

Justification From Eternity

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Bible Text: Romans 8:33; Revelation 13:8

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Let's read Romans eight, first of all, and then Revelation chapter 13. There is one verse here that I want to read.

Let me tell you what I would like to speak on this morning. We are going to fly high today. I want to speak on the subject, "Justification from Eternity," or eternal justification, the case for eternal justification.

Let's read our two texts, first of all in Romans chapter eight and it will be verse 33. And there is a clear, clear declaration here for us to consider.

"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."¹

Or, literally, it says, "God that justified."

Now, how can he do that? Revelation 13 and the eighth verse.

"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."²

And that last phrase will come importantly into play this morning, "...slain from the foundation of the world."³

Now, it is clear that we are about to jump into the end, the deep end of the pool this morning with such a subject and purpose as has been set before us today, which is that justification takes its rise, justification has its beginning, not when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and not even when Christ died upon the cross, but before the world in the very eternal counsel of the almighty God and the covenant there established between the holy three, when before the world began some were then chosen in Jesus Christ and they were predestinated to the adoption of children. That is clear in Ephesians one verses three through five. And even before the world began, Paul says in 2 Timothy one and verse nine that we were given grace in Christ Jesus. And then, of course, we were viewed

¹ Romans 8:33.

² Revelation 13:8.

³ Ibid.

in Christ and we had that union with our Lord Jesus Christ from everlasting. And this union with Christ is, therefore, the ground of the conveyance of every saving benefit which is received by the elect and bestowed upon them.

We have nothing in the way of saving mercy but what was proposed and declared before time. And that includes justification. And also were purposed to us not on the basis of any personal merit or worth that might be in us, not in any action on our part, but strictly in with and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now these things we will return to later in our study. But it is probably best that we now attempt to lay a foundation deep and wide and work our way gradually up to the subject by reasoning about something that we find in the Scripture. That is that rather than the Scriptures always using the general terms “salvation” and “saved,” which are good words and scriptural, by the way, we also want to consider the various aspects of salvation, the parts that make up the whole, the things that make up the totality of God’s saving work toward the elect of God.

And we also want to make some distinctions that are very important, lest all things run together in our minds, things such as the *ordo salutis* or the order of salvation, which has regard to that process by which the salvation purposed in Christ before the foundation of the world wrought out in Christ in his death upon the cross is then in an orderly fashion manifested and realized and applied unto the elect sinner.

Now these works, though they form a unified whole, are nonetheless distinguishable as we meet with them in the Scriptures. For example, regeneration is distinct from conversion and that distinction ought always to be made. They are not one and the same.

On the other hand, justification is not the same thing with sanctification. They are not one and the same. And yet in these, one may lead unto the other. Sanctification is not glorification, though it goes before it. Adoption is not the same as reconciliation by Christ.

Now these all fitly framed together grow up into a holy house of salvation by the ordering of the Lord, if I may paraphrase Paul to that extent.

Now, we want to hone in or we want to focus on that one great aspect of God’s saving work—justification, as I announced in the beginning. And it does not seem a stretch to say that this is the, quote, lost, unquote, doctrine today. It is the one today, perhaps more than others, that is hidden under a bushel, one they visit here and visit there in many churches. It is doubtful that they would hear this grand and glorious doctrine of justification expounded upon in the hearing of the worshipper, at least not at any length and not at any depth. And even sometimes in the Calvinistic circles, as we might all them, one might not hear it traced back to its origin or its beginning before the foundation of the world.

Now these do not seem... there does not seem to be a lot of preaching today on this very important doctrine. And may I remember you that when this doctrine is left out of the Christian message, it is like a ship without a rudder. It is like a bushel with a large hole in the bottom so that it is taking on water and is in danger of sinking the whole ship. Even so when the doctrine of justification is left out of the Christian message as a part of the gospel and a part of the great salvation of God, a giant void is left in the Christian message.

John Gill wrote in one of his many articles on the subject of justification these simple words, quote, "The doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ is one of great importance and the apostle spoke of it as if the essence of the gospel lay in it," unquote.

In other words, is there a gospel and could there be salvation if justification be extracted from the mid.

John Gill said, again, "It is a fundamental article of the gospel and so much so that some have called it the basis of Christianity that this great doctrine of justification is the very basis of our great salvation."

Now this great doctrine is a vast ocean and the question is: Where exactly do we put our vessels into this ocean that has neither bank or bottom that we might visit every port and carry ourself along?

Let's begin by defining the terms. What is justification? Should the question be asked, what is justification and what does it mean to justify? Now these terms we meet with so often in the Scripture that it is incumbent that we qualify them in our understanding. We would know the meaning of these words: justify, justification and such like.

Now it is generally conceded by expositors of a sounder nature that these are forensic terms, meaning they are legal terms which one might hear in a court of law, legal terms or the sentence that is pronounced.

And as [?] wrote, "It is ordinarily used in a declarative sense so that it signifies to account, to declare, to prove that one is just," justification.

In this sense, justification is not a work wrought in the sinner inwardly. We need to keep that in our mind. It is not an inward renewal such as regeneration is.

And sanctification is the change of our inward part by the power of God.

And then, again, justification is not an infusion of righteousness or holiness. Justification is not what gives us a new heart or renews our mind before our almighty God.

I think that this can be confirmed convincingly by examining several places where the word is to be found and is used in the Scripture. And do not let it surprise us that we even find that at times this word "justified" is applied unto God as well. Therefore, it cannot

mean to make one righteous, as it is applied to God. And I will show you that in a moment. It does not put righteousness into one, but it declares that they are righteous and that is the declaration.

Consider, for example, Luke seven and verse 29. And listen very carefully to what is said and of whom it is said.

“And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.”⁴

Now, it cannot have the meaning of to make righteous or to put righteously into one.

Listen to 1 Timothy three and verse 16 of the God man incarnate where it is written that, “God was manifest in the flesh [that is Jesus], justified in the Spirit.”⁵

Listen again to Luke 10 and 29. We read there of certain lawyers who were willing to justify themselves.

Luke 16:15 Jesus said to some Pharisees, “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men.”⁶

Listen to Romans 3:4, taken from Psalm 51 and verse four. That you, saith David in the time of his prayer and contrition, praying to God he said, “that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.”⁷

And all these places—we could find some more—the meaning is not to make one righteous. But it is to declare or to pronounce one as righteous. When the people justified God in Luke seven and verse 29, they in now way conveyed any righteousness unto God, only they declared him to be so. They justified God. He is righteous.

Likewise, when the Pharisee and the self righteous justified themselves, they were but falsely declaring or announcing themselves to be righteous, declaring that they were righteous in themselves which justification was only a figment of their vain imagination. They had pronounced themselves so, but God had not. It was not a divine verdict that was passed upon them, but it was the false estimate which they held of themselves and, thus, they presumed [?] the good sentence upon themselves, that they were men that were righteous.

However, says Paul, “It is God that justifieth,”⁸ Romans eight and verse 33.

⁴ Luke 7:29.

⁵ 1 Timothy 3:16.

⁶ Luke 16:15.

⁷ Psalm 51:4.

⁸ Romans 8:33.

Now when we seek to get a grasp on justification, it is then that we find that the Scriptures speak of this justification in more than one way or from more than one aspect or angle. And it had several causes, it would seem, as we read the Scripture.

By the way, we are indebted to the apostle Paul, more than any other, for the systematic study and outlining of the doctrine of justification. But even he, the apostle Paul, speaks of justification from several standpoints or aspects, for example, in Romans chapter three and verse 24.

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”⁹

Now the word “freely” is the word “gratuitously,” without any cause, none on the part of the individual being justified.

Again, in Romans five and verse one Paul said, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

Later, Romans five and verse nine, “...being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”¹¹

But now let’s get down where the rubber meets the road. Let’s trace justification to its origin and back unto its first cause, asking the question: Where does it take its rise? When does it first appear in reality, in time or in eternity?

John Gill referred to justification as an immanent act of God taken up in the mind of God from eternity. That is, it originated in the mind and the will of God, but not after the race fell, but when the Son became incarnate and died, but as one old timer put it in his writing, justification is a sentence conceived in the mind of God as a decree from eternity. Another held that justification is absolutely an essential part of the covenant of grace established and with Christ before the foundation of the world.

Now you may ask, or some may ask: How can justification be? How can there be justification before the fall and before we had sin, before Christ had died and before we have believed?

We should ask of them: How is it that Christ is said to be the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world? Herein is a great connection. Slain before or from the foundation of the world, Revelation 13 and eight.

Peter says, 1 Peter chapter one and verse 20, “...foreordained before the foundation of the world.”¹²

⁹ Romans 3:24.

¹⁰ Romans 5:1.

¹¹ Romans 5:9.

¹² 1 Peter 1:20.

Foreordained to what? Foreordained as a Lamb without spot and without blemish. And not foreordained after the fall, but before the fall and even before the creation of man, before the world was created in which man was to dwell and was to live.

Lest we forget, there was at that time a union formed between Christ and the elect, before the world, from the beginning, in the eternal purpose and the establishing of the covenant of grace and redemption was from that time. From that the elect or from then and that the elect are then viewed by God as being in the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it was then that the Son became our surety as it is said in Hebrews seven and verse 22.

Now a surety is one... the word means to strike hands or to mix one's self up together with another, basically, is the meaning of the Old Testament word "surety." And a surety is one who mixes himself up with others in order to answer their debts and be responsible for them so that all that is required of the debtor is then given by the surety even life for life.

For the first mention of suretyship, study the matter from Genesis chapter 43 verse eight and nine when Judah pledged to be surety for Benjamin.

"If I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever."¹³

So Christ became surety for all of God's little Benjamins to be brought safely.

You know, the wise Solomon counsels us against it. He said it is not good to become a surety and especially for a stranger in Proverbs chapter 6:1-6, Proverbs 17 and verse 18. Solomon counsels against it. Why? Because when the debtor defaults, the surety must pay the debt and answer all. The surety must pay. He shall suffer. He shall smart for it is the way Solomon put it in Proverbs 11 and verse 15.

So soon as their sins were therefore imputed unto him, so soon were they, as they were, imputed unto the surety, the Lord, they were not imputed unto the elect. For God will not require a double debt, first of the surety and then also of the elect.

One hymn writer puts it in a wonderful way.

Payment God will not twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then, again, at mine.

As Dr. [?] put it, "Christ's atonement in bearing our sins was in the eye of God from eternity and was as if it were already done. By the decree it is as if it is done. And if that be the case, then all intended by the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ may be viewed then by God as being absolutely sure."

¹³ Genesis 43:9.

In that Romans four and verse 17 God calls those things which be not as though they were. Thus, God could call Abraham the father of many nations even when he was childless and even when he had a barren wife. The father of many nations with a barren wife, as Paul speaks of what Murray called, quote, “Determinant certainty,” unquote. That because of the power and the decree of God, that because God determined it or because God willed it, therefore it is as if it had a being. The accomplishment is sure and is certain and cannot fail because God willed it to come to pass in his decree.

So that God’s will to elect is election. God’s will to save is our salvation. God’s will for Christ to die assures that he will die in the fullness of time. God’s will to adopt is certainly our adoption. Then God’s will to justify is our justification.

Now, one of the most frequent objections raised by the Arminians goes something like this, of those who oppose the doctrine of eternal justification or, if you wish, justification from eternity. Their argument is this and they think it a sound one that none can be justified before they actually exist or before they have actually committed sin. We should remember. This is the very same argument which the remonstrance, that is, the opposers of sovereign grace raised up centuries and ages ago against the doctrine of election.

They said, “None can be elect before they have a being. None can be elect before they are in existence, before they believe.”

We remind them Paul teaches the Ephesians that they and we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Again, that is Ephesians 1:3-5. He tells the Thessalonians that they were chosen unto salvation from the beginning. That is 2 Thessalonians two and 13.

And he told Timothy that the Lord has saved us and given us grace before the foundation of the world, 2 Timothy one and nine.

And if any therefore are minded to argue against justification from eternity on the same ground that one cannot be justified before they have being or before Christ died or before they have faith or belief upon the Lord, then let us reason with them upon two points that we want to make.

Number one, the Old Testament saints, all of them, were justified before Christ came and died upon the cross. They were justified before their sins were actually, literally, really atoned for in the death of the Lord, before the great sin bearer lay down the perfect and everlasting sacrifice for sin.

Abraham is a good example of men being justified in the Old Testament in Romans four. No, there was not another way for any to be saved during the Old Testament dispensation other than by the grace of God.

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, Genesis six and verse eight. Divine favor he had in the eyes of the Lord.

The second point is this. On the other side of the cross, Jesus, indeed, died for you and died for your sins before you actually had a being and before your sins were actually committed. The Lord died before those two things occurred.

Now let's see if this makes any impression upon the Arminian who try to hang everything upon the love of God. We ask them, then: When was the love of God fixed upon then sons and the daughters of men? Was it when they were born? Was it when they believed? Was it when Christ died? Was it when they believed or were baptized? Was it when they loved God that God set his love upon his people?

Scripture declares, Jeremiah 31 and verse three, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."¹⁴

They said they are accepted in him. In him, said Paul, in Ephesians one and said love was manifested in Christ giving himself for us upon the cross.

Therefore, as he loved his people, as they were in Christ, so he acquitted his people as they were in Christ on the merit of his coming death for their sin. For justification takes its rise, first and foremost, in the mind and in the will of God and finds its substance in the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

Justification has in it two blessed articles of the gospel, two blessed parts that are considered and contained in the gospel. Number one, that the sins of the elect, all the sins of all of the elect have been imputed to our surety, the Lord Jesus Christ. They have been made to light upon him and he made full satisfaction in their behalf.

Secondly, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to those who were chosen in him and appointed to everlasting life.

By the way, let's consider a moment, if we might, and that is the argument we must have actual existence in order to be justified. Consider the case of Adam and the race, that his sin was imputed to the race as seen in two facts, that all are born in sin and that all are subject to physically die. And Paul, in the end of Romans five, ties the knot between Adam and the race.

In verse 18, "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation."¹⁵

In the first half of verse 19 of Romans five, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners."¹⁶

¹⁴ Jeremiah 31:3.

¹⁵ Romans 5:18.

¹⁶ Romans 5:19.

Now this, too, was before they personally existed or actually and personally had sinned in person. And it is a truth that whatsoever is done by a federal head is put to the account of those in whose behalf he acted. Thus, Paul teaches us that we sinned in Adam, Romans five and verse 12.

By the same token what is done by Christ, the head of the election of grace is reckoned unto the elect. And so soon as it is done by the federal head. Therefore, for justification from eternity to stand, it must be that Christ in the decree of God before the world had our sins imputed to him and he was ordained to be slain.

We can see how this would give rise to this objection or to this question. How can justification be from eternity if condemnation by the sin of Adam came after that and in time? Would the latter not nullify and supersede the former? Does this not nullify the fact that Christ was slain from the foundation of the world and that their secret justification, however, would be manifest in God's time? And it does not nullify.

As an illustration, there was a secret election of Gentiles which did not appear in older ages or times, Ephesians three and verse five. And that secret election of Gentiles was hid in God from the beginning of the world, Ephesians three and verse nine. Though it was not made manifest for century after century prior to the manifestation in the calling of the Gentiles by the gospel. Before that, they worshipped idols as and they served all manner of false gods. But their election stood because it was of God.

Now a man may live as a pauper, thinking not to have a dime unto his name, though that man will inherit in time a fortune. He is secretly rich before he comes to the knowledge of it. And he lives as a poor man until he learns of that inheritance. When does he have the inheritance? It is when the rich heir sits down and makes out his will and puts it down that it is to go to so and so. But it is actually not realized until it is conveyed and the knowledge of it is given.

No doubt, some would hear this sermon and say, "You have ignored the heavy emphasis which the New Testament puts upon justification by faith, by believing," which they contend would show that none are justified until they do and actually believe, until they exercise faith in the Lord Jesus. Such of you has more to do, I fear, with free will than with free grace. But we must consider what is meant by justification by faith, whether it is cause, whether it is effect. Justification by faith, is it cause or is it effect?

I love to read John Brown's book on *Eternal Justification*, included like this. "Justification by faith is the knowledge and the perception of justification." It is the knowledge or the perception of it, imparted when the Spirit of God has quickened us and has enlightened us.

You hear a little phrase from Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 11 in that wonderful, wonderful prophecy of all prophecies. It says this.

“By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.”¹⁷

Not the knowledge that he possesses and exercises, but the knowledge of himself that he imparts or manifests or revealed unto him. The knowledge of his saving work, therefore, being known and revealed. Our justification is not secured by our believing, but it is manifest to by and in faith, by the faith which God deals us, the regeneration elect. One receives what Brown called, quote, “The comforting knowledge or perception of that gracious privilege,” unquote, becomes when our hearts are opened by God and our minds are enlightened. We must bear in mind, too, that faith is not of men. It is not our contribution. It is not our part. It is the gift of God, Ephesians 2:8-9. It is a work of God, Colossians 2:12. We believe by grace, Acts 18 and verse 27.

And Paul said in Romans four and verse 16, to sum it up, he said, “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace,”¹⁸ so that salvation by faith is nothing more or less than also salvation by the grace of God.

Gill makes the same conclusion on adoption as on justification. He wrote—and I quote—“Faith is not the cause, but the fruit and the effect of justification. Justification is antecedent to the act of believing,” unquote.

And, again, he wrote, “The reason why we are justified is not because we have faith. The reason we have faith is because we are justified. Faith is given by God. It is created in us for the express purpose of believing and espousing the Lord Jesus Christ. And the testimony of Christ set out yonder in the gospel. The elect are justified in their federal head, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that justification is applied to the conscience of believers. And then the assurance of it is sealed up in our hearts when grace enables us to believe the testimony concerning Christ.

Consider, if you will, this justification must be absolute and righteousness must be perfect. I will say it again. Justification must be absolute and righteousness must be perfect, that is, full and entire. And faith is never perfect and if faith were the essence of our justification then justification would be imperfect and so our righteousness.

Thus, we view justification from three aspects, we believe biblically: A) as decreed by God before the world, B) in the death and resurrection of Christ—Romans 4:25, “Raised for our justification,”¹⁹ or some say on account of our justification—and then C) in the grace of faith. We believe and that justification is sealed up in us, but it took its rise in the eternal counsels of the almighty God. He decreed it before the world. He made provision for it. Christ the lamb slain before the world ever began.

When our sins are put upon Christ, as soon as they are imputed to him, so soon may he impute righteousness unto us and declare justification.

¹⁷ Isaiah 53:11.

¹⁸ Romans 4:16.

¹⁹ Romans 4:25.

Consider these things. This is a glorious aspect of it, I believe.

All right. Thank you and let's rise for a word of prayer, please.