of course belonged to the church of Rome, Augustine, while a believer in free, sovereign, efficacious grace, was unclear on the doctrine of justification by faith. In fact, it seems very clear to me at least – I don’t consider myself to be such an authority on Augustine that I can say I’ve read everything that he’s written, but I have read a good bit – and I think it’s fair to say that Augustine was a sacramentarian. That is, he understood grace and he understood the principles of grace. He understood the fact that man’s will was in bondage to sin and that he needed the grace of God, but he never was able to extricate himself from the views of the church in his day that the blessings of the spiritual life come to us by virtue of the observance of certain sacraments.

He never was able, for example, to extricate himself from the belief that salvation came to us through water baptism. He talked on the one hand of grace, and he made a great deal over it; in fact, talked about it so much that both Luther and Calvin learned from him the essentials of grace. But he himself never saw that to believe that a man received salvation through water baptism was a contradiction of the principle of grace.

B. B. Warfield, one of the theologians that we’ve referred to quite a bit has often said that it was his view that Augustine had come to such a remarkable transformation through his conversion and through his study of the Scriptures that if he had lived long enough, he would have come to see the errors of sacramentarianism. And the reason that he didn’t was because he didn’t live long enough. Now Augustine did live to be 76 years

of age, and I don’t what Warfield expected of him, whether he should [laughter] to be 125, but he never did see that, and so in that sense, Augustine’s knowledge of the way of salvation was limited. He was a sacramentarian.

The Romanists, however, have their own peculiar views concerning justification, and I want to speak of them now for a few minutes. Capital A, then, their doctrine. The major points of the Romanists’ doctrine of justification by faith are these. Justification, first of all, for the Roman Catholic, involves the expulsion of indwelling sin and the infusion of grace by the Holy Spirit which results in the forgiveness of sins through water baptism. So that according to Romanist doctrine, then, the Holy Spirit in grace expels original sin, indwelling sin, infuses grace, the grace of faith that expresses itself in love – *fides formata* is the Latin term, enwrought in the soul – and the forgiveness of sins results, and all of this has its beginning in water baptism. So you can see that the Romanist’s view of justification by faith is itself a sacramentarian position.

Now the Romanists go on, secondly, to say that this infusion of divine grace is not produced except through the concurrence of the contingent will of the believer. Now let me put that in language that I think we could understand. This change that takes place in a believer, produced by the Holy Spirit, in which he infuses grace that results in the forgiveness of sins, that infusion of grace does not take place apart from the action of a man’s free will. So in other words, it is necessary for an individual to make a decision of his free will, and when he concurs with the Holy Spirit, who infuses grace, then the result is the expulsion of indwelling sin and the forgiveness of sins.

Then, thirdly, the enwrought faith or love, or faith which produces love, or the enwrought love and good works then becomes the righteousness imputed to the believer. So, what happens is the Holy Spirit infuses grace which results in faith and love, and then the good works that result from faith and love are in turn imputed to the believer as his righteousness. And thus he’s personally righteous because these are personal acts which the believer does.

Furthermore, the Romanists believe that this is a process, and being a process, justification therefore may be increased, or it may be diminished, or it may be lost entirely. So you can see then that the doctrine of justification according to the Romanists is a very strange teaching, at least for a Protestant.

Now, let me critique it. And I want to say two things about it, particularly. First of all, this form of the doctrine of justification, this understanding of the doctrine of justification is a method of salvation by works. Now I like the term, synergistic, and I think it is good for us to learn this term. I’ve put it up here once before [writes on overhead], syn-er-gistic. *Ergon* means “work” and *syn* is the transliteration of the Greek preposition for “with,” so something that is synergistic is a mingling of works. So that if we say a doctrine is synergistic, it is a doctrine in which faith is mingled with works. Faith and works.

The Romanists speak a great deal about faith. They speak a great deal about grace. But they also by their doctrine mingle works with it so that it is synergistic teaching. Any time anyone believes that you’re saved by faith in Jesus Christ plus something that you do, such as joining the church or being baptized or sitting at the Lord’s table, or whatever it may be, that person holds to a synergistic form of doctrine.

So first of all, then, this Roman Catholic understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith is synergistic. Now this is not something that I simply have said concerning them, but it is clearly taught in their own doctrinal standards. Listen to what they say in the Council of Trent in chapter 16 in the Ninth Canon, the Council of Trent which represents one of the official statements of Roman Catholic doctrine, it says this, “If anyone saith that by faith alone the impious is justified in such wise as to mean that nothing is required to cooperate in order to attain to the justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will, let him be anathema.” Anathema is of course, the word for accursed.

So you can see that what they have said in this are two things. They have said that if you say there is no cooperation on the part of man in his justification; that is, if he does not have to do something, cooperate with his free will in the decision, or to put it more plainly, if he does not have to be prepared and disposed by a movement of his own will, then let him be under the curse. So they have said plainly here that faith alone is not a sufficient means for justification, but rather, salvation must be by faith plus a movement of one's own will.

Now this is why the Reformers accused the Catholic Church of teaching a doctrine of justification by works. And when the Reformers, both Luther and Calvin, proclaimed their doctrine, they in their proclamation of it expounded it in just such a way so as to refute this particular explanation, which they knew as the explanation of the organized church of their day. So the first thing that I think we should say about the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification is that it is a works justification.

So they require cooperation, they require the movement of one's own free will in the receiving of the grace of God and furthermore, they specifically say that faith alone is insufficient for justification. So then, it is a synergistic doctrine that they hold.

A second thing that can be said about it is that it confounds justification and sanctification. Now we know, I think, that when we are justified, we have the righteousness of God imputed to us on the basis of grace, so that we are able to stand before God with a righteousness that is acceptable to him. Then, having received a righteousness that is acceptable to him, having been united to our Lord Jesus, united in his death, burial and resurrection, and now given new life, then begins the process of sanctification, by which we grow in grace and ultimately reach the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the case of the Roman Catholic doctrine, there is a confounding of justification and sanctification. According to Rome, justification is imperfect. It is capable of increase and diminution. It's liable to entire loss, and the Council of Trent says this on that point,

“If anyone saith that the justice received is not just preserved but also increased before God through good works, but that said works are merely the fruits and signs of justification by faith (that’s what the Reformers, that’s what Luther was saying), but a cause of the increase thereof, let him be anathema.” So in effect they say by their pronouncement in the Twenty-fourth Canon that good works are not the fruits and the signs of justification, but they are a cause of the increase of justification.

So when a person does good works, he doesn’t do good works because they’re a product of the new life, they deny that. As a matter of fact, they do good works and that increases their justification before God. So justification is something that may be increased, it may be diminished, it may even be lost entirely. So there is a confounding of justification and sanctification.

Therefore, in the light of what we have studied about justification, we cannot say that that position is a biblical position.

Well, what about our Arminian friends? What kind of doctrine of justification do they hold? Now I want to confine myself to the evangelical Arminians, because, obviously, the non-evangelical Arminians will not under any circumstances hold to an evangelical doctrine of justification by faith.

The Arminians, who arose out of the controversy with the Calvinists in Holland in the early part of the 17th Century ultimately divided into at least two branches. Generally speaking, there was the non-evangelical branch of Arminianism which soon after went into rank disobedience or unbelief. But the evangelical branch of Arminianism has found its greatest expression in churches of the Wesleyan tradition.

John Wesley was an Arminian, and John Wesley was an evangelical. John Wesley was a Christian man, but his view of Christian doctrine was Arminian. Now Wesley’s doctrine is what we would call “Wesleyanism.” Wesleyanism or the Wesleyans are not only the Methodists, but are the Nazarenes, the Pentecostals, and others who generally speaking have – the Church of Christ also belongs in that category – because they all have

essentially a doctrine of, that is evangelical but nevertheless with the Arminian contradictions of grace. There are some differences of course between Wesleyanism and the Church of Christ, and I don’t mean by that to lump them in the precisely same category, but they are all Arminian. At least they hold that in common.

So we’re going to confine ourselves to evangelical Arminians, or the Wesleyans, the most evangelical branch of the Arminians. And capital A, their doctrine. I’d like to make just three major points concerning the Arminian doctrine.

According to Arminians – and they do not all agree on every point, and so you will find in some of the discussions of Arminianism that there is a difference of opinion over the precise views that they hold – but the first point I want to make concerning their doctrine is this. According to the Arminians, justification is the judicial act by which God pronounces believing acceptors or Christ’s offering absolved from their sins, released from the penalty of sin and accepted as righteous before him.

Let me say that again, because I think that is very close to the position of the Reformers. Justification is the judicial act by which God pronounces believing acceptors of Christ’s offering absolved from sin, released from the penalty of sin and accepted as righteous before him. So justification is a judicial act according to the Arminians. In this judicial act, God pronounces believers, those who have accepted the substitutionary offering of our Lord. He pronounces them righteous before him. That’s the first thing.

The second thing that characterizes their doctrine is that justification is accompanied by initial sanctification. Justification is accompanied by initial sanctification, so we cannot speak of justification as distinctly separate from sanctification.

And third, the imputation of which Arminians speak is not the imputation of the righteousness of God, but the imputation of the believer’s faith for righteousness. Imputation is not the imputation of God’s righteousness or the righteousness of Christ, but the imputation of the believer’s faith for that righteousness. Now that’s a point that

Arminians make a great deal over, because they do not like the Calvinistic doctrine of imputation.

Now let me critique this. This position of the Arminians denies the imputation of God’s righteousness. In other words, according to the Arminian doctrine, when a man stands justified before God, it is not because he has had imputed to him the righteousness of God.

Now I want you to turn with me if you will to Philippians chapter 3 and verse 9. This is a passage that we have referred to once before, but I want you to see it in the light of this denial of imputation. The apostle says in Philippians chapter 3 and verse 9, while you’re finding it, I’ll read verse 8,

“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and may be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, derived from the law, but from that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”

Now that would seem to me that that statement, “a righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,” makes it plain that when we are believers in Jesus Christ and justified, we do have a righteousness from God.

Some like to think of the righteousness of Jesus Christ being imputed to us, others the righteousness of God; that point I don’t think of such great practical importance. The facts are that we have a perfect righteousness before God which enables us to stand before him accepted. It should be, I think, evident, that if we are to stand before a holy God and a righteous God, that we cannot stand before him with an imperfect

righteousness. Therefore, we must have a perfect righteousness. We must have the righteousness of God or the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The Arminians deny that kind of imputation. They still use the term, imputation, which can be confusing, but their imputation is not the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. It’s the imputation of human faith. And that human faith, or evangelical obedience as they call it, is substituted for the righteousness.

Now a second thing that I’d like to say by way of critique. The faith is imputed for righteousness. Let’s turn back to Romans chapter 4 verse 3 again in the passage that we looked at a few weeks ago. Romans chapter 4 verse 3. Now Romans chapter 4 verse 3 and verse 5 says the same thing. And I want to read both of these verses, and I want you to notice, specifically, the way in which the New American Standard Bible translates this because the brethren who did this translation did not understand that by translating the way that they did, they were falling into the hands of the Arminians.

But as is so often the case, people who translate the Bible are not necessarily theologians, and that’s why, often, their translations are not reliable. In order to be a good translator, you must not only know the language, but you also must know theology, because there are always cases in translation, as anyone who knows any foreign language knows, in which you have alternatives. You may translate this expression this way in English, or this way, speaking from a grammatical or syntactical standpoint. But, if you know theology, you may know that one is clearly correct, and the other clearly wrong.

Listen to the way they’ve rendered it,

“For what does the Scripture say? And Abraham believed God
and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

Well that seems to say, does it not, that the faith is imputed as righteousness. In other words, evangelical obedience is taken to be righteousness.

Now we might have some suspicion about this, because aside from this place in Romans chapter 4 and one other possible place, in all of the mentions of justification by grace through faith in the New Testament, faith is always an instrumentality, or a means, for the reception of righteousness, and not the righteousness itself. So that would have, if you were a theologian, that would put you on your guard. But our translators were not theologians. Fifth verse,

“But to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.”

Again, that is a mistake. In verse 22,

“Therefore also, it was reckoned to him as righteousness”

Reference being to the faith. And verse 24,

“But for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. But for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned (the “it” probably being a reference to faith in the thought of the apostle there).”

So in these four cases in Romans chapter 4, it is stated that faith is reckoned as righteousness. In other words, the evangelical obedience of putting trust in Christ becomes the ground of justification.

Now that denies what we have been saying in these studies, because we have been saying that the ground of the imputation of righteousness is what Christ did on the cross. We have been saying that the principle is grace, but the ground is the sacrificial

work of our Lord on the cross, and the imputation is made on the basis of what Christ did. But you can see here that faith becomes the ground on which this rests.

Justification then is not a judicial act of God but a sovereign act of God whereby he accepts faith for righteousness. That is the Arminian doctrine. Faith is accepted for righteousness, accepted by God because of his sovereign prerogative. It’s not a case of the total satisfaction of the righteousness of God by the full payment of the penalty which should be paid because of his righteousness and holiness, but out of his sovereignty, he accepts faith for righteousness.

But now wait a minute. What is faith? Why faith is simply receptivity. Faith is not any work. Now, evangelical Arminians will of course say they do not mean that faith is a work according to their understanding of the doctrine. But on any grounds, faith is simply receiving something. Can righteousness – which in other places is said to be by faith – can righteous be both by faith and also faith at the same time? I don’t think that’s possible. The apostle elsewhere says that, for by grace are ye saved through faith. So, how can you have righteousness through faith and have faith as the righteousness at the same time?

I mentioned the other night, one of the Reform theologians said, “Can a beggar’s professions of destitution be the price that purchases relief?” The fact that we make exclamations, that we have nothing, does that mean that by saying we have nothing we buy what we need? No.

Well what is meant by this statement? After all, does not Paul say his faith is reckoned, and then we have righteousness? Well, I tried the other night to point out to you that this little word that is translated here “as” does not necessarily have to be translated “as.” In fact, we could render it like this, to paraphrase the *eis* or the Greek preposition which is used here: “And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him *in order to the obtaining of* righteousness.” In other words, by that kind of rendering, faith remains the means and instrumentality by which righteousness is obtained. Or as

someone has put it, “It is the *etis* of designed result.” Faith is reckoned unto the designed result of the possession of righteousness.

Now I claim, and I think I’m right, that the New Testament supports that understanding of the expression “unto righteousness” rather than “as righteousness,” and we should never have had this rendered, “Faith is reckoned as righteousness,” as if faith is the righteousness. Faith is the means by which the righteousness comes. It is faith unto the obtaining of righteousness. It is an instrumentality. The Arminians, then, do misunderstand the doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

Now I want to say in concluding with the Arminians. Some of the Arminians are very close to the Reformed position, and we should recognize the fact that their doctrine is evangelical, and we should not, because they do not understand this particular doctrine as we do, consider them not to be Christians. I think we all realize, too, that you hear a lot about Calvinism and Arminianism in Believers Chapel, and I would like for it to be understood once and for all that we do not mean that Arminians cannot be Christians. John Wesley was a great Christian man.

After all, our own understanding of biblical doctrine is not absolutely perfect is it? No. We’re still here. We’re still learning, all of us are. And the chances are that practically every one of us in this room who prides himself on being a Calvinist now can look back with a little bit of embarrassment to the day when he was an Arminian to a more or less degree, but at the same time a Christian.

The attitude toward the Arminian is not to be contempt. The attitude toward an Arminian is to be concern and love and care in order that if it’s true that we do have a kind of understanding that the doctrine that builds us up and edifies us in our faith, to win them to the understanding that we think will help them in their spiritual life. And so, we should we should never have the attitude of contempt for an Arminian. The chances are if I had been treated that way by some of my Calvinistic brethren who dealt with me from time to time, why I would have been turned off by the very doctrines of the grace of

God that have meant a great deal to me. So, let’s always remember that. But we’re just talking about clarity in theology, now.

Well I want to come to the position of contemporary theology and deal with a few things that one occasionally runs across in connection with the modern understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith.

There are both objections to the doctrine and departures from the doctrine, and I’ll try to speak of them in that way. So, first of all, some of the objections that have been raised against the doctrine of justification by grace. I’ll mention three of them.

First of all, it is said that the doctrine of justification by grace is contrary to grace. Seems to be a strange thing, a strange kind of objection, but let me try to outline it for you. We have said – and I think it was in our second study – that we have made a great deal over the point that justification by grace through faith was a legal declaration by God that the person who believed in our Lord Jesus Christ was just before God. Remember that we made a great deal over, “to justify” means to declare righteous. It does not mean to make righteous. It means to declare righteous. So it is a forensic declaration. It’s a legal declaration.

Now it is the contention of some who have heard us say that this is a forensic transaction that if it is a legal transaction based on the fulfillment of God’s legal requirements, then it’s not grace. We have certain debts before God, and the Lord has come and has paid those debts, legally paid them, and now we are pronounced justified or declared righteous by God.

But we say this is by grace, but it’s not grace. It’s law. The Lord Jesus has paid the legal penalty, and God now righteously declares us righteous. So it’s not grace. And yet the Bible says we’re justified by grace as Titus says in chapter 3. And does not Paul say, “For by grace you are saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God not of works lest anyone should boast.” So, we cannot this understanding of justification because it’s not by grace.

Well, that’s really just a clever kind of reply and retort, because we would simply ask the question, yes, it’s true of course that we had certain debts before God, the penalty of our sin. That is death, the wages of sin is death. And it’s true, too, that the God-man has come and he has paid that debt perfectly. He’s satisfied the holy claims of God against us.

But, on what principle did the Son of God come? The grace does not rest in the declaration. The grace is not found in the declaration. The grace is found in the gift of the Son to accomplish the work of redemption. So it was gracious of God to give the Son to meet his own legal requirements, so that he might legally and righteously declare us righteous. So, the grace is found in the gift of the Son.

Now Paul puts it in Romans chapter 5 verse 20 and 21 like this. He says, “And the law came in that the transgression might increase. But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

There are people who have the idea that God forgives us by lowering his standard, that he is a kind of God who averts his eyes so to speak and lowers his standard, and therefore receives us because the Lord Jesus has prevailed upon him to lower his standards. No, that is not so at all. The grace of God does not lie in the fact that he has lowered his standards. His standards are absolutely the same. Grace must through righteousness. Listen, my dear Christian friends, when we get to heaven, and we come up to the pearly gates, and we knock on the pearly gates – this is all a figure, you understand [laughter] – we knock on the pearly gates and an angel opens and says, Who are you and what right do you have in here? Why, we don’t say that the Lord Jesus came and so prevailed on God that he would lower his standards enough to let me in.

We say, step aside. This is my home, because we have righteous entrance into heaven, righteous acceptance, righteous claims. But, God’s grace was manifested in the gift of the Son to offer the sacrifice which made it possible for us to have a righteous

entrance into heaven. The grace, then, is in the gift of the Son. So, when a person says this is contrary to grace, it only shows that he doesn’t understand where the grace of the saving work is.

Now the second thing that Arminians like to say is that this kind of doctrine that we who are still sinners are declared righteous by God is a legal fiction. In other words, we’re still sinners, but God says, we’re righteous. He says that we are legally righteous before him, but we are still sinners. That’s what Luther said. He said *simil justus et peccator*; at the same time just and yet still a sinner. So they say that’s legal fiction.

But justification does not say that sinners are righteous of themselves. It says that we are clothed with Christ’s righteousness which is imputed to us, and that’s a covenant righteousness, and furthermore, it’s really mine. It’s given to me because I stand in my substitute and representative. It’s not a legal fiction. It’s not simply that God says you’re righteous when you’re not. But I really have been given a righteousness that is acceptable to him. It’s real, because my substitute has paid my penalty, and being identified with him, I possess his acceptance with the Father. He’s my mediator, given by the Father with grace. So, it’s not a legal fiction.

Then there’s some who say it unethical. The idea that we should be justified apart from anything that we do – why that’s unethical. Now the apostle knew this argument back in the 1st Century. These arguments, incidentally, are arguments that are so true to human nature. We all think of these things. For after Paul had said in Romans chapter 5 and verse 20, “And the law came in that the transgression might increase, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” Then the apostle said, “What shall we say, then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?” That’s the kind of thing that people say when you preach a doctrine that you’re not justified by anything that you do, but you’re justified by grace through faith.

And then they say, well, you mean that you can stand before God righteous apart from any human works? You mean the grace of God is so great that no matter how much

you sin, the grace of God covers that sin? And as a matter of fact, when the law reveals more and more sin, why the result is that the grace of God just super-bounds over that? Well why not go out and sin as much as possible, because the more you sin the more God’s grace will forgive the sin, and thus he will be glorified more and more. So, sin more and more and the result will be forgiveness more and more, and God will get more and more glory. So it’s obvious that a doctrine that leads to human sin and human forgiveness of sin, and increasing glory to God, it’s obvious that’s wrong.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound or may increase? “May it never be!” the Apostle Paul states. Through the doctrine of union with Christ we cannot possibly live in such a way. He goes on to say, “How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Therefore, we have buried with him through baptism into death in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so too might we walk in newness of life.” God forbid. The doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ means he has died with him, he was buried with him, he’s been raised with him. He has new life and consequently, he walks in newness of life. He loves to please the one who has loved him so. His whole life pattern has been changed.

And I love the way Phillips translates that, “May it never be!” What a gastly – no, I’m sure he would say – [English accent] What a ghastly thought! [Laughter] Or as the Swiss commentator Walter [indistinct] says, “Good heavens, no!” [Laughter] It’s unethical – good heavens, no! Through the doctrine of union with Christ, we can then be an, and only thereby, be ethical. The truth of the matter is that no one can possibly be ethical without a change of life within, and without the possession of new life, and it is only by virtue of death, burial and resurrection with the Lord Jesus that we are possessors of new life and thus able to please the Lord.

When I was going through Dallas Seminary, there was a young man by the name of Irving Grubbs, a very earnest Christian man. He was a year or two ahead of me in the seminary, but we became rather close because they lived near us in the married students dormitory. And so we became acquainted with Irving. We were very much impressed with his dedication to the Lord’s service.

And Irving went out to India as a missionary. And I was put on his prayer letter, and I followed him with a great deal of interest because I had known him. And I remembered receiving a letter from him in which he described the first time that he had preached in India in the new language that he had been learning for about a year. And he said he was out on a street corner, and it came his turn to preach. And he began to preach, and Irving was a very good preacher. He had preached out on the street corners. In fact, I had preached with him at one time downtown in the middle of Dallas many years ago. You didn’t realize it, but I was a street preacher in Dallas at one time.

And Irving wrote back and said he was preaching in a gathering of Indians in India, and he said when he finished preaching, someone came up to him afterwards and said, “The kind of doctrine you preach leads me to say, Let’s go on continuing in sin that grace may abound.” And I remember thinking to myself as I read that letter, well evidently Irving Grubbs is preaching the gospel that Paul preached, because that was the same kind of objection that he got. And when I taught Romans at the seminary I used to use that as an illustration when I came to the sixth chapter here, pointing out that if you don’t get that kind of objection from your preaching, you’re not really preaching the purity of the grace of God.

And a few years ago I received a letter from one of my students who left and went up to Chicago to form a new church. And he said, “Dear Dr. Johnson, we’re thoroughly enjoying the work of new church planting. It has certainly made me appreciate the training I received at Dallas.

“I thought you would be encouraged to know your students are following in Pauline traditions. At our second service I preached on salvation by grace, Ephesians 2:8 and 9. Later, I was talking to a Jewish woman who had been there. She almost echoed Paul’s rhetorical question of Romans 6:1: I don’t like this idea of free forgiveness you were talking about; this would mean that I could out and sin all I want to because God has forgiven all my sins.”

And Jim Heinz, who wrote this letter to me said, “*Meganoito* (that’s the expression the apostle uses there), I couldn’t help but think of your statement that if we preached the same gospel Paul preached, we would get the same objections.” [Laughter] I was glad, because it indicated to me that he was preaching the same gospel the apostle had preached.

Now, I would like to say one word about departures from the doctrine of justification by grace, and I’ll confine myself to Karl Barth’s views, because Professor Barth has been one of the better known theologians of the 20th Century.

Simply stated, Professor Barth’s views are these. Jesus Christ is the elect person, and he’s elect for everybody. And furthermore, he is also the reprobate person, and he is the reprobate person for everybody. So Jesus Christ is the elect person, and he is the reprobate person. Predestination is the non-rejection of men to Professor Barth. Therefore, since Jesus Christ is the elect person and the reprobate person – do you understand that? – God has justified everybody through Christ’s blood. Everybody is justified.

Well, what does everyone need, then? Well the only thing that everyone needs is to be told, to be informed of his acceptance, so that the preaching of the gospel is not the preaching that Jesus Christ has offered a sacrifice by which you through faith may receive a justification from God, but rather, the preaching of the gospel is simply the informing of the audience that you are already just by virtue of what Jesus Christ has done.

Does not that sound like universalism? It’s not surprising that most people have accused Professor Barth of believing in universalism, and I think we have to say that logically that is what his doctrine ultimately came to.

I was sitting once with him in a colloquium which he had for some of the students in Basel, and he said, “I know that my doctrine tends to universalism, but I am not a universalist.” Actually, Professor Barth was non-committal, but he did say that ultimately the divine “yes” cannot be defeated or thwarted by man. “And therefore, while I am not a universalist,” he used to say, “I feel that we may hope that universalism is the teaching of the Bible.” Well, you can see from this that justification for Professor Barth is something entirely different from that which the Reformers taught. Incidentally, I do think that this is what universal redemption ultimately lead to, logically: universalism.

The Bible is quite plain however and the doctrine is clear, as Romans chapter 4 indicates, we are justified on the principle of grace. We are justified on the ground of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. And we are justified through the means of faith. And this is all grounded in the propitiation, the penal satisfaction which the Lord Jesus accomplished in his suffering on the cross. Justification by grace through faith. What a beautiful doctrine that is. What a beautiful truth it is to realize that we have a righteousness that makes us acceptable to God, and it may be received through faith, through trust.

There is a – allow me one minute – John G. Payton was one of the great missionaries of a generation or so ago. He was a missionary to the New Hebrides. He went out when the language had not been put into writing, and so consequently, his first work was to translate the Bible into the language of the people. He worked on this for a considerable period of time, but he never could find a word for believe, trust.

Well now, you cannot have a New Testament if you cannot have believe or trust, and he was still puzzling over what word to use for that in his native language when he and one of the native men went out on a hunting trip. And they went out on a hunting

trip, and after they had been out for some time, they finally killed a large animal – I don’t remember whether it was a deer or what it was – but Mr. Payton was speaking about it. And he said, “We were on our way home and we were very tired, and as we came down the last hill toward the compound where we were living, one of the men had the animal on the back of one of his shoulders and was carrying it.”

“And finally when we came up to the house (and it had a veranda on it with a chair there), he threw the animal down and he sat down in the chair and he said, ‘My it is good to stretch yourself out here.’” And he said, that’s the word that I want for my version.

And I understand that the version reads, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever stretches himself out upon him, relies upon him, shall not perish but have everlasting life.” Faith is simply the reliance upon our Lord Jesus Christ’s sacrificial work which he has accomplished, and when that takes place, then God gives us this righteous standing by which we are justified.

If you’re here and you have never been justified, we appeal to you as an ambassadors of the Lord Jesus to come to him and receive this righteous standing which enables us to have acceptance before a holy and righteous God, now and forever.

[audio ends.]