

The Good News of Justification

Day One: Justified by Faith

**Listen or watch the sermon
“Justified by Faith” by Tim
Keller**

(Go to the Living FDFD website, Week Six, to listen to or watch this sermon.)

Scripture:

Romans 3:21-26 | *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

Meditate:

Conviction:

Connect:

Day Two: Justifying Faith Trusts God Enough to do What He Says

Clearly the failure to trust God was Adam's undoing and caused the break in his relationship with God. The Gospel promises that all those who followed Adam in rebellion against God's authority can be restored in their relationship with God. In order to enjoy a restored relationship with God we need to embrace personally the rescue of God found in Jesus Christ. In short, we need to embrace the kindness of God in Christ. What does this mean? Tim Keller has this to say:

"The faith that changes the life and connects to God is best conveyed by the word "trust." Imagine you are on a high cliff and you lose your footing and begin to fall. Just beside you as you fall is a branch sticking out of the very edge of the cliff. It is your only hope and it is more than strong

The good news is that we are free to obey the commands imperfectly.

enough to support your weight. How can it save you? If your mind is filled with intellectual certainty that the branch can support you, but you don't actually reach out and grab it, you are lost. If your mind is instead

filled with doubts and uncertainty that the branch can hold you, but you reach out and grab it anyway, you will be saved. Why? It is not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that actually saves you. Strong faith in a weak branch is fatally inferior to weak faith in a strong branch." (The Reason For God)

It is not the purity of your heart or your sincerity, but the work of

Christ on the cross that saves us. I think too many people wait for God to overwhelm them with a sense that they can take no other course in life. God never expects us to violate our best judgment, but at the same time, He expects us to act on what He has given us—His Son. Ultimately, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the validation that everything Jesus said and did was true. We believe on the basis of that miracle. And it is from that foundation that we build a life of trust.

The first kind of TRUST is expressed in relationship to the COMMANDS of God. A religious person gravitates to FEAR or PRIDE when it comes to the commands of God. Fear, because the religious person is still looking to their own obedience, their own moral record, or their own spiritual resume as what will ultimately justify them. And because of that, and because they know that they have an imperfect record, every command of God is a crushing burden. And this is why the Gospel is GOOD NEWS. It is the news that Christ has taken that burden and carried it to the Cross on our behalf. Only the religious person who considers themselves a "mistaker" would find pride in their own moral record. But, indeed, there are people who do this. They use the commands of God to feel superior to and look down upon others. The Gospel is not good news for them since it doesn't apply to them.

The good news is that we are free to obey the commands imperfectly. We have no reason to fear punishment for our imperfect obedience. Instead, we can continue to walk with God, asking for His help. Because we are loved as a result of our relationship to Christ, we no longer have to fear his punishment. Like the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:18, "There is no

fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” In the message you listened to on Day One by Tim Keller, you were reminded that there is a better motivation than fear for obedience. It is love and gratitude and a desire to honor Christ.

When we trust God enough to do what He says, it shows that we believe that His commands are good and that His commands are another demonstration that He is FOR US! God’s commands are now seen as his guidance toward a life of thriving. Dr. Henry Cloud wrote a book entitled *The Law of Happiness*. In it, he discusses how spiritual wisdom (commands of God) can change our life and lead to a life of JOY. Here are some of the chapter titles (all these behaviors are actually commanded in scripture):

- Happy people are GIVERS (See 1 Corinthians 9:13-14; Christians are commanded to support the ministry of the local church through giving 10% of their income)
- Happy people don’t wait for SOMEDAY (See Matthew 6:34; Christians are commanded to focus on today and not worry about tomorrow.)
- Happy people FORGIVE (See Colossians 3:13; Christians are commanded to forgive others in the same way as Christ forgave us.)
- Happy people USE THEIR GIFTS AND ABILITIES for the glory of God and the good of others. (See 1 Peter 2:12; Christians are commanded to do good works.)
- Happy people are GRATEFUL (See 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Christians are commanded to give thanks in all circumstances.)

You get the idea. God loves us enough that He commanded us. This is good news. Now let’s trust Him enough to do what he said.

Scripture:

John 6:28-29 | *Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” 29 Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*

Ephesians 2:8 | *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*

Matthew 28:19-20 | *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

Meditate:

Conviction:

Connect:

Day Three: Justifying Faith Trusts God Enough to Gladly Receive Our Identity from Him

Ultimately idols leave us empty because our hearts were created for God. According to the seventeenth century French philosopher, Blaise Pascal, “God created our hearts with a vacuum.” His point is this, we all search for something in this world to fulfill our deepest longings, but we are always

... there is nothing we can do to GET HIM TO LOVE US MORE and there is nothing we can do that would CAUSE HIM TO LOVE US LESS

disappointed and left unsatisfied because our hearts need something that only God can fill—something TRANSCENDENT or ETERNAL. Augustine put it this way, “You have made us for Yourself, Lord. Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.”

At the Fall of Adam and Eve, we see that they were instantly

afraid and insecure. And now, because of the Fall, we are all naturally filled with fear and insecurities. And that is what drives our pursuit of idols. We think if I only had _____ (something that is not God), then my life would be worth living. I would finally be happy. I would finally feel like I am somebody. The wickedness of IDOL WORSHIP is that it promises satisfac-

tion but never delivers. Therefore, the good news of the Gospel is that we can be satisfied IN CHRIST. IN HIM we have a NEW IDENTITY.

The faith that justifies us is the faith that rejects all counterfeits and embraces the God that has justified us apart from any earning on our part. Our identity, our sense of self, the story we tell ourselves about ourselves is a gift to us found in the Gospel. We are now loved unconditionally IN CHRIST. We are now forgiven permanently IN CHRIST. And there is nothing we can do to GET HIM TO LOVE US MORE and there is nothing we can do that would CAUSE HIM TO LOVE US LESS. A person that knows this, embraces this and lives in this reality experiences JOY from that day on.

In order to appreciate this, let's look at some examples of the opposite. First, let's look at what we mean by the word “idol.” In his book *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller wrote this:

“What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.”

Idols promise SUCCESS but fail to deliver.

In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, Madonna revealed, “I have an iron will, and all of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy... I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being and then I get to another stage and think I'm mediocre and uninteresting... Again and again. My drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre. And that's always pushing me, pushing me. Because even though

I've become Somebody, I still have to prove that I'm Somebody. My struggle has never ended and it probably never will."

Idols promise SECURITY through the accumulation of WEALTH.

Friedrich Nietzsche once predicted that mankind would someday replace God with money. Read what God says about putting our hope in money for our security.

Matthew 6:24 *"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."*

1 Timothy 6:17 *"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."*

Ecclesiastes 5:10 *"Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless."*

The idol of ROMANCE promises fulfillment but doesn't deliver.

Read what Earnest Becker once wrote: *"The failure of romantic love as a solution to human problems is so much a part of modern man's frustration... No human relationship can bear the burden of godhood... However much we may idealize him (the love of a partner), he inevitably reflects earthly decay and imperfection... After all, what is it that we want when we elevate the love partner to this position? We want to be rid of our faults, of our feeling of nothingness. We want to be justified,*

to know our existence has not been in vain. We want redemption - nothing less. Needless to say, human partners cannot give this."

I like what J.D. Greear wrote in his book *Gospel*, *"We are adulterers to God when we demand that He give us certain things so that we can find happiness, contentedness, and security that really we should be finding in Him."* With this in mind we can embrace the good news of Christ's justification and find our **IDENTITY IN HIM**. We no longer need to struggle to earn our own justification through romantic partners, money, success, or fame. This is indeed **GOOD NEWS!**

Scripture:

See the Scriptures quoted above.

Meditate:

Conviction:

Connect:

Day Four: Justifying Faith Trusts God Enough to Gladly Do for Others What He Has Gladly Done for Us

Our justification by faith in Christ puts into perspective all that we used to think would make life worth living. All the money, sex, success, and power that used to be so important to us “pre-Christ” is now seen as GARBAGE in comparison to our new life and new self “in-Christ.” Read what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi:

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I

Now instead of trying to get God to do things for us, we are free to take what He has already given and give it to others.

consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that

which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith” (Philippians 3:7-9).

Only the Christian that embraces these truths can truly serve others. Why is this true? It is true because anyone who is still trying

to justify themselves will end up USING OTHERS to feel good about themselves rather than LOVING THEM. So the only way we can love and serve others is to make sure we are justified (as in justifying our existence) by faith, and not by our works.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, reminds us that genuine faith results in us DOING FOR OTHERS WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE FOR US. *“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:14-17)*

Jesus gave us a NEW COMMAND—to love others as He loved us. In other words, we are commanded to ask this question: “What does love require of me?” When we measure God’s love for us by the Cross, we will understand that all love is costly. It is sacrificial. But it is doable. What we are expected to do is to take all the love, grace, forgiveness, kindness, and goodness that Christ poured out on us and be a CONDUIT of all this to others. So our role now is to simply represent Christ, having been justified, and give to others what was freely given to us.

It is not difficult to see that we are expected by God to be connected to each other in the Body of Christ (the church). Look at this list of all the ways we can take what Christ has done for us and pass it on to others. Scripture commands us to do all of the following in relation to one another, and more:

- be DEVOTED to one another (Romans 12:10)
- HONOR one another (Romans 12:10)
- live in HARMONY with one another (Romans 12:16; 1 Peter 3:8)
- ACCEPT one another (Romans 15:7)
- SERVE one another in love (Galatians 5:13)
- be KIND and COMPASSIONATE to one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- ADMONISH one another (Colossians 3:16)
- ENCOURAGE one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13)
- SPUR one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24)
- offer HOSPITALITY to one another (1 Peter 4:9)
- LOVE one another (1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11; 3:23; 4:7; 4:11-12)
- GREET one another with a holy kiss (pre- or post-Covid)

Again, we are justified by grace through faith. There is nothing we can do to get God to love us more or less. When we are found in Christ, all the spiritual blessings associated with that belong to us. Now instead of trying to get God to do things for us, we are free to take what He has already given and give it to others.

Scripture:

John 15:12 | *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*

Also, look back at the scriptures already referenced in the Day Four reading.

Meditate:

Conviction:

Connect:
