

## Gaining Christ – Be Found in Him – Justification

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. <sup>8</sup>Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; (Philippians 3:7–9)

Church history has several moments when people who were quite religious came to a massive change. For many of them, it was the moment they understood the biblical doctrine of justification. Martin Luther was a man haunted by guilt, who had made a vow to be a monk during a lightning storm. Having tried all kinds of penance and fasting, his great change came when studying Galatians:

“My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement 'the just shall live by faith.' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.”

The same thing happened to John Wesley after a terrifying trip across the Atlantic and a long discussion with the Moravian missionary Peter Boehler. Wesley was transformed when he understood justification by faith. He writes in his journal, “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

The difference for these men, and many others is that they went from their own religion and righteousness, and crossed over into receiving and gaining Christ's righteousness.

That was not only the case for Luther and Wesley and Bunyan and others, but for the apostle Paul himself. Paul is giving an autobiographical section to once again teach the Philippians the Cross-centred, Gospel-centred, J-Curve Christian life. That's worthy Christian citizenship, and portray the gospel to the watching world. He showed it in Jesus in chapter 2. He pointed it out in Timothy and Epaphroditus. And now he is pointing it out in himself. The Philippians loved the pride, honour, status, and ambition of the Roman world. Paul shows them that Christianity does the opposite: in the gospel there is a humbling, an acceptance of death, so as to gain the reward, the resurrection of knowing Christ. That's how we live and serve in the church, dying to selfishness, to experience the gain of loving each other.

So from verse 4, Paul has shown that he has given up the boasts and honours that he could get as professional, elite religionist. He refuses the man-made gains of being Paul the Hebrew Pharisee, and writes them off completely so that he can gain Christ, because Christ is Christ alone plus nothing. Christ is of surpassing value, so nothing, no matter how prized that thing is, can or should get in the way of gaining Christ. He has died to what gets in the way of Christ, so that he may rise and enjoy gaining Christ.

But how do you gain Christ? What does that mean, and how do you get it?

This gaining of Christ, in Paul's theology happens in three ways: justification, sanctification, and glorification. For a believer, justification is past salvation, sanctification is present salvation, and glorification is future salvation. Justification deals with the penalty or punishment of sin: clearing you of guilt. Sanctification deals with the power of sin: making you more like Christ. Glorification will deal with the very presence of sin: placing you forever in Heaven with Him. Of course, all the other New Testament writers teach the same thing, but Paul is distinctive for how clearly he splits salvation into three areas.

In so many ways, some of the worst errors in Christian history have come from a failure to see either the clear distinction between these, or a failure to see the clear relationship between them. Ideas have consequences, and bad theology shows up in very practical errors.

Those who have not understood that justification and sanctification are distinct have veered into blurring the line between God's grace and man's obedience. The church in the West fell into this error fairly quickly and by the Middle Ages, the Christian life was a series of works you performed to get grace: baptism as an infant, weekly Mass, penance for sin, confession to the priest, observance of days, storing up extra merit by praying to the saints or buying indulgences. To this day, some theology teaches that justification is what happens to you not in this life but in the next, after having been purged of your sins for however long in purgatory, God then justifies you and you enter Heaven.

Even after the Reformation, some Protestants began mixing justification and sanctification by teaching that you are really only as justified as you are sanctified, so if you start going back, sinning, compromising, then you, as a genuine child of God, forfeit your salvation; you lose your justified status. The only way you can come to that conclusion is if you are mixing up and mingling those two.

The opposite error has been those who rightly understand the distinction between justification and sanctification, but fail to see the right relationship between them. They treat them like unrelated parts of the Christian life. From this error has come those who teach that once you are justified, it does not matter if you are never sanctified. If you have supposedly gotten saved, then the fruit of sanctified living is optional. If it never appears, too bad, but no problem, because to them justification is a one way, non-stop ticket to Heaven, and any mention of sanctification is adding works. These become loose in their living, casual in their worship, careless in their self-examination, because they have taken the doctrines of eternal security and failed to combine it with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Once justified, always justified, yes, but the truly justified identify themselves by being sanctified.

So this is not some curiosity for those who love systematic theology. This will have very practical effects in your life. Mix them up, and you will likely be a legalist, spending your time wrestling with assurance, penduluming between spiritual pride and despairing guilt. Fail to relate them, and you will likely be an antinomian, a lawless one; you will find sin abounding in you, false assurance growing, carelessness and irreverence strengthening and sins beginning to take deeper root in you. In both cases, you are not gaining Christ. The remedy for legalism and lawlessness is a biblical understanding of justification.

One commentator called these verses in Philippians "a small meteorite from Romans". It's as if some of the truths that are so grandly taught for multiple chapters in the book of Romans here shoot through the sky in a matter of a few sentences. And so while it might seem a bit artificial to split up Paul's sentence into separate messages, one on verse 9, one on verse 10, one on verse 11, think of it like filming a meteorite and then playing it back at super slo-mo, 2x slow speed so that we can see

very carefully the glories of Paul's theology.

Justification is the deep foundation of everything else. In just verse 9, we can identify three essential components of justification.

### **I. Justification Receives A Position**

that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in Him,

Be found in Him. This word means “prove to be, be shown to be,” “turn out to be,” or simply “to be in him”

The first thing Paul shows us is that justification is not something you do, it is a something you are given. It stands in contrast to all Paul has said about loss, losing, giving up. Justification is being found, being made something, being located. The word here for *found* is in the passive. In other words, it is something done to you, not something you do.

The initial experience in our Christian lives is God's act toward us. We can only receive it, accept it, yield to it. But we cannot engineer it, do it, make it. Justification is received. This is why baptism is such a great picture. In baptism, you are passive, though you are submitting to it and receiving it. Baptism is done to you, but you must not resist it.

The second thing we see is that justification is a position, not a practice. “Be found *in Him*” There is the position: *in* Christ. What does that mean? It means justification is not something you perform, it is a spiritual status you are given. You are placed in Christ. You come into union with Him. His sinless life and perfect obedience is yours, His death becomes yours, His resurrection is yours, even His ascension and seating in Heaven is yours. You now become hidden in Jesus, covered with Jesus, immersed into Jesus. The spiritual state of Jesus is yours.

We can think of the Israelite cities of refuge. These were cities set up in Israel for the person who accidentally killed someone else. To avoid revenge by the relatives, the manslayer could flee into one of these cities, and was there protected by law. As long as he was in the city, he was safe, and could not be harmed. The person who is placed in Christ is located within Jesus, and all His merits, and standing and status become his.

The word *Christian* occurs only three times on the New Testament. *Believers only* occurs four times. By far, Paul's favourite way of speaking of believers is to speak of those 'in Christ', or to speak of *saints*, which is also a positional word – people set apart, moved from the location of the world to be placed in Christ for God's use.

Christianity is not a religion where you achieve a certain position by your practices, by your deeds, you merit a certain status. Christianity is a faith where you are given as a gift a position in justification, and then out of that position come the practices, in sanctification. In the biblical faith you don't do, so as to be. You be, so as to do. You become what you are; you practice your position.

This is one of the hardest things for people to understand. The foundation of gaining Christ is not meriting Christ, earning Christ, deserving Christ. The foundation is being found in Christ: a gift.

So what is that gift? What does the gift of being found in Christ confer?

## II. Justification Receives True Righteousness

not having my own righteousness, which is from the law  
the righteousness which is from God by faith

Justification is about this word *righteousness*. In fact, English obscures this for us a bit. In the Greek, righteousness and justify are two forms of the same word., *dikaionyn* and *dikaio*. We'd have more consistency if we had an English word like *righteousify* or *righteousification*, because then we'd know that what God is doing is re-classifying us as righteous. Or if instead of translating the word as *righteousness*, they had translated it as *justice* or *just*.

So that leads us to the key question. What is this thing called righteousness? In the Bible righteousness means two things. One, it means to have a certain moral or ethical standing: to be innocent, or guiltless, or virtuous or godly. To be just is when the moral scales of your life are perfectly balanced. Second, it means to be in a right relationship with God, cleared and vindicated of anything evil.

If you want to gain Christ, you must gain this thing called righteousness or justice. And here Paul tells us that there are two kinds of righteousness.

Those two phrases are parallel, they form a kind of chiasm, with another phrase in between them. They are exact opposite of each other. The one is my own righteousness; the other is *the righteousness of God*. The one is *from the law*; the other is *from God by faith*. They are opposites in their nature, and in their source. The one is self-generated, based on external conformity to the law. The other belongs to God, comes from God, is given by God.

So there are two kinds of righteousness. One is phony, man-made, and therefore fake. The other is the real thing, from God and therefore true.

Now let's compare Paul's two kinds of righteousness. The first is a kind of moral standing that comes from keeping some kind of external standard. It is our own righteousness. We decide what we must do to be good enough for God, and then we keep that standard. We make the rules, and then keep them, and decide that this is good enough to be in a right standing with God.

But if you do this, you can't gain Christ. If you insist on giving reasons from yourself as to why God should accept you, then you disqualify yourself. Every reason you give is more self-righteousness, righteousness from some law you created and you kept. God tells us what he thinks of our righteousness in Isaiah 64:6:

<sup>6</sup>But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

Self-righteousness is odious and repugnant to God because it is a refusal. It is turning up our nose at God's perfection, and insisting upon offering our own works. To do this is an act of refusing to submit to God's righteousness.

<sup>3</sup>For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:3)

The second kind is not a standard we can keep. This righteousness is from God. In fact, it is the human righteousness of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup>For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor 5:21)

Now what is the ethical or moral status of Jesus Christ? He never sinned, and He perfectly kept God's law. And what is the relationship of Jesus Christ to God the Father? One of perfect acceptance and love. To have this righteousness counted towards you is to gain perfect moral standing in the sight of God, and to be in perfect, loving union with God.

When Martin Luther began understanding what he was reading in Galatians and Romans, he realised that the Bible was not talking about God helping us improve our own righteousness. He realised that the Bible was talking about an outside righteousness, a righteousness belonging to someone else, from someone else. The Bible was talking about Christ's righteousness.

He also saw that texts like this one did not mean that God was going to slowly cure you of your sins by infusing and imparting righteousness into you, and then finally write you a doctor's note, saying "justified". No, God was going to impute to you, credit to you, the righteous standing of someone else. This is not a doctor declaring you are now cured. This is a judge dropping all charges, clearing you and declaring you innocent based upon someone else.

This was the moment of John Bunyan's conversion: John Bunyan: "But one day, as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, Thy righteousness is in heaven; and methought withal, I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, as my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was adoining, God could not say of me, He lacks my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." (Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, 35-36)"

This is why some clever fellow when teaching children said that the word justified means "just-as-if-I'd never sinned". I have sinned, but to be justified is to be given a new status: just as if I'd never sinned.

The English words impute and impart sound very similar, but there is a world of difference between them when it comes to righteousness. To impart righteousness is to give it to the sinner, infusing it, changing him to sin less. But that is sanctification, the process of spiritual growth. What happens in justification is imputing righteousness. That's an accounting term: God counts the righteousness of one to be true of you. He changes your standing. That is why one of Luther's other insights was so key: *simul iustus et peccator* – all at once righteous and a sinner. Our status before God is just, while our transformation into the image of Christ is progressive.

Question, if imputation is where God declares that you are righteous, where in Scripture is there evidence that God re-imputes your sin to you? Is there a verse anywhere that speaks of God reversing your justification, taking back His verdict? Can you find the concept of unjustified or de-justified in Scripture? If so, how can a truly saved, justified person lose his or her salvation?

Paul says, I gain Christ and am found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is from the law, but by having the righteousness which is from God. Once I passively received that position of being in Christ, with that I received alien, outside, foreign righteousness, a perfect justice not my own but God's imputed to me.

That leads to the third question. How did you receive it, Paul?

### III. Justification Receives All This By Faith Alone in Christ

but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

We receive this righteousness by faith in Christ, it comes to us from God by faith. Faith is the act of trusting, humble, submissive, reception.

In contrast to the self-generated righteousness which a human can boast in, this kind of righteousness only comes to those who humbly receive it. Why must faith be the instrument to receive grace? Because faith is the only act of submission or yielding where we cannot boast. No one can boast when they receive a free gift. Faith is pure reception and submission.

Paul contrasts boasting and faith in Romans 4:

<sup>1</sup>What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." <sup>4</sup>Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. <sup>5</sup>But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, (Romans 4:1–5)

The reason why justification is by faith alone is because faith, rightly defined, is the moment of full surrender to the grace of God, the moment of full trust in His righteousness, the moment of complete transfer of merit from Christ to the sinner. It is the moment where the sinner repents not only of his sin, but also of self-reliance, not only of evil works, but of good works done in the flesh.

The very first mistake we make in the gospel is to ask, "What must I do?" "What work must I perform?" That's what the Jewish people asked Jesus: "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." John 6:28–29

Or similarly, the Philippian jailer asked "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup>So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:30–31)

What must you do? You must receive what Someone else has done. What must you do? Rest from your own works, and accept his finished work.

Our faith is not in our faith. Some people place their faith in a decision they once made. One of the great evangelical heresies is placing your trust in the memory of a decision you think you once made. Nor is our faith the righteousness itself. Our faith is not righteousness. God does not see faith and then regard it as your goodness.

No faith is joining us to Christ, and experiencing all His merits as our own. Very importantly, not only does faith refuse self-righteousness and hand over to God, it also shows that we trust God to be faithful and true. We believe we can rely on Him and that he will not fail us or change His mind.

Lord Congleton was a wealthy English nobleman who lived in the 1800s. He was a devout believer, a supporter of George Muller, in fact. He had many tenants on his estate, and had struggled to teach them the gospel or see them become Christians.

One day, he decided upon a plan that would illustrate justification, faith and unbelief. He gave a public notice that on a particular day, from nine o' clock in the morning to 12 o' clock in at noon, he would be in his office, and if any of his tenants or the people living on his grounds were troubled by debt they could not pay, they should come, with their bills, tell how much they owed, and Lord Congleton would pay them, and give them a receipt. The notice was put up all over the estate, and personally signed by him.

The tenants, suspicious, spent the intervening days trying to find out what plan Lord Congleton had to trick them.

On the appointed day Lord Congleton sat in his office with his steward. A crowd had gathered outside, and people were debating if it were all a hoax.

No one came in until at around eleven and old man who lived with his wife in the poor-house arrived. He had some debts which he wanted paid before he died, and he couldn't pay them. His friends tried to persuade him not to go, but he pointed to the notice on the wall, saying, "I know that that's his lordship's name and signature and his lordship wouldn't put his name to something that would deceive us"

He went inside, presented the bill and waited for the Lord Congleton.

'Do you really expect your debt to be forgiven?' asked Lord Congleton.

'Indeed I do, my lord,' was the reply.

'And why do you?' asked his landlord.

'Because your lordship has promised.'

"And do you trust my promise."

'Of course I do, my lord.'

'Why?'

'Because your lordship would not deceive a poor man.'

'But you are a good man, are you, industrious and hard-working?'

'Oh, my lord, your notice said nothing about that.'

'And so, believing the notice and finding no condition attached, you have come for your receipt?'

'Yes, my lord.'

Lord Congleton wrote the receipt and handed it to the tenant who waved the paper above his head and shouted, 'I knew you wouldn't deceive us. God bless your lordship.'

He was making for the door to show it to his fellow-tenants but Lord Congleton asked him to wait a few minutes till the hour struck, when the specified time ended at twelve noon.

At twelve o'clock he rushed out with the receipt, shouting, 'I've got it. My debt is cancelled.'

Other tenants then rushed to the office, saying, 'Here's my bill, and mine, and mine' But the Lord replied to them, "My friends, if you had believed my promise, and brought your bills in time, they all would have been paid. But you would not trust my word, and I can do nothing more for you now."

Faith alone says God alone can be trusted for righteousness. Not only does faith alone give all the credit to God for righteousness, faith alone gives God the credit for being truthful and reliable.

You want to gain Christ? You cannot keep your boasts, your self-righteousness, your trust in yourself, your back-up plans. To gain Christ is an absolute, ultimate commitment: total trust in Him, for a total imputation of His righteousness. He gets all the credit for being righteous and trustworthy. You get all the benefit: you gain Christ and His righteousness.

That's what we mean when we ask week after week, have you been saved? Have you accepted Christ? We don't mean are you religious the way Luther, Wesley and Bunyan all were at one time? They were all devout, church-going, praying. But each one was trusting, in some form, in his own righteousness. What we mean by those question is, have you been justified? Have you placed all your trust, and all your hope upon the person and work of Christ, and thereby fully expect salvation?