



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 3:21-31

“The One Distinguishing Word, ‘And,’ the Conjunction”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] I must confess I did not really know exactly what this class would be, and I may have to make some modifications. They may not be noticeable to you, but nevertheless, I will in what I intended to say. I wanted to speak to you about Romans 3:21 through 31. So if you have your Bibles, turn to the Epistle to the Romans and we'll look at chapter 3 verse 21 through verse 31. I'm not going to have an opportunity to say really everything that I wanted to say, so I may have to jump around a little bit and that's not all together the reason, but that's part of the reason.

A professor someone has said is someone who talks in someone else's sleep. [Laughter] And I've had that experience too, and so for those of you, who want to have that experience, go ahead and start sleeping right now. I'll try to finish in maybe thirty or forty minutes.

What I wanted to say to you and I'm not sure I'll be able to say it in the time that we have, in fact I know I won't, but perhaps I can say the essence of it at least. What I wanted to say to you was to talk to you about the one distinguishing word. And the one distinguishing word as I understand it and in what I'm going to say to you is the word and. The conjunction, A – N – D, and. The Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century was a massive reassertion of the centrality of the triune God and the blood that was shed

on Calvary’s cross for redemption. That is the essence of what happened in the Protestant Reformation. It was there that the glory of divine sovereignty and the primacy of his grace in human salvation was reasserted. Now that doesn’t mean that it was not asserted down through the centuries, but only occasionally, and often in difficult and far away places, sometimes far off from what was happening in the world. But nevertheless, in the protestant reformation, that crucial truth of justification by faith according to the principle of grace alone was reasserted by Luther and Calvin and the others who took part in that brave reformation.

When you think of justification by grace through faith, you think of what Luther called the article of a standing or falling faith, *articulus Stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, the article of a standing or a falling church. G.C. Berkouwer, a modern day theologian, a Dutchman, has said that justification by grace through faith defines the preaching. In other words, if we’re really having Biblical preaching, it will be justification by grace through faith at its heart. Now that does not mean of course that every message will be on justification by grace through faith. But the essence of it will be there. Calvin said this is the main hinge on which religion turns, justification by faith through grace.

Now if you read the newspapers and if you read Christian newspapers particularly, the magazines and if you listen to the preaching that we often have to listen to on the radio or over the television, we are faced you will know, with a two fold attack on this priceless truth. We have an attack which has been going on for a long time, from Rome’s sacramental system. That is, that grace can only be conveyed to us through a sacrament. That raises a question, “Is a sacrament a work?” Now we don’t have time to talk about that, most of you in this room who are knowledgeable at all, you would know that a sacrament is a work. For example, if we’re justified by baptism, then we are justified through a work. For it is a work to go down to water, experience immersion or effusion or what ever your method may be, and come out expecting to have received forgiveness

of sins. That forgiveness would be through a physical act and therefore qualifies as a work.

Now we've had a good bit of that in evangelicalism recently with the document, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together.” And surprisingly has had favorable response from people like Chuck Colson, no theologian, Bill Bright, certainly no theologian, but surprisingly from a real theologian, Jim Packer. Evangelicals and Catholics Together has been essentially pressing for some form of if not union, some form of organizational oneness between Roman Catholics and evangelicals. Now to launch into that is not my purpose, but just to mention it, no doubt it's been mentioned here by the people who have spoken to you.

On the other hand, we have the Vineyard Movement and its neglect of biblical doctrine. And many of you are acquainted with the name, John Wimber, John Wimber has died. Others such as Jack Deere who was a student at Dallas Theological Seminary and a student while I was there and also was on the faculty for a while, teaching in the Old Testament department. That's on the other side of some of the difficulties that we have been seeing in the evangelical church.

But aside from all of that, I say these things just to remind you of things that have been happening about which you should be at least somewhat knowledgeable. The passage that we are looking at is one of Paul's ways of defining what it is to become a Christian. And what he says in this passage is not the only definition that we might have but it is one of the definitions that is valid. A Christian is an individual who has by the preaching of the gospel come to understand that Jesus Christ has satisfied the holiness and righteousness of a holy and righteous God with respect to those for whom he has offered his sacrifice. So that this passage is one of the ways of defining what is meant by Jesus Christ's saving work. What is meant by Jesus Christ and him crucified to put it very simply. Well that's the thing that Paul said he preached, Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Now it's part no doubt of the plan of God on the one hand and part also on the other hand of the subtlety of the evil one, Satan, God's enemy to make this issue something that requires a bit of brain work on your part, a bit of understanding, a bit of study to understand precisely what the gospel is. Now we know in the Bible that so far as the understanding is concerned, it doesn't depend on how wise we are humanly, because ultimately the gospel is a divine revelation. He speaks the truth and he opens hearts to receive the truth. And that is often just as clearly done with the individual who's never entered a classroom as it is with a person who spent his whole life in the classroom. In other words, to understand truth is fundamentally to receive by divine revelation the truth that is found in holy Scripture.

Now, the passage that we're looking at here, Romans chapter 3 verse 21 through verse 31, did I read it? I didn't read it? Well I'm not sure you could put the right emphasis on it. Well I'm going to read it now. One of the difficulties with old age, I didn't remember whether I read it or not to tell you the truth. [Laughter] I've been reading it a lot over the past week, thinking about what I was going to say to you and I came in expecting to have forty-five minutes to talk to you and I'm not going to have that time, so now I'm kind of free wheeling. So in chapter 3 of Romans verse 21 through verse 31, I'll read these verses so you will understand what I'm going to be talking about, what I have been talking about,

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all (Some question about that phrase,) who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the

present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Now obviously if you look at the section that I’ve just read, you will note that in verse 21 through verse 23 the apostle has said something about the manifestation of the doctrine of justification by faith. One of the best of the commentators on the Epistle to the Romans has said that this is the marrow of theology, and it is relief for those whose mouths have been stopped. Now a person’s mouth is stopped when he discovers that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ. For he naturally as a result of the fall in the Garden of Eden thinks, “If there is such a thing as salvation, it must be the result of our works, the good things that we may do, religious or other wise moral.” But when a person learns that good works, moral works do not bring him into the presence of the Lord God that is the beginning of new thinking. Because the Scriptures tell us of course that salvation comes through faith alone, through faith alone. But not through faith by itself, but through faith in an object and the object is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in his saving work, in his sacrificial work, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, I wanted to speak to you this morning, I’m not going to be able to do it because of the length of time but I wanted to speak to you on the subject of the one distinguishing word. And I’m going to speak it anyway. The one distinguishing word is the word and, A – N – D. In other words, are we justified by Jesus Christ and baptism? Are we justified by Jesus Christ and good works what ever they may be? But actually what Paul tells us is that we are justified through Jesus Christ’s work alone. Through faith alone, not faith in works, not faith in our Lord and his some special information about him that’s not clear in Holy Scripture. But the Bible tells us then that one word tells the story, faith in Jesus Christ alone. We say *Sola Fide*, by faith alone, *Sola Gratia*, by grace alone, *Soli Deo Gloria*, to God alone, that is to God who has arranged this method of

salvation, to him alone be the glory. Actually, we are saved *Sola Cristos*, by Christ alone, not by Christ and a priest, for he is the priest who’s offered the sacrifice.

Now the apostle tells us here that this justification by faith alone which someone has called the marrow of theology is manifested in verse 21 through verse 23,

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all (There’s some question about that phrase so we’ll just say to all) who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

Now if you look at this, you would immediately sense that moral man and his claims, or moral man and his mouth are stopped, for justification is not by morality. Morality, true morality can only follow salvation. So, justified by faith alone, the Bible describes this in various ways. Job describes us as vile, that’s applicable it seems to me. That’s what we are, we’re vile. Some of us viler than others, some of them seem according to human standards, to be just a little vile. But vile is not a bad word to describe us.

Isaiah calls us undone. Undone, that’s very applicable to. Jeremiah says we are black. Now that might be misunderstood in our political world today, but nevertheless, in the world to which black and green and white apply, black describes us, we’re black, we’re dirty. Sinful is Peter’s word. Paul’s word, well Paul agrees with Peter except that he says that he was the chief of these vile black sinners. So, the testimony of the word of God is not so great.

Now the testimony of today’s preachers is different however. I have a testimony that some of you might have read of, I know you’ve been exposed to it. But Robert Schuller is a well known preacher, and many of you are acquainted with him and with his work, crystal cathedral in southern California. He says “Reformation theology failed to

make clear that the core of sin is the lack of self esteem, the most serious sin is the one which causes me to say I am unworthy.” It seems to me like that’s one of the nicest things that a person could say, “I am unworthy.” But Schuller has turned it upside down. I may have no claim to divine sonship if you examine me at my worst he says, we agree with that. It’s true that every person possesses the dignity and value of an image bearer of God, but that dignity however is a dignity before man, it’s not a dignity before God. “God tolerates no self esteem, no self assertion, but only self despair,” those are the words of John Calvin. And it’s a good revelation I think, of what we really are.

It’s often said that Christ died for us means well we have lots of self worth, for he died for us. And that indicates our self worth. It was however, not something in us that moved God to provide an atonement; it was something in God that moved him. Because he wished to give us worth before him, it isn’t because we had self worth; it was that he might give us so. Well I don’t want to go too much into this, I’m sure that most of you here in this audience know all of these things.

The apostle in these three verses gives the manifestation of justification. Verse 21 through verses 23, I don’t have time to talk about other details of it, but in verse 24 and verse 25, the apostle goes on to describe what that justification is. By the way, when do we have to stop? About fifteen till?

[Comment from the audience]

[Johnson] Alright well go by. I haven’t been doing any preaching recently so I have lost my ability to time myself. But I’ll stop for you, don’t worry.

In verse 24 and verse 25, the apostle describes what justification is. He says more about being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Now I must say just one word about justified. To be justified is not to be or become inherently righteous. To be justified, for the verb *dikaioo*, is the Greek word. That word

is a legal term, usually used as a legal term in the apostle’s writings. And so it means not to be righteous, it means to be declared righteous in a court of law. In other words, it’s an official opinion from the judicial authority in Heaven. When a person believes in Jesus Christ, the decision has been made, he has been declared righteous. Just like recently in the election, ultimately, George Bush was declared elected, a legal decision. Dikaioo, that term is legal term, to be declared righteous. To be justified is to have a legal standing before God, not dependent upon any human judge at all. Declared righteous by virtue of what happened at the mercy seat. So, the apostle says, we are justified freely by his grace through what Christ has done, freely.

I love what R.C.H. Linski the Lutheran commentator has said about freely. HE says “This is pure, abounding astounding grace to be justified freely by his grace.” “Pure abounding astounding grace,” for nothing as the apostle puts it in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 8. “Awake my soul in joyful ways, sing thy great Redeemer’s praise. He justly claims a song from thee, his loving kindness, oh how free.” Some of the hymn writers did get it right. Dr. Chafer at the seminary was a song leader, for he was a musician, he had a musician’s degree. And that was something he loved to emphasize, the grace of God and also to expound it like a musician would expound something that he really enjoyed hearing.

The method, what is the method? Well it’s the Father provides a satisfaction of his justice by what the Son has done and secures our redemption from bondage. And the means of the appropriation is faith, for he says, chapter 3 verse 25, “whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness.”

Now I said that I wanted to talk to you about the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, and framed it in the term, the one distinguishing word. The one distinguishing word is the little word and, A – N – D. Because [indistinct] tells us that we are justified by faith in Christ, by faith alone. All other religions add something. We are justified by faith and baptism, we are justified by faith and good works, justified by faith



and and we may add our ands. So, when we talk about Christianity, we are talking about something that is truly abounding, astounding grace. The Father provides a satisfaction of his justice through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus. And by that redemptive work we are delivered from bondage. So, justified freely by his grace.

Now, in that little statement, in the little addition of the conjunction and, one moves from Christianity to everything else. Justified by grace through faith and, and whatever it may be destroys Christianity, because Christianity is bound up in sovereign grace. Justified by grace, amazing, how the apostle puts it through almost all of his writings, but you'll notice he says in verse 24, we're justified freely, justified freely. And it's done through that which represents the reality of the Old Testament mercy seat. Our Lord has satisfied the divine claims. The means of appropriation? Well he talks about it here clearly as being simply faith.

Now, the reason that it is necessary to emphasize some of these things so much is because we have so much contrary to it. Now, I want to read something for you to explain in a more theological way what I'm talking about. One of the greatest of the southern theologians was Robert L. Dabney. Incidentally, he was very instrumental in the founding of the University of Texas in his old age. But he was a Virginian and an outstanding Southern Presbyterian theologian. He has written theologies, he wrote a number of other books and had a clear understanding in my opinion of the doctrine of the grace of God. He has a paragraph on the difference between Reformation Theology and Rome. And I'd like to read a bit of it for you. He says,

“The doctrine of Rome is a masterpiece of cunning and plausible error. According to this doctrine, justification is rather to be conceived of as a process than an absolute and complete act. The initiation of this process is due to the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit bestowed first in baptism infusing an inworking a *fides formata*, that is a faith formed, in the soul. Free will is by itself inadequate for such an exercise, but yet neither

doth the Holy Ghost produce it without the concurrence of the contingent will of the believer. In other words, what God does is a work that is done in conjunction with the free will of man. If the free will of man is not a part of it, it doesn't work. (Now I think you can see immediately we are talking about something that's not a grace salvation, it's a works salvation. But anyway, he goes on to say,) so Rome's doctrine is synergistic, moreover the meritorious cause which purchases for the believer this grace of a fides formata, (that means faith having been formed,) is Christ's righteousness and intercession. But now the Agape love, but now the love with resultant good works thus inwrought by grace is the righteousness which is imputed to the believer for his justification. (In other words, the thing that is imputed to him for his justification is something that he himself has performed by the act of his free will in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit.”

That's the doctrine of salvation according to Rome. That's why Luther was so concerned about justified by grace through faith alone, echoing the words of the Apostle Paul. You see, my dear young friends, I know that a few of you are not young, what we're talking about is something that is at the essence of Christianity. Are we justified by faith alone really if we're justified by our free will's activity? No we're not. That's plain, that is it's plain in this class. But wait, let me correct that, it's plain in this class to me, and a few of you that I know real well, it's plain to you also. And probably to most of you that I don't know real well, it's probably just as plain to you also. We're talking about the essence of Christianity; we're talking about that which the apostle's died for, which the reformers gave themselves for, which true Christians have given themselves for down through the ages, justified by grace through faith alone.

And after all, it all comes down to one little word, justified by faith and the activity of our free will, justified by grace through faith and membership in the church and so on. What we're talking about then is really the reality of what Christianity is. And the fundamental fact about it is that when a person comes to realize that his salvation is due

to the Lord alone, and that he himself, not only did not take part in the saving act, other than to receive it. When he realizes that, he realizes just how much he is dependent upon divine grace, divine grace. And when that grips and individual, then he understands and also enjoys what Christianity really is all about. Justified by grace through faith alone, that’s why ultimately, you can never have finally a proud Christian. You can never, the Christian who understands that cannot possibly be a proud Christian.

I think my time is about up, and I didn’t even talk much about what I intended to talk about. I must make a confession to you, I’ve not been preaching much recently. Preaching is like anything else, it needs a little discipline, and I didn’t know exactly what you were going to be like, and I’m not prepared discipline wise for you, so I’ve just kind of talked along this morning. Trying to make this one point, that there is one distinguishing word between Christianity and all the other similar systems, and all the other opposing systems and it is the one word and. Justified by faith and what? Church membership, baptism, and ordinances, et cetera. That’s the difference between Christianity and everything else, justified by faith alone, no ands, no additions. That’s what the apostles fought for, that’s what the reformers fought for, that’s what true Christians have fought for down through the years, and that’s what my young friends, you who profess Christ ought to fight for too.

Thank you for listening to an old man this morning. I remember when I was sitting in class listening to some of my old men who were teachers that are now with the Lord. I can remember how I thought as I listened. Now that old man’s amazing that he’s up there talking and I would get things here and there and go out and think, when I get behind the pulpit, things are going to be a lot different. [Laughter] And here I am now in their position. Thank you for listening; let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the greatness of the saving work of Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee Lord that the one distinguishing word is the word and.

“The One Distinguishing Word, ‘And,’ the Conjunction” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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And we desire to add nothing to the work that Jesus Christ has done. We want Lord, to exalt Thee, the Triune God, the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross. Enable ...

**[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]**