

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 40 - JUSTIFICATION]

We have been looking at the atoning work of God specifically with regard to justification.

- ◆ What Christ has accomplished through His atoning work has fulfilled the three requirements needed for justification.
- ◆ 1) The death penalty demanded for the sin of the world has been satisfied through the death of the only one who is capable of fulfilling this role, the Creator of mankind, the Son of God who has joined Himself to mankind in His incarnation (Colossians 1:15-17, Mark 10:45).
- ◆ Consequently, the justice demanded by a holy God for mankind's sin has been served.
- ◆ 2) With His passive obedience of going to the cross on our behalf, Jesus acknowledged human sinfulness and God's right to judge and punish this sinfulness.
- ◆ In other words, Jesus repented for us and acknowledged God's right to punish our sinfulness.
- ◆ 3) While Jesus bore the weight of the world's sin when He went willingly to the cross on our behalf, God in turn, now imputes the righteous life Jesus lived on our behalf to us so that we are now considered as righteous as Jesus Christ.
- ◆ ***2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***
- ◆ This is called the "great exchange," the bargain of the universe. We gave Jesus our sin, and in return He gave us His righteousness.
- ◆ As a result of all this, the good news of the gospel is, ***Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).***

One has to marvel at this godly act, as no court in the land would allow this type of transaction to occur.

- ◆ There is no way a judge would allow an innocent person to substitute himself to accept the punishment of the guilty party.
- ◆ Yet this is precisely how God chooses to justify us. The judge sentences the guilty then steps around the bench and assumes the penalty on behalf of the guilty party.
- ◆ Here we see God in the ultimate act of love bearing in His own incarnation His own judgment on mankind.
- ◆ God Himself endures His own wrath against sin.
- ◆ What we see here is the breaking in of the new order of the kingdom of God, a system of justice accompanied by terms such as grace, forgiveness and mercy.
- ◆ As we have learned earlier, all of God's characteristics including anger and judgment are governed by "love."
- ◆ "Love" necessarily involves a relationship between parties, something sadly missing in man's system of justice where everything is kept on a strictly legalistic basis.
- ◆ But such is God's love for His wayward children, He has initiated a system of justice that not only sets them free from the demands of the law, but also demonstrates to those same rebellious children His unwavering love and commitment to them.

However this is not to say that God has suspended the demands of the law in order to come to this arrangement.

- ◆ Forgiveness and pardon has come at the supreme price, the death of the Son of God. Absolute judgment has been administered on the One substituted in our place.
- ◆ But this very fact introduces the other benefit of dealing with sinful humanity through grace rather than the law.
- ◆ While there is the unmistakable sense of joy associated with this good news for sinners, there is also the shame of knowing that our sin has caused the death of God.
- ◆ Love by its very nature is a choice. A response generated by fear of punishment, as occurred under the administration of the law is not "love," it is coercion!
- ◆ However the whole dynamic of the equation changes under the administration of "grace."
- ◆ Under "grace" we are dealing directly with a loving God who has already justified and reconciled us despite our sinfulness.
- ◆ The chances of a positive response of love on the part of sinners to this act of godly love and grace dramatically increases in this scenario as compared to living under the demands of the law.
- ◆ The usual result of living under the law is guilt and condemnation, while grace produces remorse, gratefulness and thankfulness.
- ◆ Let me share with you a story by Søren Kierkegaard that illustrates this dynamic.

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“Suppose there was a king who loved a humble maiden. The king was like no other king. Every statesman trembled before his power. No one dared breathe a word against him, for he had the strength to crush all opponents. And yet this mighty king was melted by love for a humble maiden. How could he declare his love for her? In an odd sort of way, his very kingliness tied his hands. If he brought her to the palace and crowned her head with jewels and clothed her body in royal robes, she would surely not resist – no one dared resist him. But would she love him? She would say she loved him, of course, but would she truly? Or would she live with him in fear, nursing a private grief for the life she had left behind. Would she be happy at his side? How could he know? If he rode to her forest cottage in his royal carriage, with an armed escort waving bright banners, that too would overwhelm her. He did not want a cringing subject. He wanted a lover, an equal. He wanted her to forget that he was a king and she a humble maiden and to let shared love cross over the gulf between them.” For it is only in love that the unequal can be made equal,” concluded Kierkegaard. The king, convinced he could not elevate the maiden without crushing her freedom, resolved to descend. He clothed himself as a beggar and approached her cottage incognito, with a worn cloak fluttering loosely about him. It was no mere disguise, but a new identity he took on. He renounced the throne to win her hand.

- ◆ A God who is “love” does not want cringing subjects. He wants equals so shared love can pass between them.
- ◆ Jesus made Himself like us so we could be made like Him.
- ◆ Mankind whether he likes it or not is inescapably implicated by love to their Savior, Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Jesus through His saving work has achieved salvation for every single human being.
- ◆ **“that if One died for all, then all died.” (2 Corinthians 5:14).**
- ◆ Each has been gathered up to receive the gift of salvation so we can share in the divine fellowship that exists in the very godhead itself.
- ◆ This inconceivable gift of God is held out there ready for the taking.

This ought to be wonderful news for all mankind.

- ◆ If the conditions for our justification before a holy God have been satisfied by the saving work of Jesus Christ, what does it mean for mankind?
- ◆ ***Romans 5:9-11 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.***
- ◆ What we learn in this verse is that “justification” leads to “reconciliation.”
- ◆ But unlike the limited forgiveness of sin that resulted in the offering of the Old Covenant atonement, this New Covenant atoning sacrifice has real power to forgive.
- ◆ Because of its limited power to justify, the Israelites, year after year, went back to living under the condemnation and resulting guilt of the law.
- ◆ However, now that true justification has been achieved through the covenant of grace, not only is total forgiveness real, but it also sets men free from the debilitating power of guilt that holds mankind in its grasp (Hebrews 10:1-22).
- ◆ ***Hebrews 10:16-22 “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”17 Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”***
- ◆ We are not just issued with a pardon for our sins, but God chooses to purposely blot out from His memory those guilty debilitating memories that we humans tend to hang on to.
- ◆ We humans have the unfortunate habit of handing the power of sin back to something God has utterly removed and forgotten.
- ◆ Jesus has liberated us from our guilty past and ushered in a new age, the age of reconciliation.
- ◆ In this new age, the past is undone, God puts the clock back or in the terminology of the prophet Joel, “He restores the years the locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25).

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- ◆ The atonement goat on which the sins of the nation were placed and then taken out and released into the wilderness is symbolic of how God now treats our sin and guilt.
- ◆ ***V.18 And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.***
- ◆ It is no longer necessary because God has chosen not to remember them.
- ◆ ***V.19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.***
- ◆ When Jesus descended into that awful hell of the cross under the final judgment of God, He brought to an end the power of sin and guilt over mankind.
- ◆ The age of the fallen creation is coming to an end, and the new age has dawned.
- ◆ This is why Paul can say, ***“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:1-2).***
- ◆ By accepting God’s judgment on our sinfulness, Jesus has satisfied the legal requirements necessary for the relationship between a holy God and His creation to be restored.
- ◆ However, the ultimate goal of atonement is not just to satisfy the legal obligations, it’s the restoration of the relationship, at-one-ment.
- ◆ This is the point where “justification” passes over into “reconciliation.”
- ◆ To go back to Kierkegaard’s story of the humble maiden, it’s about shared love passing between the two parties.
- ◆ Jesus’ incarnation (lowering Himself) and act of justification (making us right with God) has levelled the playing field to make it possible for mankind to respond to his gracious act of love.
- ◆ We will take up this subject of reconciliation next time.