

# Lesson 3: Gospel and Heart (Justification and Adoption)

## Key concept Justification/ Adoption

### Objectives:

- \*Ground the certainty and blessing of our adoption in our justification
- \*Develop a more vibrant and alive faith that is taking hold of the finished work of Christ

### THEOLOGICAL BUILDING BLOCKS I

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### JUSTIFICATION AND ADOPTION

In order to understand the gospel deeply and comprehensively, it is important to understand various doctrinal "building blocks" which the Bible teaches. This article starts with a clear statement that all who have sinned are alienated from God. In order for any sinner to be reconciled to God, his debts must be paid to God; justice must be served. However, no sinner has the resources nor ability to earn God's satisfaction. God demands perfection. So, how does the Christian message of reconciliation "work?" How does the apparent "contradiction" between God's holiness and his mercy get worked out in the Christian Gospel? God says all debts must be paid, yet he wants us to be free from condemnation. He swears that he hates the death of a sinner (Ezek.33:11), yet he has also sworn that the soul that sins must die (Ezek.18:4). It seems he cannot keep both oaths! As Horatius Bonar put it: *Law and love must be reconciled ...the one cannot give way to the other. Both must stand, else the pillars of the universe will be shaken.*<sup>1</sup>

### SUBSTITUTION

"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God (1 Peter 3:18). "The Son of man came ...to give his life as ransom for [Grk. 'anti' instead of] many" (Mark 10:45). "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for [Grk. 'huper' on behalf of] us" (Gal. 3:13).

**IN Christ there is a Two-fold concept.** If God must be judge and the law fulfilled, what can be done? The Bible tells us that Jesus came as our substitute: 1) He lived the life we should have lived, in our place, and 2) he died the death we should have died, in our place.

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**Life-substitute.** From the beginning of his life, Jesus did everything that is required of a human being. When John the Baptist showed a hesitation to baptize Jesus, he replies, "it is necessary for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:13). Jesus was sinless in himself - so why was it "necessary" to be baptized? It was necessary for our substitute. In our place, he was perfectly fulfilling the law wholly and fully. He was doing everything that a human being needed to do to be acceptable to God. He loved God with all his mind and soul and strength; he loved his neighbor as himself (Luke 10:27). He was perfectly obedient to the law for us, "by one man's obedience many shall be made righteous (Rom. 5:19).

**Death substitute.** When he died, he did not simply experience physical pain, but also the punishment and rejection of God. He gave 'propitiation' for sin; he took all God's wrath (Rom. 3:25). Jesus carried our identity upon the cross. Matthew (8:17) applies Isaiah 53 to Jesus. There it says, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him... the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:4-6).

"Our most merciful Father... sent his only Son into the world and laid upon him the sins of all men, saying, 'Be thou Peter, that denier, Paul that persecutor, blasphemer and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer; that sinner that did eat the apple in Paradise; that thief that hanged upon the cross; and, be thou the person which hath committed the sins of all; see therefore that thou pay and satisfy for them," *Martin Luther, Commentary on Galatians [On Gal. 3: 13]*.

"The concept of substitution may be said, then, to be at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone," *John Stott, The Cross of Christ*.

**Law and Love fulfilled.** It is by Christ's substitution, and especially at the moment of his death upon the cross, that God's love and law are both satisfied. He was smitten to satisfy the justice of God (it pays for sins), and yet at the same time, the love of God (it secures our salvation). "That God might be both just and justifier of those who believe" (Rom.3:26).

"Both love and law have triumphed. The one has not given way to the other. Each has kept its ground; nay, each has come from the conflict honored and glorified. Never has there been love like this love of God, so large, so lofty, so intense, so self-sacrificing. [Yet] never has the law been seen so pure, so broad, so glorious, so inexorable. There has been no compromise. Law and love have both had their full scope. Not one jot or title has been surrendered to the full; the one in all its severity, the other in all its tenderness. Love has never been more truly love, and the law has never been more truly law, than in this conjunction of the two," *Horatius Bonar, The Everlasting Righteousness, p.4*.

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**JUSTIFICATION**

**Justified.** To be "justified" is to be right with someone, without any blame or liability. "Justification" is a legal act in which a person who trusts in Christ is declared to be completely righteous in God's sight. "A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16). In Colossians 1:23, Paul tells us that through the gospel "he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through his death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." The word "present" is a legal term, meaning to appear in court. The two sides of justification are pardon (as if we never sinned) and acceptance (as if we lived a perfectly righteous life) because of the double imputation.

"Such are we in the sight of God the Father as is the very Son of God Himself. Let it be counted as folly or frenzy or fury whatsoever, it is our comfort and our wisdom; we care for no knowledge in the world but this, that man hath sinned, and God hath suffered; that God hath made Himself the sin of man, and that men are made the righteousness of God," Richard Hooker, *On Justification*.

**IMPUTATION**

**Imputing vs. imparting.** How does Jesus' life and death substitute for me? It is by imputation. Imputation is a legal, forensic term. It is helpful to distinguish imputation from impartation. Imputation is to put something into my account or record; impartation is to put something into my nature. Though it is not a common term, if we say, "you are imputing motives to me", we mean, "you are treating me as if I had those motives." So to impute is to treat **as if**.

**Two-fold transfer.** Jesus saves us through "double imputation"; our sins (record) are imputed to him and his righteousness (record) is imputed to us. "God, made him sin who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21). This classic verse tells us about the double imputation. First, "God made him sin." Did God "impart" sin to him? No, he did not become sinful in his nature. This means God treated him **as if**. He was legally declared sinful, and treated as a sinner, held liable for the record of a sinner. He is given all that a sinner deserves. Second, "we become the righteousness of God in him." Clearly, this is parallel to the first clause, so it does not mean that God imparts his righteousness into us. It means God treats us **as if**. We are legally declared righteous and treated as perfect. We are given all that perfectly holy persons deserve. This meaning is clear in that Paul says we are only righteous "in him." He loves us "even as" his Son (John 17:23).

"God beholdeth us in the righteousness which is imputed, and not in the sins which we have committed. We are as free and clear as if there were not one spot or stain of uncleanness in us. Now, sin being taken away, we are made the righteousness of God in Christ," Richard Hooker, *Commentary on Jude*.

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**Beyond probation.** It is crucial to understand "double imputation" in order to understand the fullness of justification. If all Christ did was to take our sins (and not give us his righteousness), then his death would only give us pardon, and put us back into probation in order to serve and obey God. But he not only was our death-substitute, but also our life substitute. He not only fulfilled the law by paying the penalty, he also fulfilled the law by obeying it. The result of his life-record is "blessing"; the result of our life-record is "curse." Now, when we believe in him, there is a double transfer, the curse of our record is imputed to him (Gal. 3:13), but the blessing of his record comes to us (II Cor. 5:21). He does not put us back on probation, but back beyond probation, for he fulfilled the probation for us. "Now *there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 8:1). It is "double imputation" that makes Luther call a Christian: *simul justus et peccator* (simultaneously just and sinner). At the same time, we are both sinful, yet completely righteous in God's sight.

[The] covenant of works was a probation [the nature of God's relationship to Adam before he sinned in Gen 3]. If Adam had kept the law of God for a certain period, he was to have eternal life. If he disobeyed, he was to have death. Well, he disobeyed, and the penalty of death was inflicted upon him and his posterity. Then, Christ by his death on the cross, paid that penalty. However, if that is all Christ did for us, do you not see that we should be back in just the situation in which Adam was before he sinned? The penalty of his sinning would have been removed from us because it had all been paid by Christ. But, for the future, the attainment of eternal life would have been dependent upon our perfect obedience to the law of God. We should simply have been back in the probation again. As a matter of fact, [Christ] has not merely paid the penalty of Adam's first sin (and the penalty of the sins which we individually have committed), but also he has positively merited for us eternal life. He was, in other words, our representative both in the penalty paying and in probation keeping. He paid the penalty [of failed probation] for us, and he stood the probation for us. "[Christ not only took the punishment by his death], but merited for them the reward by his perfect obedience to God's law. Those are the two things he has done for us," *J. Greshem Machen, God Transcendent*.

**Intercession.** The Christian's position is now more certain and sure than we can imagine. We are told that Christ stands before the Father as our legal representative, our advocate (I John 2:2; Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:33-34). What this means is that the law, once our enemy that "demanded" our punishment, now becomes our friend "demanding" our acceptance. How so? The law has been perfectly fulfilled in our substitute, and so now it would be unjust for God to turn on us! For God to punish us for any sin would be to exact two payments for the same debt (since Jesus paid it). Now Jesus stands before the Father, in a sense, demanding not mercy, but justice for us. We have both his law and his love for us. We could not be more loved nor secure.

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If thou my pardon hast secured,  
And freely in my room endured  
The whole of wrath divine,  
Payment God cannot twice demand,  
First from my bleeding surety's hand  
And then again from mine.  
-- Augustus Toplady

"Now, the Lord Jesus Christ does not merely ask God to overlook our sin or forget it. He stands [before the Father]...as it were, to say to God...'I am here to just remind you that the law has been fulfilled, that the death has been died, that the punishment has been enacted; they are free because I died for them...I say it with trembling and yet I say it with confidence, God would be unjust if He did not forgive my sin. Christ has died for me...'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...' (1 John 1:9). God's acceptance of us is now a matter of justice. It is Jesus who enables God to be at one and the same time just and justifier of the ungodly (Rom. 3:26)," *D.M.Lloyd-Jones, Walking with God*.

"[On the cross] in that combination of the judicial and the paternal...law has become the source and vehicle of love; and love law's upholder and honorer; so that even in these and aspect love is the fulfilling of the law. The law that was against the sinner has come to be upon the sinner's side. It is now ready to take his part in the great controversy between him and God...provided he will put that case into the hands of the Divine Advocate (1 John 2:2)," *Horatius Bonar, The Everlasting Righteousness, p. 12*.

"I labored diligently and anxiously as to how to understand Paul's word [in Romans 1:17], where he says that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. I sought long and knocked anxiously, for the expression "the righteousness of God" blocked the way, because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous. 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. Therefore, I did not love a righteous and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet, I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

Then, I grasped that the righteousness of God is that righteousness by which grace and sheer mercy God justifies us by faith. Thereupon, I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. When I saw the difference, that law is one thing and gospel another, I broke through. And, as I had formerly hated the expression "the righteousness of God," I now began to regard it as my dearest and most comforting word. So, that this expression of Paul's became to me in very truth a gate of paradise..."

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“... If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This is to behold God in faith, so that you should look upon his fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly, but only looks upon a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face," M. Luther (quoted in *Here I Stand*, by R. Bainton).

**A PRACTICAL STATEMENT OF THE GOSPEL**

THE GOSPEL IS THAT YOU ARE MORE SINFUL AND FLAWED THAN YOU EVER DARED BELIEVE, YET YOU CAN BE MORE ACCEPTED AND LOVED THAN YOU EVER DARED HOPE AT THE SAME TIME, BECAUSE JESUS CHRIST LIVED AND DIED IN YOUR PLACE. *Salvation is of the Lord* (Jonah 2:9).

The determining factor in our relationship with God is not our past or present, but Christ's past and present. How then does it work? It works like this: God accepts this righteousness of Christ, this perfect righteousness face to face with the Law, which He honored in every respect. He has kept it and given obedience to it [through his perfect life], and he has borne its penalty [through his death]. The Law is fully satisfied. God's way of salvation, says Paul, is that. He gives to us the righteousness of Christ. If we have seen our need and go to God and confess it, God will give us his own Son's righteousness. He imputes Christ's righteousness to us, who believe in Him, and regards us as righteous, and declares and pronounces us to be righteous in Him. That is the way of salvation, the Christian way of salvation.

To make it quite practical, let me say that there is a very simple way of testing yourself to know whether you believe that. [After] I have explained the way of justification to them, I say: 'Well, then, you are now ready to say that you are a Christian?' And they hesitate. And I know they have not understood. Then I say: 'What is the matter, why are you hesitating?' And they say: 'I do not feel that I am good enough.' At once, I know that, in a sense, I have been wasting my breath. They are still thinking in terms of themselves; their idea still is that they have to make themselves good enough to be a Christian, good enough to be accepted with Christ. They have to do it! 'I am not good enough.' It sounds very modest, but it is the lie of the devil, it is a denial of the faith. The essence of the Christian faith is to say that He is good enough and that I am in Him! As long as you go on thinking about yourself and saying: 'Ah, yes, I would like to, but I am not good enough; I am a sinner, a great sinner,' you are denying God and you will never be happy. You will continue to be cast down and disquieted. You will think you are better at times, and then again, you will find that you are not as good as you thought you were. How can I put this plainly? It does not matter if you have almost entered into the depths of hell, if you are guilty of murder, as well as every other vile sin; it does not matter from the standpoint of being justified before God. You are no more hopeless than the most respectable person in the world. Do you believe that?, D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*.

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**Adoption.** There is a "higher" benefit of Christ's grace than even justification. We are also adopted into God's family as his children. This is implied in substitution. God now loves us as if we had done all Jesus had done. He loves us *even as* he loves his own son (John 17:23). Therefore, he adopts us into his family (Romans 8:14-16). Like justification, adoption is fundamentally not a change in nature, but a change in status. As in civil adoption, we not only become a loved member of a family, but certain rights and duties come to us legally. Adoption is distinct and beyond justification, for it brings us into the most intimate position possible with the God of the universe. The Gospel is adoption through substitution. God honors believing sinners as if they had done everything that Jesus had done, and loves them as his only natural son.

**FAITH AND WORKS**

**Intro:** How does all this come to us? By faith. But what is "saving faith?" "Faith of itself is God's gift and God's work in our hearts, which therefore justifieth us because it apprehendeth Christ our Redeemer," *Martin Luther, Commentary on Galatians [Comment on Gal.2: 4ff].*

**Faith is not a work.** Our new status is based wholly on the merits of Christ, and not in anything in us, not even in our act of believing. A marble statue has an "instrumental cause" (the chisel and hammer) and an "efficient cause" (the sculptor). The real power and "merit" that caused the statue is therefore the artist; the chisel and hammer are only channels by which the artist's power and skill come to the marble. Even so, faith is only the "instrumental cause" of our salvation. It has no merits of its own - in no way does it procure or earn our salvation. If we slide into such a belief, we will begin to think that we need a high quality to our faith. Actually, all faith does is recognize our need and our provision in Christ. It merely transfers the merit of Christ to us.

**Faith looks away from our works.** Paul defines saving faith in extreme language when he says, "*now to him who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited to him as righteousness*" (Rom. 4:5). Since the book of James and Romans 6 shows us that true faith always leads us to good works, why would Paul say, "*to him who does not work?*" Paul is showing us in the boldest terms that no one can be a Christian until you change your attitude toward, not just your sins, but also your best deeds. Paul provides himself as a case study of this very thing in Philippians 3, where he says he had to come to see his achievements and his moral efforts as worthless (Phil. 3:3-9).

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Saving faith is not just a general belief in Jesus' divinity and that he lived, died, and was risen. Saving faith is also not just a general effort to live for him, follow his example and obey him. (Saving faith entails both of these general "faiths," an assent to the facts about him and a desire to serve him, but it is also something distinct, additional.) The real difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is not their attitudes toward sin. (Both the Christian and the non-Christian ordinarily acknowledge that they sin and need forgiveness.) The difference is their attitude toward their good deeds. The Pharisee repents of sin, but the Christian repents of his or her "righteousness" as well, seeing it not only as insufficient, but sinful itself, since it was done in order save ourselves without Christ. This is what it means to "*stop working*" (Rom. 4:5). This means that what really comes between God and the sinner is not so much our sin as our good works. **Faith always leads to works.** The Reformers summed up the Biblical teaching by saying: "We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that remains alone." In other words, though we are not saved by leading a holy life, salvation leads us to a life of gratitude and liberation from the bondage of sin into a progressively more righteous life. "*Faith, if not accompanied by works, is dead*" (James 2:17).



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**Discussion Questions**

**LOOKING BACK (20 Min)**

1. Discuss how you did on your goals from last week.
2. Discuss any progress you made in loving your neighbors on your 3x5 card.

**LOOKING UP (40 Min)**

1. What does it mean that Jesus was our life substitute and why does that matter?
2. What is justification?
3. Discuss how you feel about the practical statement of the gospel that was given in terms of seeing it's truth in your life.
4. What is the difference between imputation and impartation?
5. Is faith a work? Discuss.

**LOOKING FORWARD (15 Min)**

1. List one goal that you have for next week related to applying Lesson 3.
2. List one goal that you have to love one or more of your neighbors on your 3x5 card.
3. How do you need prayer this week?