

The Bible and Catholic Salvation, #1
The Bible & Roman Catholicism
By Don Green

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Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

We're going to pause this series we've been doing on Sunday mornings from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7 for a week or two. For those of you that haven't been with us on Tuesday evenings, we have been doing a series called "The Bible and Roman Catholicism" in recognition of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation which is going to be on this Tuesday. It's increasingly been impressed upon my heart and upon my mind what a privilege it is to be a preacher of the word of God on such a magnificent occasion as that, and we have a very few copies of a cd album with the messages to date on this that are in the lobby on the round table out front. We invite you to take one of those. We didn't print too many of them. We can print more if these go out. I always wonder how many people are even using cds anymore because everything can be downloaded, but those are available and if you haven't been able to follow the series, we do encourage you to pick one of those up. We think the material is quite important for you to know.

And as we talk about this and as we've dealt with this series, I've tried to impress upon you the fact that we can make no mistake that eternal issues are at stake here. The consequences of the truth of which we are speaking from God's word will reverberate throughout all of eternity. There will be no end to the consequences of the truth of God's word on these issues. There will be for those that believe the Bible and trust Christ according to what is revealed in Scripture, there will be no end to the blessing and the perfection of bliss that we will know forever and ever, amen, throughout all of eternity. That will be the consequence for those who believe. For those who have trusted in the false system of salvation offered by the Catholic system, the consequences will also be eternal but they will not be consequences of bliss and joy and peace, it will be consequences of judgment for having entrusted themselves to a false Gospel. So we're mindful that as we teach these things that important things are at stake and to say that they're important is really to understate the matter.

Scripture states it plainly in Hebrews 9:27,

27 ... it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.

Hebrews 9:27, "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." There is infinitely more to the significance of your existence than what is happening in the four corners of time in which you live out your 70 years or whatever the case may be. The

reality of eternity bursts in on that whether people are conscious of it or not. There are consequences to life. There are consequences to your response to Scripture. There are consequences to your response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and God has stated it plainly so that no one could miss it: judgment is coming and that means that the most important question of them all, the only question that ultimately matters in life, is how can a sinful man or a sinful woman be right with God? That is the only question that matters because if you were king for 50 years over the most glorious earthly empire and then you died and went to hell, what would it profit your soul to have gained the whole world and yet to have lost your soul? Perhaps in terms that are more pertinent to each one of us here, when we realize that the struggles and the difficulties of this life and the sorrows and the rejection and the pain and the misery that sometimes accompanies our human existence is temporary when we realize that Christ has saved us for greater purposes that have yet to be unfolded and that will far transcend anything that we knew in this life, then we have a hope, we have a refuge that solidifies our heart that allows us to go through the trials singing with joy rather than crushed with discouragement. So all of these things really really matter.

How can a sinful man be right with God? And what we've done in the series, again for those of you that haven't had the opportunity to be with us so far, we have systematically compared Catholic teaching on the Pope, on Catholic tradition, on their Mass, and on Mary, to Scripture and we have shown conclusively from the Bible that those things are unbiblical, that they are false, and that they are a false ground of hope for everyone who trusts in them. Not only is it false and therefore leading men astray, what I want you to understand is that Catholicism is designed to rob glory from Christ and that is why it is such an offense and such a stench in the nostrils of God and in those who believe in Christ. It robs Christ of his glory. Think about it. Think of Christ as the eternal Son of God who came to earth, gave his life on the cross, was buried, resurrected and ascended into heaven and the glory of what his work and person accomplished, and Scripture says that he reigns as head over the church. But Catholicism comes and says, no, the Pope is the head over the church and pushes Christ aside and elevates the Pope in his presence.

They add Catholic tradition and they will give a head fake to the word of God but then they'll talk about their Catholic tradition being of equal importance to Scripture and that word in affirming the Old Testament and preparing the way for the New Testament, they pull down and make it equal to the things that they have made up over the centuries. In their Mass whereas Scripture talks about Christ and having made a one time, once for all sacrifice that was sufficient to cover the sins of everyone who would ever believe in him throughout all of time, Catholicism comes and says, no, and they attach their little figurines of Jesus onto their crucifix and say, "No, we need a Mass to continue that sacrifice," and they rob Christ of glory by elevating their Mass in his presence. And whereas the Bible says that there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, Catholics look to Mary and call her the Mediatrix, the female mediator, and that you pray to her and you ask her to rescue you in the hour of death.

And for those of you that haven't been with us, I want to say and I'm careful to say that as we are addressing this and as we are talking about these things, we are aiming the power

of God's word against Catholicism as a system. Individual Catholics are not our enemies. We love them. We would have them share in the same salvation that God has given to us as sinners and so this is not an attack on individual Catholics, it is an exposing of the system that is going on here and a call and a warning and a plea to those that are in the darkness of it and an offer to them, "Come out of that darkness which offers you no hope, which promises you no certainty of salvation. Come out of that darkness. Come out of the whole system that you have embraced or perhaps only known from birth, the only thing you've known from birth. Come out of that because there is one who is far superior to everything that you have ever been taught and we would have you know the blessing of Christ and the certainty of salvation and that's why we're doing this." It's not simply a historical commemoration of 500 years, it's a living reality that still matters today. We preach this more to our generation than we do to commemorate the past Reformers, but we also realize that we are standing on the shoulders of great men of the past who often laid down their lives for the sake of the things that we discuss here in peace this morning. These things are of great value no matter how you look at it.

And beloved, here's the thing, today and on Tuesday and it may bleed over a little bit beyond that, we're going to address the topic of "The Bible and Catholic Salvation." The Bible and Catholic salvation is our topic for today and for Tuesday. If you're able to join us on Tuesday, we'd love to have you. We have a large group that comes every Tuesday but there is always room for one more. Beloved, here's the thing: there is only one way of salvation and the Bible says that it is easy to miss. Jesus himself said in Matthew 7:13-14,

13 Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The Apostle Paul said in Galatians 1:8, addressing a form of perverted Christianity that was trying to add works to faith in order to achieve salvation and therefore writing under circumstances that were not that much different from dealing with modern day Catholicism. The Apostle Paul lowered his own boom on the false teaching of his day and said,

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

You see, we do not have the liberty, brothers and sisters, friends that are joining us perhaps for the first time, we do not have the liberty to say, "Well, they teach a different way of salvation," talking about the Catholics, we don't have the liberty to say, "They teach a different way of salvation but we are still going to regard them as brothers and sisters in Christ. I don't want to be too judgmental. God is the one who judges and so therefore I'm not going to be too strict on this." We don't have that option open to us if we have any desire at all to be faithful to God's word because Scripture says that a man is justified by faith alone, Romans 3:28. We're going to talk about all of this in the hour ahead.

Catholics do not teach the same thing about salvation and so whatever else we say about this as Catholics elevate all kinds of different things in opposition to Christ, whatever else we say about it, Scripture says there is one way of salvation and that means either the Catholics are right and we are wrong or the Bible is right and Catholics are wrong. There is no middle ground here. There can be no compromise. There can be no going back to Rome as so many people that would claim the name evangelical would have us to do today. There is no going back because Scripture says that these two things are mutually exclusive. There is a broad way and a narrow way and a lot of people miss the narrow way, Jesus said, therefore beware of who teaches you. Beware of false prophets, he goes on to say. There is only one Gospel and those who contradict the true Gospel, Scripture condemns to damnation and so this really matters. When you remember that the consequences are eternal and that Scripture says there is only one way of salvation, then we realize that the consequences of this are infinite.

Now, here's how we're going to approach this. I'm going to do it the exact reverse of how I've done the prior messages on Catholicism. What I've tended to do, my approach has been to lay forth Catholic teaching at the start of the message and then bring Scripture to bear upon it. I'm going to flip that and today this morning we're going to look at the biblical way of salvation and then we will on Tuesday look at the Catholic system and see how it compares to what we find from Scripture here today. We want to answer three really basic questions here today and I'll lay these out for you for those of you that are taking notes. By the way, that prompts me to remind, I've been encouraged that many people have taken me up on this, that I invite you to ask for my preaching notes because it's hard to get everything down in a message like this. It's hard to take everything down. I'm happy to share those, all you have to do is email us through our website and we'll be delighted to send those to you. Those are free and available so that you have all of the documentation of everything I've said throughout the entire series. I want you to know, I like to say this, I want you to know I'm not making these things up. It's all there in black and white documented for everybody to see who wants to see. You do not have to take my word for it. So for this morning we ask these three questions. 1. What is justification? What is justification? Secondly, why do I need it? And three, how do I get it? Simple questions. What is justification? Why do I need it? And how do I get it?

Let's dive into what God's word has for us here this morning. Point 1: what is justification? Now, I want to acknowledge up front that the word "justification" can be intimidating. It can be an intimidating term to come to grips with. I mean, after all, it has five syllables: jus-ti-fi-ca-tion. Five syllables, that's a lot. We're not used to using words that are necessarily that big just in general and certainly the world doesn't discuss justification and so if you're not familiar with Scripture, you might be tempted to say, "Well, how important could it be? Let's just talk about Jesus." But justification is a crucial term in the realm of salvation and it is essential to understand this in light of the series that we are doing on Catholicism. "To justify," the verb "to justify" comes from a Greek term known as dikaiōo. I like saying that. I like the "aioo" sound at the end of those words and related Greek terms like it. It's a word group that is used to 208 times in the New Testament so that gives you a sense of its importance. To be mentioned over 200

times in the New Testament, we have the idea there is something important to pay attention to here. And just to give you a couple of definitions, justification is a legal term as it applies to salvation. It is a legal term which means this: that God declares sinners righteous in the sight of his law. Justification is an act of God, not an accomplishment of man. Justification is something that God does, he does in an instant, and it is a declaration that he makes. It is a legal verdict that is applied to the soul of a man on grounds that we'll discuss in a moment.

Justification means that God's law has been completely satisfied and if you'll turn to the book of Romans 4, we want to take a look at a key passage that we'll bounce off of a couple of times this morning, Lord willing. Here in this section of Scripture, the Apostle Paul has talked about the wrath of God, the judgment of God, and the fact that salvation and justification is found by faith alone. Look at Romans 3:28 as we start here. He says,

28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

And having established that principle, he illustrates it with a couple of examples from the Old Testament. He talks about Abraham in chapter 4, and also talks about David later on.

Now, look at chapter 4, verse 1. Abraham who was in a sense the forefather of the Jews, Paul raises him and uses Abraham to illustrate his point. He says in chapter 4, verse 1,

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

And then Paul goes to Genesis 15:6 and says where was it that Abraham was declared righteous, verse 3,

3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Abraham believed the promise of God and God credited him with righteousness. That was when Abraham became a believer. Now in verse 4, Paul goes on to say,

4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

If you work for something, it's not a gift, it is a wage that is paid to you. Paul says but salvation is not a wage for something done, it is a gift given apart from merit. In fact, it is a gift given in the presence of demerit.

Look at what he says now in verse 5 and these next four verses are really key for us. Paul says in Romans 4:5,

5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

Do you see it? Apart from works. That's essential. Verse 7,

7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. 8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account."

Now, to look at those four verses in kind of a global perspective, and overall view, there are two aspects to justification, two aspects to being right with God. First of all, righteousness is credited to our account before God and our sins are forgiven, our sins are pardoned. You must always think about justification in that twofold way. God forgives all of our sins past, present and future, and then he assigns to us, he credits to us, he accounts to our benefit, he imputes to us, all of those being synonyms for what we are saying, he imputes to us righteousness and we'll explain this more in a moment.

Louis Berkhof defines justification in this way, he says justification is that legal act of God by which he declares the sinner righteous on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Christ. And notice something very very important. This goes to the key of everything. Look at Romans 4:5 with me again. Who is it that God justifies? Who is it that God justifies? He justifies the ungodly. He justifies us not after we have lived a life of good works and he says, "Okay, you've passed the course. You've done the test. I declare you righteous based on what you have done." The time at which God declares a sinner justified is while that sinner is still ungodly. That's why it is such a gift. It is a gift that is not earned on the basis of prior performance. He justifies the ungodly when the sinner believes in Christ and so that is crucial to understand. Justification is a legal verdict in the sinner's favor delivered by God as a gift of grace, not as a reward for something that he has done rules or rituals that he has kept. Justification is God's legal verdict on the life of a man that says, "I hereby declare you righteous in the sight of my law." That's what justification is. It is a legal verdict, not an inward change. There are other aspects of salvation that go to the inner change that a sinner undergoes. Justification is not about that. It is about a legal declaration by God, "I view this sinner now as righteous in my eyes." Because – here you go, bleeding over into things that I'm going to say on Tuesday – because it is God's verdict, it cannot be reversed. Because God is the Judge and he is the final authority, when he declares a sinner righteous, nothing can overturn that verdict.

Look over at Romans 8 with me. Romans 8. When God saves a man, what is there left to be said? Romans 8:31,

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

What does it matter what anyone else says? Or stated differently, who could come and overturn God's verdict? Where is the Supreme Court above God that sits in judgment of his verdicts, of his declarations? There is none.

Verse 32,

32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns?

If God has justified us, there is no one left to condemn us, there is no one left to overturn the verdict that is in our favor. Justification is God's legal verdict, "I declare this sinner righteous in my sight."

Now that's what it is, now let's unpack what leads up to it a little bit. Point 2: why do I need justification or why do you need justification? I'll be honest with you, I have justification. It's not that I need it now, it's just a rhetorical device to ask the question. You are asking this to yourself, "Why do I need justification?" That's the point.

Why do you need justification? Here's the thing, beloved. We're talking about things upon which eternity hinge here and I just have to highlight that and emphasize that to you so that you understand how important it is because I realize that as you're sitting, it's easy for your mind to drift in and out, maybe you're tired or whatever. I get that but this is a place where you really need to pay attention because the things of which we are speaking here today are the pathway to eternal life and eternal blessing for you and you must understand these things in order to come truly to Christ, in order for your sins to be forgiven, in order to be rescued from eternal damnation. So you must know these things. We're not up here talking about temporal earthly matters about how you can get along better with your coworkers at your job. That by comparison doesn't matter. That's not important in comparison to this. This is what happens to your soul when you die, where you will live forever and ever. That's what really matters. Why do you need justification? Here's the thing: justification addresses the pressing matter of your standing before God. How does God view you. What is your relationship to God. What will God do with you when you are in his hands in judgment. Jonathan Edwards, of course, preached perhaps the most famous sermon on American soil, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." You are a sinner. What's going to happen to you when you are in his hands?

Now, I understand that a lot of people don't want to talk about the wrath of God, don't want to talk about sin. It's uncomfortable. They are afraid people will leave if they preach on this and people say, "I'm not here to preach the wrath of God, I'm just here to encourage people." Well, great, encourage them all the way until they drop into hell. That's a great ministry to have, Joel. You can't know these things and understand them without feeling some measure of passion in your heart. Not just me, you. You see, my friends, the Bible says that God is angry. The Bible says that God is angry.

Look at Romans 1. Why do you need justification? Well, let's start with the fact that God is angry. He's angry about something. In Romans 1:18 it says,

18 ... the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

God takes offense, and rightly so, when men reject his righteousness and practice ungodliness. God is offended by that. It angers him. It invokes his wrath and anger against those who would commit such cosmic treason against his reign in the universe.

Look at it again with me. Let's not pass over this too quickly because this is why we all need justification, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." Now I imagine someone saying, "Hey, wait, wait, wait, whoa, whoa, whoa, you're saying that about me? I have an objection to make. I've never killed anybody. I've been faithful to my wife. I've never told any major lies. I'm a pretty good guy. Well, why are you talking to me about the wrath of God?" Here's the problem, beloved, is that when a man talks that way, he's comparing himself to the wrong standard. He hasn't looked at the holy law of God and see that he falls miserably short. He hasn't seen clearly that Jesus said that your angry unforgiving spirit is as bad as murder. He hasn't seen that Jesus says that your lustful thoughts toward others are as bad as actually committing the physical act of adultery, Matthew 5. He hasn't considered and taken into account that God looks on the heart and that God sees the inner man and evaluates a man based on what he finds there. You see, sinners are so deluded, the population in general just views God so lightly and with such indifference and says, "Look, I compare pretty good to my fellow man, I'm going to be okay." Well, that's just the wrong standard. The standard is the high holiness of God and what he declares in his word. So if you think you're a pretty good person, I can tell you that you've never understood the first thing about the Bible or about the biblical way of salvation.

Look at what God finds offensive in verse 21. He says,

21 ... even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Do you know why God is angry? Do you know why God is wrathful toward men? It's because they do not give him the honor he deserves as God even though he has revealed himself in the heavens and in his word, and they do not give thanks to him. They live ungrateful vis-à-vis God. They don't even think about him, let alone to give thanks to him and say, "God, everything that I have is a gift from you." James says that every perfect gift comes from the Father down from heaven from the Father of lights.

You see, men are indifferent to, perhaps some of you don't really care about, don't even think about the fact that you don't consciously honor God for his glory. You don't consciously thank God for all of the gifts that he has given and the way that he has

revealed himself and the kindness and the mercies that he shows to you which are new every morning. You don't even thank him for it. You may not think that's a big deal, God does. Scripture does. It says God is who he is and he has been great and glorious and gracious to you. You should honor him and give thanks to him. Do you do that? The sinner who is thinking rightly is humbled before the proper standard and says, "Do you know what? I don't. No wonder God is angry with me." Can you imagine being in the presence of an earthly king in all of his royal majesty, being a subject to an earthly king and he is right there in the room with you and you look at him and you turn away from him, you dishonor his sovereignty, you dishonor the earthly majesty of it, you don't give honor to the one to whom rules over your realm? What's a king going to do with something like that? That's a great offense against the crown. Well, multiply that by infinity and you start to see something of the magnitude of the treason that every man, woman and child is guilty of against God and the guilt of that is universal. It extends to every man, woman and child.

Look at chapter 3, verse 19. We have so often referred to verses 10 through 12 that we'll just assume them: there is none righteous, none who understands, none who does good, not even one. Well, add verses 19 to 20 to the mix. Again, remember we are answering the question why do you need justification? Chapter 3, verse 19 says this,

19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

Your works cannot save you and the word of God, the law of God reveals that plainly. All the law of God does is reveal your guilt, your failure to obey and glorify God in the way that you should. Jesus said, if you want to go by the words of Jesus, what did Jesus say the greatest commandment is? What did he say? You know. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind, and your neighbor as yourself. Love God with everything that you are and none of us have done that and God finds that offensive. God assigns guilt on the basis of that. Why do you need justification, my friend? You need justification because it is all about guilt under the law. God has declared you guilty due to your sin.

Now, guilt is universal. That's why you need justification. Let's take it a step further. The fact that you are guilty is no small matter. This is not an incidental thing like the color of car that you decide to buy. Romans 6:23 says that the wages of sin is death. Ezekiel 18:4 says the soul that sins must die. So all of a sudden we are face-to-face with a bursting thundercloud of judgment hanging over our heads ready to burst loose at any moment, and we realize that we are defenseless against the righteous lightning bolts of the judgment of God, speaking metaphorically.

The Bible explains what the consequences of death and judgment are. In 2 Thessalonians 1, I'm just going to read it, 2 Thessalonians 1:7 through 9 says this,

7 ... the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

That's the sad tragic destiny of everyone who is not justified by God. There is this eternal destruction that awaits. And look, those of you that are preteen, in your teens, maybe your early twenties, and you think all of life is ahead, "I don't need to worry about this for 50 years." Look, you had better worry about it now. You had better take this to heart and pay attention now and not presume upon the fact that God will necessarily give you another opportunity to respond to the Gospel when it is presented to you.

Do you know something, my friends, my unsaved friends that are in the room, over the live stream, subsequent media? Those of you that say, "I'm going to deal with this later. I like life the way it is right now. I don't want Christ messing it up. I don't want to repent. I'll do it later." You're making a fatal assumption in that. You're assuming that there will be another time. You're assuming that later down the road your heart will be softer than it is now. What makes you think that would ever happen? The longer the clay is baked under the sun, the harder it gets. Well, if the sun is softening the clay of your heart to respond, you need to respond now and not assume that if you walk away and harden your heart against it, that you'll have another opportunity in the future or that you will be more concerned about your soul later on that you are right now. That's foolishness. No one should think that way. No one should assume anything about that they will be more inclined toward God later on. The more you harden your heart now, the harder your heart will be and more difficult to penetrate later on, humanly speaking. So don't make that mistake. I'm speaking for the good of your eternal soul as I say these things.

Why do you need justification? You need justification because you need to be delivered. You need to be saved. And do you know what you need to be saved from? It's not often said this way, sometimes it is. Do you know what you need to be saved from? Do you know who you need to be saved from? You don't need to be saved from a sad life. You don't need to be saved from difficult circumstances. You don't need to be saved from depression. That's not what you need to be saved from. That's all earth focused. You should think about your deliverance why you need justification this way and this way only: you should be thinking, "I need to be delivered, I need to be saved from God. I need to be saved from God because God is angry with me over my sin." That's why you need justification. God has declared judgment on you already, has revealed his wrath against you already, and you need to be delivered from that. You need God and God alone to reverse the verdict of condemnation that is presently on your soul. You need God to declare a verdict of pardon and righteousness in your behalf. That's the only thing that can save you, is if God would graciously do that.

Well, that should lead naturally in everyone's mind to the third question here today: how do I get justification? How do I get justification? How do I take this promise of which

Paul has spoken that we saw in Romans 4 of a full pardon from sin and an imputation of righteousness that satisfies the justice halls of God, how do I get that?

Well, let's address it this way at the start. It is the sinner's impulse, it is the thought of every natural man initially to think that he can do it himself. "I'm going to make a resolution. I'm going to decide right now I'm going to be a better man going forward." Good luck with that. Good luck with that. Some of us can't even stop at three potato chips, what makes us think we can reverse the course of our soul, right? "I'm going to stop speaking hard things to my spouse," and 15 minutes later, that lasted 15 minutes, right? Don't you see if you reflect honestly on your life how little power you have? That you have no power whatsoever to change your standing with God but just even on a human level, haven't you seen that your efforts at self-discipline yielded nothing? How many of you, let's approach it this way, this is October 29 as we are preaching today, how many of you even remember the New Year's resolutions you made on January 1? How many of you even remember them? That small fraction of you that even remember, how many of you have kept them? Your resolve is nothing. Your will cannot save you. It is the sinner's impulse to try to make himself right with God and it is the heart of folly to do that. That is foolishness. Scripture says that you are dead in your trespasses and sins. A dead man can do nothing to reconcile himself to God. Scripture says that Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving. You know, whatever else we say about Satan, he is a supernatural power opposed to men coming to salvation. You are under the darkness of your own heart, the deadness of your own sin. You are under the domination of Satan himself in addition to being under the wrath of God. What makes you think you can do the first thing, lift the first finger in favor of your own soul in any way that would accomplish your deliverance from the wrath of God? What makes you think that? You see, you're foolish in your pride, my unsaved friend, when I address you.

Let me just say this: it is not unloving for me to tell you these things. It is an act of love for someone to open the Scriptures and tell you the truth about yourself and the truth about God. If you reject it and say, "Well, that offends me," you're walking away from the very thing that would save your soul. Why would you do that? It would be like going to a doctor and the doctor says, "Look, you've got cancer but we can cure this." "Doctor, it offends me that you say my body is sick! I'm leaving!" And you turn on your heels and you snap your way out. "That Doctor says I'm sick. Can you believe that? I feel sorry for that doctor, that he speaks that way to men and doesn't tell them that they are healthy and everything is going to be okay." That's insanity, isn't it? Well, multiply insanity by infinity and you get the utter incoherent nature of a response that rejects something simply because it offends you in the spiritual realm.

Scripture says over and over again that a man cannot save himself. A woman cannot save herself. And that impulse, in fact let's put it this way, that impulse to try to save yourself by being better or by denying the judgment of God and saying, "I'm actually a pretty good person. I think God will take me in when it's all said and done." That impulse is actually a further manifestation of the dark sinfulness of your own heart because as you say those kinds of things, you are rejecting the one revelation of God in the true Gospel. God says you can't save yourself and you say, "I think I will." It just multiplies the guilt

and rebellion to even think that way. Scripture says Romans 3:20, we just saw it, "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight." Isaiah 64, "all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away." Think of yourself, Scripture speaks about your life this way as being a vapor that quickly passes away. Think about yourself and your claim to righteousness as a puff of smoke in a hurricane wind. Poof, it's gone. It doesn't exist. It's carried away where it can never be found again. You have no chance. You have no opportunity with God if you try to approach him on the basis of your own goodness and obedience. That does not exist in the courtroom of God.

What does that mean? Is all hope lost? Well, yes and no. Yes in the sense of yourself, yeah, all hope is lost. You have no hope within yourself to fix this situation. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who realize that they are spiritually bankrupt." God's word, my friend, I realize this is a hard message to hear but do you know what's a lot harder than hearing a hard message on a Sunday morning in 2017? Do you know what's a lot harder than that? What's a lot harder than that is being in hell forever. That's hard and there is no relief to it. So what this all means is that if you are going to be saved, if you are going to be justified, you must look outside of yourself. You must look to resources that do not belong to you if you would be delivered from the wrath of God.

Do you know what the good news is? God has made the way. God has made the way. He has provided the way of salvation. In humility and great love for us, Jesus Christ became a man. The eternal Son of God left the glories of heaven in order to come to earth. Scripture teaches that he lived a perfectly obedient and sinless life that fully answered the demands of the law of God. And as you know, every one of you, as you know, Christ voluntarily went to the cross of Calvary and offered up that perfect innocent life, offered himself as an innocent sacrifice to pay for the penalty of sin and God accepted that sacrifice as shown in the resurrection.

Look at 2 Corinthians 5:21. Remember, God assigns guilt to your account. 2 Corinthians 5:21. Oh, these words are so sweet and I trust in the work of the Spirit of God in your heart that they will ring with a renewed and deeper and broader sound of glory in your ears in light of what we've said here today. Scripture says,

21 He made Him [meaning God made Christ] who knew no sin [there is that sinless life] to be sin on our behalf [where, at the cross], so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

You see, justification brings what we call a double imputation, a double reckoning. Your sin reckoned to Christ at the cross where your sin was punished in full. Jesus said, "It is finished. Paid in full." And when a sinner believes, truly believes in Christ, God graciously supplies them the righteousness of Christ on their account. Having imputed their sin to Christ at the cross, in justification God imputes the righteousness of Christ to your account. Do you know what the righteousness of Christ is? Perfect. Absolutely impeccable. It satisfies everything that God requires. God laid sin on Christ and punished

him as if he were guilty of all the sins committed by everyone who would ever believe in him. That's why his suffering is such a sacred act. That in voluntary love and self-sacrifice, Jesus as it were, said, "Father, lay it on me. I accept the blame. I accept the guilt. Even though I didn't do it, Father, I accept it. Punish me on their behalf."

That's what 1 Peter 3:18 says. Look at 1 Peter 3:18 with me. This act of substitution, Christ standing in our stead in our place at the cross. 1 Peter 3:18 says,

18 ... Christ also died for sins once for all, the just [the just one being Christ] for the unjust [being us], so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

Beloved, imputation is another word that isn't part of our normal everyday vocabulary; we'd all be better off if it was. But God imputed your sin to Christ at the cross. He counted your sin to Christ. He reckoned it to Christ and punished him there. The stroke fell on him. And in justification, God takes that perfect righteousness of Christ that satisfied everything that he required and says, "I'll as a gift, I will count that righteousness to your benefit, to your account. I will deal with you as though you had lived the perfect life of Christ because Christ suffered and paid for your sin as though he had done it, even though he hadn't." So God gives you a gift and treats you as though you had done something that you hadn't. Why? For the sake of his Son.

So how do I get this justification? In his life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has the answer for the greatest need of your soul. You can be justified in God's sight. The vital question then in light of what we've said here, in light of the cross of Christ, in light of his resurrection, the vital question is this: how do I get that? How do I receive that? How can I find that? How can that gift be made mine? It's the only question in life that matters. If you get this right, nothing else matters. If you get this wrong, nothing else matters. Nothing else helps. Nothing else compensates.

We have already seen to get this gift of justification cannot be something that you do. It cannot be based on your works. Go back again to Romans 4. This passage is important enough to read it twice. We'll start at verse 4. Romans 4, beginning in verse 4,

4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

You can't work for it. Verse 5, but the blessed contrast introduced by the word "But." A contrast. In contrast to working and receiving it as something that you deserve, verse 5,

5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. 8 Blessed [a divinely privileged, in a

position of divine favor is this man] the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.

How do you receive justification? You receive it by faith. You do not work for it. As I've already said, if you try to work for it, you make the situation worse. You walk further away from God when you say, "I'm going to try to earn my salvation."

So you are justified by faith and that means that the million dollar question is: what is this faith? What is this faith? Well, let's approach it in a couple of different ways supported by Scripture. Faith, beloved, means this: it means that you rely on Christ alone for your salvation, Christ alone for your merit before God and on nothing of yourself. You receive justification as a gift of undeserved favor from God.

Look at Romans 3:21, and all of this setting up things that we'll talk about on Tuesday in the way that the Catholic Church violates this very basic principle. Romans 3:21,

21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe [apart from works, faith, belief, trust, receiving] for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

Verse 28, actually verse 27,

27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded.

Listen, listen, listen: no one is going to be in heaven taking credit for anything that they did that contributed for them being there. There will be no one in heaven saying, "Do you know what I did to get here?" No one will be there saying that because that is a boast, "I did my part." Verse 27 says, where is boasting? It is excluded.

By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Look at Romans 10:8. You see, when the Gospel is truly preached, we're not calling on men to work to receive it, we're calling them to believe in Christ to receive it. It's not about moral reformation, it's about being born again because you cannot save yourself. It's about receiving a gift from God that you could never earn, never deserve. What could you possibly do that would merit, that would reward the gift of eternal life and blessing in heaven forever and the righteousness of Christ applied to you and all of your sins pardoned forever never to be brought up again by God? What could you do that would deserve that? A 10 minute daily devotion carried out faithfully? Giving a guy on the street a \$20 bill? Do you think you could buy your salvation for handing somebody a \$20 bill? How about \$50? How about \$50? Would God be impressed with that? How about

\$100? Carry it all the way through, beloved. Nothing could deserve the great gift of salvation in heaven forever, therefore, you have to give away, put away any thought that, "I can do something to deserve it." Look, if there was a work to do to deserve it, it would be laid out clearly in the pages of Scripture. Scripture says works can't save you and, therefore, stop thinking about trying to do it on your own. Stop making up your own standard of righteousness. There is only one standard that matters and that's the standard of God and the standard of God is only satisfied in Christ and in Christ alone.

Romans 10:8. What does it say?

8 ... "the word is new you, in your mouth and in your heart" – that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

The promise of Scripture based on a response of faith and faith alone.

10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Faith means, let me give you a couple of definitions: one short in my own words, a longer one in someone else's words. Faith means that you receive Christ and all of his work on your behalf and you rest in him. It means that you cease trying to earn your salvation because you know that Christ has paid it all. "Christ, I come to you as a guilty soul. I come to you knowing that I cannot earn my salvation. I come to you believing your promise to save me if I believe in you. Lord, I turn from sin. I turn from this world. I come out of the false religion of Catholicism and I come and I embrace you and you alone." And you rest in him. The rest is a crucial aspect of it saying, "Lord, I understand you have satisfied God completely. There is nothing left to do for me to earn favor with God, to earn the verdict." You receive Christ and you rest in him. You yield to Christ, you bow before him and you are satisfied in him and that's accompanied with a sense of relief, of trust, of wonder, of love, of gratitude, all mixed together in seed form in that initial act of faith that says, "Lord, I see it and I trust you and I rest right here."

J. C. Ryle puts it this way. Bear with me, it's a little bit of a longer quote but I want you to get this because I would love for you to go to heaven with me, with others in this room that know Christ. That's the only thing I care about right now. J. C. Ryle puts it this way, "True saving faith is an act of the whole inner man. It is an act of the head, heart, and will, united and combined. It is an act of the soul, in which, seeing his own guilt, danger, and hopelessness, and seeing at the same time Christ offering to save him, a man ventures on Christ, flees to Christ, receives Christ as his only hope, and becomes a willing dependent on Him for salvation." Continuing the quote, "True faith has nothing whatever of merit about it, and in the highest sense cannot be called a work. It is but laying hold of a Savior's hand, leaning on a husband's arm, and receiving a physician's medicine. It brings with it nothing to Christ but a sinful man's soul. It gives nothing, contributes nothing, pays nothing, performs nothing. It only receives, takes, accepts, grasps, and

embraces the glorious gift of justification which Christ bestows, and by daily acts renews that faith."

The one who receives Christ like that receives justification. The one who receives Christ like that receives a perfect standing with God that is permanent and can never change. It can never be reversed. If God has declared it, he will not reverse himself because he cannot contradict himself and there is no one higher than God. Scripture has laid forth before you the way of salvation, the way that you can be reconciled to God today in the person and work of Christ alone, by faith alone. Now look, it's humbling. It takes away our pride. It's a recognition and acknowledgment someone else has to save me because I can't save myself, and it's the deathblow of pride in your heart to realize, "I was a ruined sinner but Christ saved me. He gets all of the glory. I get none. And do you know what? I like it that way."

In justification, the law previously condemned you. In Christ, God delivers a verdict of complete and irreversible pardon. And yet, beloved, in some of the songs that we sing don't fully bring this out the way that they should or could. The verdict goes beyond mere forgiveness. In justification God doesn't simply restore you to a position of innocence, God gives you a status of perfect righteousness, that you have satisfied all that he requires and that verdict is secure because it rests on the merit of Christ, not on your good works. Salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone.

That raises two vital questions as we close and I am almost done here. First of all, in the context of our series, "The Bible and Roman Catholicism," we ask this question: does Roman Catholicism teach salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone? I'll answer that one: no, not at all. They don't. We'll show that on Tuesday. The second question is one that only you can answer. I can't answer it for you: do you trust in Christ alone and nothing good in yourself? Forget about the person sitting next to you. Don't think, "You know, I know someone who needs to hear this." Answer the question yourself: are you trusting in Christ alone for your salvation? If the answer is yes, then your heart should burst with joy and gratitude. "O God, thank you the wrath of God has been completely satisfied against me never to be raised again. I am at peace with a holy God. How great is that?" If not, come to Christ and be saved, won't you?

Next Sunday, I hope to address a passage from James 2 that might seem to make this more complicated. We'll address that next Sunday and discuss a little more the change that accompanies justification in the life of a believer. I hope you can be with us. God bless you.

Let's pray.

In Christ alone, O God, our hope is found, and in Christ alone is our glory. Father, we really tremble at the magnitude of the things that we have discussed here today. Who is adequate to talk about eternal salvation and the holiness of God and the judgment of God? But Father, we trust that through your word somehow you have adequately

conveyed this so that it would be settled in the minds of your people, perhaps some things of faith clarified for them. And for those that have not yet believed in Christ and do not have this great gift of justification, Father, please silence the work of pride in their heart. Please, O God, hinder the work of Satan that would continue to blind them. Please, O God, by your Spirit open their eyes, incline their will, incline their understanding to the truth of the things that have been said. There is no other place for them to go than what has been shown in your word today. Please, Father, those that are under the sound of our voice with whom we move and live and have relationships that are still in darkness, please Lord, work in their heart that this all might be true for them as well.

God, we can't do it on our own. No man can redeem his brother by any way and he might as well stop trying. God, not only are we dependent on Christ to believe in him by faith for salvation, we are utterly dependent on you to do the work in the heart that is necessary to make that happen. So for friends present and friends outside, friends over the live stream, Father, through this message, through like messages preached around the world by those who also love Christ and love your word, send forth your word with power. Lord, we realize we live in a very dark age. We ask for a supernatural work of your Spirit to bring the light of Christ to bear, to bring a sweep of revival as you have done in the past, as you have done on this soil, O God, in times gone by as we look back and we remember the times of the Great Awakening where people fled to Christ in response to your word. God, we ask for something like that, that you would honor your word, that you would honor your Son, that you would honor your servants of five centuries ago, Father, by the power of your Spirit bringing men to saving faith in Christ and in Christ alone. That's what we ask for, Father, as we close this time in Jesus' name. Amen.

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