

**AMAZING GRACE – Part 13***'Justification by Grace, through Faith'*

by Rev. Robert Griffith

I believe much of the pain in the Christian Church throughout history has been caused by sloppy thinking. If we walk in the light by embracing the truth conceptually and relating to it spiritually, we are largely protected from being manipulated or seduced by all kinds of different doctrines or beliefs. We need to exercise our thinking ability to fully appreciate the life that we have in Christ. When we get theological truths straight in our minds and meditate on them, we are released in true worship. Clear thinking about our forgiveness and the depth of our acceptance and justification inspires our gratitude to God and makes our life more dynamic and our worship more intense. So let us reason together now.

**Justification by grace through faith is the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ.** If you understand the essence of your justification before God, you will be able to understand everything that flows from it. Justification is a legal term taken from Roman law courts and when applied to us it means we are now justified – or made right with God. The opposite of justification is condemnation. Justification undoes condemnation, as we see in Paul's words in Romans 5:

**Romans 5:16-18** *"... the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin (that one man being Adam, who sinned for us all). The judgement followed one sin and brought condemnation, (that's the problem you and I were born into and then participated in; and therefore, along with the world, we are condemned) but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. (It erased condemnation and made us just - justified, perfect before God). For if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."*

Through Christ we reign, because we are justified – no longer under condemnation. We have seen that Paul would allow nothing to be added to the gospel of justification by grace alone and he got very agitated with anyone who would try! He explains this in his letter to the Galatians when he said:

*"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."*

In other words, your behaviour will never justify you. Your actions, your works or your obedience to the law of God have no bearing on your standing in God's sight.

**Galatians 2:15-21** *"If while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"*

Justification describes someone who actually committed a sin, who violated the legal system – but who nevertheless, somehow gets to walk out free - innocent and pardoned. In fact, the only person who can be justified, is someone who was once guilty! It does not refer to one who has been falsely accused. So let's look again at those three verses in Romans 5 and see how justification works for us, remembering that the opposite of justification is condemnation.

**Romans 5:16** *“ . . . the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgement followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.”*

The gift of God (Jesus Christ) brings justification for all of us who were rightly condemned. Our sins, our crimes against God demanded punishment. The wages of sin is death so someone has to die. That someone was Jesus, Who took the complete punishment for our sins when He died on the cross.

**Romans 5:17** *“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”*

That is to say – you are now right with God. God didn't overlook your sin, He legally and completely punished all your sins *in Christ*. That is true whether you know it or not, or feel it or not. Jesus' death on the cross facilitated God's forgiveness of everybody's sin, for all time. When you believe into Christ you receive the justification that is available for everybody. Paul continues:

**Romans 5:18** *“Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.”*

To return to our courtroom scene, when you believe into Christ and this becomes your reality, you don't have to sneak out of the court hoping nobody stops you. The Judge is not going to change his mind. His job is to see that the law is fulfilled and that breaches of the law are punished. That's exactly what happened. Jesus achieved both. The law and the Judge are satisfied. You are free before the law.

A young boy grew up on a large wheat farm and he was out in the paddock with his grandfather one summer just before harvest. They were talking about the threat of fire which was always present that time of the year. The boy's grandfather told him to always carry a box of matches with him when he was out in the fields. He said that if a fire came and he couldn't escape, he should start another fire around him, let it burn a little and then stand right in the centre of the burnt patch. The grandfather explained to the boy: *'You will be safe there, because fire cannot pass where fire has already been.'*

When we believe into Jesus Christ – completely emerging our whole lives into Jesus by faith – we believe into the only place in the universe where the fire of God's judgement has already passed. Let's make no mistake about it, the Bible tells us that there is a terrible judgement coming upon the earth. The holiness and purity of God will one day burn against all unholiness and impurity. Our God is an all-consuming fire. In Jesus Christ you have already been burnt - the fire of God has consumed all that is not holy. Let's look at Hebrews.

**Hebrews 10:10-14** *“And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*

How holy do you want to be? Being holy isn't watching everything you think, say and do, trying your hardest to be like Jesus. This verse says that you have been **made** holy – it is something that has been given you by God. Holiness is a gift from God.

*“Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest (Jesus Christ) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down ...*

Why did Jesus sit down? Because the job was finished! The priests who operated within the Jewish sacrificial system never sat down because their job was never done - there was always more sin to be atoned for. But Jesus, after this one sacrifice ... sat down ..

*... at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”*

Jesus has, once and for all time, made perfect; made holy; pronounced right, true and just, those who believe. Those who walk in this reality are now being purified and made holy in their own experience. Holiness is a gift – it has been pronounced and it has been given to you. In the New Testament there isn't a choice between holiness and sin in that sense. Are you a sinner? Yes. Are you holy? Yes. In God's sight, you are completely holy because of what Jesus did for you. So out of good common sense, you step into that life and you experience more and more of the life that is yours in Christ, and act out more and more of the reality that is already there in God's eyes. You step by faith into the holiness that has been declared – once and for all time.

When you understand that in God's sight you have been made perfect, you are far less inclined to sin. When the love of God, as seen in the death of Jesus, really gets a hold of your heart and you realise that He died to make you holy – then repentance and holiness will ooze out of you! Sin will no longer attract you! God has said you are holy. It's a divine decree. When that truth sinks in, then your need to justify or defend yourself, or get angry with those who cross you, disappears. It is a waste of emotional and physical energy. God has declared you holy and blameless in Christ. What more can there be?

**2 Corinthians 5:21** *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

What a wonderful exchange – Jesus Christ became sin for us. God has to punish sin. His holiness burns against it. That is the whole meaning of the cross. Jesus bore the consequences of all sin on the cross so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. How holy do you want to be before you feel OK? You are the righteousness of God. Does that do something for your self-esteem? For many, the answer is 'no'... because they don't really believe it! Our prayer must be: *“Lord God ... please, through preaching, prayer, by personal revelation, through ministry ... somehow Lord, burn this truth into me - that I am the righteousness of God - bury it deep in my consciousness and then help me to live it.”*

That will do two things: firstly it will lift all anxiety off you, making you happy and joyful and life will be worth living; second, it will make you a better person. Any kind of holiness preaching: *‘do this, don't do that’* only makes us more focussed on sin and failure. The Bible says that law exacerbates our lusts and desires. If you want to become a better person, just believe the Truth! Just embrace the Gospel! You are the righteousness of God. Believe it and then you will look at things in your life and see that they are inconsistent with the righteousness of God, and you will choose not to do those things anymore.

That's how sin is dealt with - not by wrestling with it and concentrating on it and praying against it, or rebuking the devil over it. No! Concentrate on who you are in Christ, and all that other junk in your life will just fade away, because it's not compatible with who you really are in Christ. This is what makes our legalistic attempts to be justified by our religious behaviour so pointless.

Paul cried out to the Galatians: *"Why are you doing this – deserting the truth? It's bad enough that you think you can achieve something better than the righteousness of God by what you do – circumcision, eating the right food, giving alms, fasting – that is so stupid. But when you do that, you raise yourself above others who don't. It's wrong! Don't do it! We who are Jews by birth should already know that we are never justified by observing the law, but only by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."*

As we have already seen, the law is holy and perfect, just don't try to be justified by it! Paul is not antinomian – he is not anti-law. The law reflects God's character. It is the only absolute standard by which behaviour can be judged. God's holy law lets everybody in the whole world know that they need a Saviour, but nobody is going to be justified by the law because they can't keep it!

So logic dictates that we have to look somewhere else for our justification. So we look to the only One who ever fully obeyed the law – Jesus Christ. We are justified in and through His obedience to the law. That is why, in Colossians 2, Paul tells us that Jesus nailed the law to the cross. As we believe into His life, death and resurrection, the law is no longer over us.

Jesus said the law will never pass away. It is a reflection of the character of God and God will never change. So the law didn't pass away but it was totally fulfilled in Jesus on behalf of the whole human race and so as we believe into that fulfilment of the law by Jesus, it becomes our reality. So in a practical sense, we are no longer under the law – we live under the grace of God as shown in the giving of His Son. Paul sums it up well here:

**Galatians 2:19,20** *"For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."*

Paul's testimony is clear: He was crucified with Christ. His sins were judged in Christ. Fire has actually passed through him already on the cross - smell the smoke! Paul had already died for his sins *in Christ*. He had already been judged *in Christ* and cannot be judged again. Now he is justified and he can stand before the Judge of all judges dressed in the righteous robes of Jesus Christ.

Now the questions about sin, confession and repentance can be answered! What if you sin tomorrow? The death of Jesus dealt with those sins also - before any of them were committed. Now some people struggle with the concept that their sins are already forgiven and blotted out before God before they even confess them or ask for forgiveness.

There are a few Bible texts that have been translated and interpreted to infer that God's forgiveness is conditional upon our confession and repentance, or upon our forgiveness of others. That is how they are translated into English – but that can't be what they mean when we understand the whole Gospel. Think about it – not theologically, just logically. Jesus Christ has justified you and now when you sin, you don't look to some external behaviour to make you justified, you look to Him who is your justification.

Let's hear from Paul again:

**Romans 10:1-4** *“Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”*

Do you understand that? Jesus Christ is the end of the law, and you are in Christ. You don’t have to come up against the law and feel condemned by it because it has ended for you. Paul elaborates in his letter to the Colossians:

**Colossians 2:13-15** *“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”*

Now, when you come against the law, you can say: *‘Jesus Christ has put an end to this standard for me – the law by which I was judged has been nailed to the cross.’* The law now functions for us by showing us the appropriateness of our behaviour. It shows the character of God. It shows the kind of performance which is possible the more we allow the life of Christ in us to flood every part of our being. So now, with overwhelming gratitude, we can thank God for having done that.

When we look at the law, we can now say: *‘Yes, Lord, that’s where I want to be. The things I have done wrong were stupid, inappropriate, immature. I need to deal with the consequences of them. I embrace Your forgiveness where I’ve hurt someone.’*

So we don’t ask for forgiveness so we can become right with God, but rather so our relationships with one another can remain strong; so that we don’t open the door to the enemy to use that sin to mess up more relationships. Sin is evil - whether you’re in Christ or not. So don’t do it! It will hurt you and those around you. The grace, love and acceptance of God does not remove the very real cause-and-effect nature of our sins. Sin needs to be rooted out of the lives of each and every one of us and out of the Church - but it does not affect your relationship with God if you are in Christ. The word ‘confess’ means literally, *‘to say the same thing about...’* It’s not a religious ritual with which you buy God’s forgiveness. You have that forgiveness whether you confess or not! True confession for a believer in Christ involves sitting down with God and saying:

*‘Father, I blew it – you know I blew it. I agree with you, and affirm that this was a stupid and sinful thing to do, but Father, I’ve lived with myself long enough to know that if You don’t change me by the power of your Holy Spirit, this is where I’m stuck – I’ll just go right out there and do it again! Father, I thank you again for accepting me in Christ in spite of my sin ... but I want you to change me. I want the life of Jesus that is in me to dominate – more of Him and less of me.’*

You are never out of relationship with God because of your sin. You’re either in or out of fellowship with the Father depending on whether you are in Christ, or not. It’s that simple. You are not judged by the law any more, nor justified by it, and nor should you condemn yourself or anyone else by it.

Confession also completely delivers us from defensiveness. We can honestly admit our faults. We can acknowledge those things that are still not right in our lives, and God will say to us: *“Yes, that is all true, but you’re OK with me, because you are in Christ. Now let’s work on those things so that you can experience more of the abundant life I have given you freely.”* That gives us true freedom in Christ like we’ve never known before and we go on to find that once we open ourselves up to God and others, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, the power of God is working in us and for us and through us.

The only way for God to release us from the accusation and condemnation of the law and our sin was to justify us. In His holiness, He could not leave sin unpunished. The righteous requirements of the law had to be met – and they were met, in Jesus. The fire of God’s judgement has passed through Jesus, and we now stand in Him. Fire cannot pass where fire has already been. By placing us in Christ, through faith in Him, we are credited with His performance, His holiness, His righteousness, His perfect life. His sacrificial death and His glorious resurrection. That’s where we are now; in Christ.

So justification sets us free from the burden of failing to please God, and our own expectations, and the ways in which we punish ourselves. It sets us free to be ourselves. The power of sin is broken. Although we continue to sin, we are no longer enslaved to it. We deal with it in the power of the Holy Spirit, by the grace of God. We take hold of His gift of repentance and respond to His work in us to restore relationships with other people as we allow the life of Christ to bear fruit in us. That, my friends is the wonder, the beauty, the power and the reality of the Gospel of God’s amazing grace. That is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth - and Jesus said, if you know the truth, it shall set you free!

I really want to encourage you to revisit this sermon a number of times. Week by week in this teaching series I have been unwrapping God’s amazing grace and trying to explain each layer and the many different levels of grace. Today, I have exposed the very heart of grace.

**Justification by grace through faith is the heart of the gospel of God’s amazing grace.**

If we truly understand and embrace the truths I have outlined here, then the wonder, the glory and the power of the Gospel will explode within us and everything will change.

May it be so.

1. Read through this week's sermon once without taking notes or highlighting anything ... just to get the big picture. Go through the text more closely. Highlighting or underlining key phrases or paragraphs which stand out as significant to you. What single statement impacted you the most? How will that now change your life? Write down what you need to do to respond to God's truth today.

2. Ponder the following statements from this week's sermon. What practical implications could or should flow from each of these statements? If you ask "How then shall I live?" in light of each of these truths, what would be your answer?

*Justification by grace through faith is the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you understand the essence of your justification, you will be able to understand all that flows from it.*

*Fire cannot pass where fire has already been. When we believe into Jesus Christ – completely emerging our whole lives into Jesus by faith – we believe into the only place in the universe where the fire of God’s judgement has already passed.*

*The grace, love and acceptance of God does not remove the very real cause-and-effect nature of our sins. Sin needs to be rooted out of the lives of each and every one of us and out of the Church - but it does not affect your relationship with God if you are in Christ.*

*You are never out of relationship with God because of your sin. You’re either in or out of fellowship with the Father depending on whether you are in Christ, or not. It’s that simple.*