

Saints in Christ, Justified and Growing in Sanctification
June 28th, Sermon (Romans 6:1-11)
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Introduction: Last Sunday Fr. Chris in his powerful sermon stressed that at the very heart of authentic Biblical Christianity is our understanding of Justification by Grace through Faith Alone. He particularly emphasized the significance of the word “alone.” On this critical topic our Articles of Religion say this —

XI. Of the Justification of Man.

*We are accounted righteous before God, **only** for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith **only**, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.*

In that famous homily, a homily written by Thomas Cranmer himself, one reads this,

Because all men be sinners and offenders against GOD, and breakers of his law and commandments, therefore can no man by his own acts, works, & deeds (seem they never so good) be justified, and made righteous before GOD: but every man of necessity is constrained to seek for another righteousness or justification,

to be received at GODS own hands, that is to say, the forgiveness of his sins and trespasses, in such things as he hath offended. And this justification or righteousness, which we so receive of GODS mercy and Christs merits. embraced by faith, is taken, accepted and allowed of GOD, for our perfect and full justification.

Could it be stated any more clearly than that that we have absolutely no hope of being justified except on the basis of the Father's mercy grounded in the Son's merits? Archbishop Cranmer is nothing if not clear!

And then thirdly, "the judicious" Richard Hooker, who is regarded by many as Anglicanism's most profound and definitive theologian, in his famous work entitled,

A learned discourse of iustification, workes, and how the foundation of faith is overthrowne (1585) set forth the classic Anglican understanding of justification and said the following, (272 words but well worth it)

Christ hath merited righteousnesse for as many as are found in him. In him God findeth vs, if we be faithfull, for by faith we are incorporated into Christ. Then although in our selues we be altogether sinnefull, and vnrighteous, yet even the man which is impious in him selfe, full of iniquitie, full of sin, him being found in Christ through faith, and having his sin remitted through repentance:

him God vpholdeth with a gracious eie; putteth away his sinne by not imputing; taketh quite away the punishment due therevnto, by pardoning it; and accepteth him in Iesus Christ, as perfectly righteous, as if he had fulfilled all that was commanded him in the lawe: shall I say more perfectly righteous, then if him selfe had fulfilled the whole law? I must take heed what I say; but the Apostle saith* God made him to bee sinne for vs, who knew no sinne, that we might be made the righteousnes of God in him. Such wee are in the sight of God the father, as is the very sonne of God him selfe. Let it bee counted folly, or frensie, or furie 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 himselfe the sonne of man, and that men are made the righteousnesse of God. You see therefore that the Church of Rome in teaching iustification by inherent grace, doth pervert the truth of Christ, and that by the handes of the Apostles wee haue received otherwise then shee teacheth.*

This classic statement of Hooker refers to a concept which Dr. Richardson mentioned last week, that of imputation. Hooker is teaching that those in Christ by grace through faith alone no longer have their sins imputed to them (or charged against their account) but now instead have the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to them (credited to their account). And he cites as the definitive Biblical proof text — II Cor. 5:21. (A verse which should be as widely known and memorized as John 3:16!)

So what exactly is meant by this imputation? A key statement by Paul in Romans 4 reads this way —

For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him (λογίζομαι) as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted (λογίζομαι) as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted (λογίζομαι) as righteousness,

That’s the positive imputation of righteousness. Conversely, Paul uses the exact same word to refer to the non-imputation of our sins by a gracious Father for those who are in Christ in II Corinthians 5:19,

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting (λογίζομαι) their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

And then again in that amazing passage just two verses later we come to Hooker’s definitive proof text — ***He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.***

So if we are tracking with what the great apostle is teaching about justification by faith, and if we were attending with care to the language of last week's epistle text in Romans 5, language which clearly stated that in Christ ***“grace has superabounded above all man's sin,”*** we can somewhat sympathize with the fact that it is not terribly difficult to draw a false inference.

Shall we just continue in sin that grace may abound?

It almost sounds a sensible question, or at least a question deserving a sensible answer.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

It is important to understand that this false inference would simply be an impossibility with respect to many modern and ancient expressions, more truly “distortions” of the gospel. Any performance-oriented understanding of salvation which suggests that salvation is even in part the result of how well we do or have done, simply could not be the logical ground from which this noxious theological weed, this false inference could grow. Think about it. How could it?

Now both Richard Hooker in 1585 and Dr. Richardson last week have indicated explicitly and rightly that the Roman Church gets some fundamental issues about our justification quite confused. Number me amongst those who believe that Rome was in a muddle about this question in the 16th Century and sadly is still in a muddle today. Thankfully, many many Roman Catholics hold to a more Biblical, a much truer and better understanding than the official dogmatic pronouncements of their church. That is a good thing! But I wish to suggest this morning that the problem of confusion regarding justification is much wider and deeper than merely a particularly Roman muddle. This is not most fundamentally a denominational failing. Rather, it is almost a universal blindness endemic to the lost human heart. For it is virtually hard-wired into the darkened Adamic soul that we must somehow be able to take at least some portion of the credit for our salvation. And it almost feels embarrassing to us to think or suggest otherwise.

So let me make a statement right here and right now which might well surprise you. Here goes — I am very convinced that most of the people I have ever met *in my entire life* have had tremendous difficulty or indeed oftentimes have just flatly refused to believe that a sinner is or can be justified by a holy God exclusively on the grounds of His mercy and the Son's merits. And I have done a fairly careful study of the human condition with respect to this question for a great many years. Let me tell you how.

Elaboration: DISCO Class question — “WHY DO YOU BELONG HERE RATHER THAN THERE?”

The perverse disinclination to believe that one's standing before a holy God could be solely on the basis of what that holy God has done for the sinner is not a denominational problem for this or that group. It is a virtually universal tendency of the human heart to cling to the misguided hope of being able to take credit for one's good standing before God. For the benefits of salvation are imagined to be somehow less than fully satisfying for those with no ability to take credit for that salvation. It makes us feel weak, helpless, undeserving and pathetic to have to receive what we haven't earned from another as an unmerited, an undeserved gift. We would rather delude ourselves with the self-talk of our utter self-sufficiency and our almost godlike omni-competence. After all, it is only the sick who happily avail themselves of the ministrations of the doctor and we would much prefer to pretend to ourselves and others that we are in tip-top shape, good to go, couldn't be better, thank you very much.

But this attitude is spiritually catastrophic. For there is no hope of salvation for those who desperately cling to this bizarrely naive and desperately wrong-headed delusion of their own self-righteousness.

And yet, if this understanding of our justification which I have set before you is indeed the heart of the gospel, and it surely is, it raises a question.

For why should those who have been saved gratuitously on the basis of the merits of another not be morally or spiritually indifferent? Now that I'm a child of God and my sins are forgiven what's the difference between my living piously, religiously, self-sacrificially vs my living piggishly if my relationship with God is already securely established on the basis of the merits of someone other than myself? And theologians have described this as extrinsic or alien righteousness.

This, I believe, is the question of this day. And our famous epistle text, Romans 6:1-11 gives three very clear and powerful answers to that question.

I. First, a moral or spiritual indifferentism does not follow from a right understanding of our justification because we are now in Christ by faith and his death is now our death.

In Romans 5 and 6 Paul is demonstrating a theological symmetry between our ruin and our salvation. In each instance, it was our full identification in the representative acts of another which created the result of ruination or salvation.

With respect to our ruination we learn that we all sinned in Adam's sin. Romans 5:12 makes this staggering claim,

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men **because all sinned**.*

This language is wrongly understood if heard to suggest that sin and death spread throughout humanity because we all individually made the terrible decision to follow Adam's example, which is to say, to sin. No, it's saying, instead, that in Adam's sin we were all there, sinning with him. He was that covenantal or federal head of humanity and in his act all humanity was acting.

Elaboration: Our Articles of Religion are very clear about the right way to understand the language of Romans 5.

IX. OF ORIGINAL OR BIRTH-SIN

ORIGINAL Sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation.

It's not as though we were born these perfectly little innocent beings into a sinful world, we looked around at all the sin and tragically adopted and learned those deadly destructive habits. No, we are as the offspring of Adam actually engendered as people of a corrupt nature, inclined to evil and under God's wrath, from the very beginning of our individual lives. Why? Because we were there in Adam's ruinous transgression. We were there with him participating with him in the original transgression..

But there is a symmetry between our identification and participation in the transgression of Adam and our consequent ruination and our identification and participation in the death of the Second Adam, Jesus, and our consequent salvation.

It is our utter and radical identification with the person and the work of the savior which is at the very heart of the mystery of our justification. That's what Richard Hooker was referencing when he said,

*“Christ hath merited righteousness **for as many as are found in him.** In him God findeth vs, if we be faithfull, for **by faith we are incorporated into Christ**” . . . or again, **“him being found in Christ through faith.”***

At one time our identities and our destinies were utterly wrapped up in our identification with Adam and his world-destroying transgression. Now our identities and our destinies are entirely wrapped up in our identification with Jesus and his saving death.

In Adam, quite literally his sin was our sin.

In Jesus, quite literally, His death was and is our death. Hear Paul's language again,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

Now some get tripped up on the language of baptism Paul uses here and wrongly imagine that he is teaching some sort of magical view of baptism in which salvation is automatically conferred by the external act of contact with the baptismal waters.

The New Testament teaches no such thing. Hooker's own assessment is true to the revelation — ***“the sacraments are visible signs of invisible grace.”*** And the Apostle Peter in I Peter 3 is keen to distinguish the invisible spiritual grace of the sacrament from its external form. So he says this,

“God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”

If we are quite convinced that there is a definite reference to the sacramental rite of baptism in Romans 6, then I think we should be careful to remember the true nature of the sacrament and follow the guidance of the good language of this commentator, (NIV SB)

“In NT times baptism so closely followed conversion that the two were considered part of one event (see Ac 2:38 and note). So although baptism is not a means by which we enter into a vital faith relationship with Jesus Christ, it is closely associated with faith (see 1Pe 3:21 and note). Baptism depicts graphically what happens as a result of the Christian's union with Christ, which comes with faith—through faith we are united with Christ, just as through our natural birth we are united with Adam.”

That could well be it. I have no problem with that understanding. But I am also quite open to the suggestion of a number of commentators who argue that the sacramental rite is not in view here, but instead the spiritual baptism which occurs in regeneration. After all, this same Paul spoke this way in Titus 3,

*[H]e saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the **washing of regeneration** and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

Or again, he spoke this way in I Corinthians 12,

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free —and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

I think it possible that there is no explicit reference to the baptismal rite in Romans 6 at all but that this is Paul's metaphorical way of talking about our being immersed in the person of Jesus Christ by faith. But whichever way you take that language about baptism, it is very clear that we are joined to Christ with special reference to his death. And through that connection to his death, we experience deliverance. (Curiously phrased — “He who has died has been justified from sin.”)

A particular orientation of our lives which was grounded in transgression and leading to death and damnation has been set aside by the redeeming work of the Second Adam. So to persist in the life of death which is characteristic of and consistent with the life engendered through our connection with Adam is absurd. In Jesus we have died to that death. And in that death to that Adamic death there is liberation unto new life.

II. Secondly, those who are now in Christ and so identified with him that his death is now our death, we are also by faith incorporated in the Triumphant Lord who conquered death and rose from the grave victorious over it.

It would be a truncated and distorted understanding of the saving work of the Lord if we only understood his death but had no grasp of his resurrection. The two, death and then resurrection hang together as essentially one saving event. So those who are now by faith incorporated into the person and the saving work of Jesus cannot without extreme incoherence fail to grow more deeply into that new, promised resurrection life. It is as absurd as a farmer who always plants his seeds but never reaps the harvest for those in Christ to identify with his death but to be utter strangers to the power of his resurrection life. What? That would make no sense at all. The one quite naturally is followed by the other.

III. Thirdly and lastly, our growth more deeply into the life which is rightfully ours in light of our being in Jesus depends in part upon our starting to perceive the reality of our new lives the way God has made them in fact by his juridical pronouncement, by imputation. So Paul under inspiration brings us right back to the language of imputation and now applies that principle term – λογίζομαι in a different way. So in verse 11 we are surprised to read,

So you also must consider yourselves (λογίζομαι) dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Paul has brought us back to the principle term of imputation to show that what the Father has imputed to our account in our justification, a juridical, forensic pronouncement from the Eternal Judge of our innocence, indeed, our perfect righteousness in his sight, this is the new positional reality of ourselves which we are to learn to adopt as our new understanding of our new identity in Jesus.

The Father's justification of those in his Son is instantaneous, absolute, irresistible, indefectible and eternal. But our growing more deeply into this reality in our present lives here in this world at this time, what theologians call sanctification, that is ongoing, progressive and sometimes apparently as frustratingly slow as molasses.

But as we reckon to be true and of decisive significance in our lives what the Father has reckoned to us by way of divine imputation, we advance more deeply into lives of coherence and personal sanctity.

Conclusion: So let us circle around to a conclusion. The shockingly generous way God has provided for the salvation of sinners is almost beyond belief. At first we are amazed and delighted. But then if we are not thinking deeply about the truth of our new standing in Jesus we might just come up with some nonsense about letting God's magnificent grace superabound even over more sin, and perhaps we can help in producing some of that sin. After all, there's a certain pleasure in some sin and our sins are covered and forgiven, why not?

Why not?

1) Those of authentic faith in the gospel are through regeneration now ***in Christ***. Just as we once found our identity and destiny in our connection to Adam — we sinned in his sin, even now we find our new identity and destiny in our connection to Jesus. We have by faith been incorporated in him. Now, his death is, in fact, our death. It would be insane for us to persist in the deadly behaviors characteristic of the life to which we have in Him now died. What sense would that make?

2) The Lord we worship and serve, in whom we are now seen by the Father, he did not merely die, he conquered death and rose from the grave. For us to linger in the realm of spiritual death, and that's what sin is, would be as grotesquely ugly and disturbing as if a caterpillar would weave its cocoon only to die and rot within it. The butterfly simply must burst forth. That's what the cocoon experience was all about. For us to persist in our sin because they are now forgiven is to pretend that the new eternal life offered in the triumphant son is not worth experiencing. It's absurd. It's ridiculous.

3) We are called to regard or reckon as real and true that which the Father has accomplished on the basis of his divine imputation of righteousness to us. We are to perceive and evermore fully live into what is real, what is enduring, what is promised rather than to waste our lives away in the city of shadows.

We are not called by God merely to avoid hell and eternal separation from Him. No, we are invited to draw into his presence and to know him intimately now, right here, right now. And God giving us the grace by His Son and the power by His Spirit that is precisely what we will do! Please, God! ***Amen.***