

**JUSTIFICATION**  
**First Things First**  
**Part 2**  
**Dr. George O. Wood**

We're in the middle of a five week period of time in which we're sharing together this book "First Things First." Parallel to this study the Sunday morning service has been focusing on the Things That are New. Since we've become a Christian, what's new? Last week we looked at the fact that because of Christ we have a new nature and there is a new recording of our name in the Lamb's book of Life. Today I want to look with you at what is new and that is the word "justification" is new. If you have come to Christ you are justified by faith. You are treated as righteous.

Several months ago I walked out of our home on a Monday morning and there was a ticket on the window of our car and our car was parked right in front of our house. That's frustrating when you get a ticket for parking right in front of your own house. But there had been a new law in our community that anybody parks on the street from 8-12 on Monday mornings which is street cleaning day gets a ticket. I had forgotten that law so I went in to the judge to try to justify myself. To prove that I had legitimate cause for disobeying the law – ignorance or sufficient inattention to the signs that had been posted. He was not too impressed with my attempt to justify myself. However he did reduce my fine. But under the law I was still guilty and he needed some exaction from me.

I thought of that incident as I faced the subject of justification today. You cannot help when you speak of justification but talk of it in a legal frame of reference. Justification is a legal term. It belongs in a courtroom. We totally misunderstand what God has done for us unless we take that as a setting for the application of this word.

We all have an appointment in a courtroom. The courtroom of God, the eternal judge. Hebrews 9:27 tells us "It is appointed to us once to die and after that the judgment." Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

The word for judgement seat in the language in which Paul writes is the word *bema*. He knew what it was like to be before a judgement seat because in that very town of Corinth once he had been brought to trial, to the *bema*, to the Roman pro-counsel.

I've stood in Corinth in the archeological ruins of that town. One of the things preserved is the *bema*, the judgment seat. Rather tall stand. Sort of like a stand you'd see today in a courtroom. It was about 9 or 10 feet high and behind it would set the judge and it was in a public outdoor place. You appear before it. And when you appear before the judge you look up. He hears your case and he passes sentence. It is within the context of that *bema*, that judgment seat that Paul makes the statement that someday even as we stand before human judgment seats, someday we're going to stand before the judgment seat of God.

When we stand at that judgment seat there are only going to be two questions that are asked of us that have a bearing on our eternal destiny. First, What did you do with God's law? Did you obey God's law? That's the first question. And the second question is, How did you treat God's Son. Did you trust in God's Son?

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A violation of the first leads us to the need for the second question, Did you trust God's Son? The only way we can emerge from the judgment seat of Christ with an eternal destiny with God is if we can answer one of those two questions, yes. Did you keep God's law totally and completely? Yes. Or two, did you trust God's Son? Yes or no.

Scriptures tell us that no one of us is going to be able to answer the first question affirmatively. None of us have kept God's law. "None is righteous no not one. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by obeying the law. Romans 3:20. We already know in advance that if we're attempting to make it with God on the basis of how well we've done we know that the answer to us will be, "Depart from Me." Since we have lost the case on number one and by the way the scriptures go to great lengths to persuade us of that.

If we're not persuaded we've already lost the case in the eternal judgment seat of God, Romans 1:18-3:20 take us through a whole series of arguments which help us to understand that the non religious person and the religious person both have violated the law. Both the written law and the law of conscience, the law within, the law of the "ought." There is none righteous, no not one and all therefore are under God's wrath. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven Paul says in Romans 1:18 against all ungodliness and immorality. The wrath of God is his judgment against sin.

The concept "wrath of God" is not a positive concept. Christians are sometimes even reluctant to think about it and talk about it because they do not see it perhaps in biblical terms. To speak of the wrath of God, for some, is to picture God as a cranky old man that's sitting up in heaven ready to gun somebody down at the slightest provocation. Maybe to some it represents sort of teed off anger.

But nothing could be further from the truth in talking about the anger of God. The wrath of God is best compared or made analogy to things like electricity and gravity. There is a law of electricity. That law says that if you try to grab hold of a 220 volt, non-insulated wire you're going to get charged! The law of electricity carries with it a wrath if you violate it. Because the nature of electricity is such that it cannot stand contact with a nature that is alien to it.

That to me very well represents what the scripture is telling to us about the holiness of God. That charge nature within God, which does not respond except with a death upon anything that touches it, which is alien to his nature.

Same way with gravity. Gravity carries with it a law that says if you violate it, suffer the consequences. A person may say, "But I don't like the law of gravity. I wish it weren't there. I don't think it exists." It doesn't matter what you think about gravity. Gravity is there. If you don't believe it try getting on top of a ten story building and walking off the ledge and say as you walk off "I don't believe in gravity." Gravity will teach you two things rather quickly. A, it exists. And, B, you are going to suffer its wrath. If we think of the Lord in those ways that there is within his nature a judgment against that which is alien to his nature, that is sin, therefore God is determined to judge sin and to exclude from his presence all sin.

How does this make God any different from the Russians then? The Russians claim sovereignty and if you invade our territory we'll shoot you down. Invade the sovereignty of Russia and get

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shot down. They base their case on the fact they have the right to protect their sovereignty and their territory. If you don't like it, sorry, take your lumps!

Is God like the Soviet Union in terms of that sort of attitude? Violate my law and I'll gun you down?

Since God is sovereign if he wanted to do that he could. The fact that God can do anything he wants to do is what constitutes being God. Just like if I have an anthill in my back yard and I decide that as the owner of that property I want to clean out the anthill no body can come in with a warrant and say to me, You can't clean up your ant hill! I can do anything I want to my anthill.

If God wanted to treat his whole creation as an anthill he can do anything he wants. That's what makes him God. He's sovereign. If he weren't sovereign, he wouldn't be God. Too many believers today have sort of a namby-pamby view of God that doesn't hold that God has any power. God created the universe. Talk about power! To throw that whole nuclear explosion into space and make life! That is sovereignty and power. God can do anything he wants to do. If he wants to ex everybody off he can do it. He's God. He doesn't have to answer to anybody.

The great thing about God though that within the nature of God is his morality and his love. Therefore God unlike the Russians puts his own Son into our plan and gave us the news that we were headed into his sovereign. He did everything from sending us prophets to wise men, to scriptures, to last of all his own Son who died for us to warn us of the coming wrath that we needed to do something to prepare to meet God. Amos said it well in the Old Testament, "Prepare to meet thy God."

So the Lord has come and he took our punishment. Romans 5:7-8 tells us what he did in coming on board our lives. "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners Christ died for us." The defending charge against us in the courtroom of God, God has been willing for his Son to bear the penalty due us and if we will allow him to bear it, we go free. We are justified. We are acquitted. We are righteous in God's eyes.

That whole great truth for me has been best illustrated in a story from my own childhood. When I was a 7-year-old kid, mom and dad and older brother and sister lived in China. A kind of primitive area of the world. We had an American birddog, ten years old, that guarded the entrance into our family quarters. She had a chain affixed to her collar that went from her collar to a hook that was on the under-hang of the roof. She had a wooden dog-box that was rather tall. My 7-year-old frame was just tall enough that if I stood on the dog box I could reach the under-hang of the roof. Once I had seen Blackie get loose and chase people and bark after them and try to bite them. I thought that was the most exciting thing in the world.

One day I decided things were rather boring, nothing was going on and I was alone and everybody was doing what they were doing and I wanted some action. So I looked around and I finally crawled up on Blackie's dog box and reached the chain. I was thinking that if I let Blackie loose at her collar, we couldn't catch her. It would be fun but it would be hard to catch her. And that might hurt somebody. But if we had the chain dragging behind her it would be easier to catch her – you could step on it.

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So what I did was slip the chain off the hook. As the end of that chain dropped on the wooden dog box, Blackie heard it and she was off like a shot. She was always chomping to get out that door anyway. Off she went, out on the open dirt street, the main street of town. And people just started flying left and right.

I waited about 30 seconds to make sure Blackie got enough lead time to make the day interesting and then yelled at the top of my voice “Blackie’s loose! Blackie’s loose!” Dad comes pronto, split second out of his study. My brother, 5 years older than me, comes out of nowhere. So Paul and Dad and I start running down the street. I’m in 7<sup>th</sup> heaven. This is exciting. People are yelling in Chinese, “Get out of the way.” They’re running and doors are slamming. Blackie’s ahead of us, a block down the road, just running for dear life and we’re chasing after her.

My reverie is interrupted by in between huffs and puffs my dad says something like this to me, “George, when you get home you are going to get the whipping of your life!” I was struck with both terror and wonder. Terror because I knew what that meant. Dad had a razor strap that he used for special discipline cases. A real tool of education. And wonder how he could know. How could anybody have told him? Now as a parent I realize you can read these things in kid’s faces but I didn’t know that then. I’m just consumed with terror. We eventually catch Blackie. Fortunately she hadn’t bitten anybody. We start walking back.

I want that walk to be the longest walk there ever has been. At that point my dad really did have three options. First, he could have ignored what I did. If he had ignored what I did the simple encouraged repetition of that behavior and ultimately somebody’s going to get hurt real bad. Blackie was going to ultimately bite somebody. He couldn’t ignore it. I guess that’s what God could do with us. He could just ignore it. But it’s going to have consequences for us and other people.

Second thing my dad could do is punish me.

My brother gave him a third option. My brother Paul, 12 years old at the time, he knew the razor strap a little bit more intimately than I did because he was in to stuff always. He looked at me and knew the terror in me. He said, “Dad, let me take Georgie’s punishment.”

That was a marvelous offer. Before I tell you what my dad did I want to tell you what God did. That is exactly what happened when our elder brother Jesus Christ, God’s Son, our Savior, appeared. There’s a judgement hanging upon us all. He came and said, I am willing to take the punishment.

There are a couple things about that, that are important to note. One of them is simply that we must decide whether or not if my father tells my brother you can take George’s punishment, I must then decide whether I’m going to let him or whether I’m going to take it myself. I can still bear it myself if I want to. I can refuse the offer. The second thing that must be true is that if my brother is going to take the punishment he couldn’t have been up on the dog box with me. If he were up on the dog box with me letting the dog loose then he needed to suffer for his own sins. He was in no ethical sense qualified to take my punishment. Only if he were innocent could he really bear my punishment, could he be punished for my sin rather than his own. That’s why the scriptures talk to us about the sinlessness of Christ. He’s not a worthy sacrifice unless he’s sinless, unless he can bear the sin of the whole world.

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So the Lord comes and offers to stand in our place and bear our punishment so that we can go free.

If my dad does let my brother bear my punishment it means that I stand at the door and I listen as the punishment is applied. That would have the same or even greater effect upon me in terms of changing my behavior than if I've borne the punishment myself. "My brother is suffering for me. I can't ever let Blackie loose again." Besides that it would create a special kindred relationship with my brother that nothing in this life would ever destroy because I'd always know that my brother suffered for me.

People who talk about becoming a Christian as getting on an asbestos suit and then going out and sinning and doing as they please don't understand the cross. Because there at the cross Jesus bore punishment on our behalf. If you're listening at the door of the cross, listening by that room where the action of the cross is taking place and you're hearing Christ suffering for you, you know he's being punished for your sin. It's going to change your behavior. It can't help but change your behavior. He died for you.

My father could uphold the law and the need for righteousness at the same time my brother could bear my punishment and all the demands of the law would be satisfied.

My dad at this point did not act like God. He went ahead and gave me the punishment. From the human stance probably what he ought to do. From God's point of view what do the scriptures say? 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." Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3 "He died for our sins." John in 1 John 2:2 "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for us but also for the sins of the whole world."

There's coming a moment when each of us individually will stand before the judgment court of God. These two questions will be asked, Did you keep my law? Did you trust my Son? If you've trusted his Son, you know that the verdict has already been handed down. That's one of the wonderful things about being a Christian. The word of what the judge is going to hand down has leaked outside the court before the court appearance, when the summary judgement is finally going to be issued. We already know what the verdict is. That's the whole idea of justification. We know in advance the way God has ruled and is going to rule. That's the beauty about salvation. We're not waiting for heaven to find out if we're acceptable to God. We already know because of our faith in Christ and trust in him that we've been made acceptable in the beloved. The verdict has been handed down.

Therefore these implications come to us. Since justification is a courtroom term it means the verdict has come down and because Christ has died in our stead, God treats us as not guilty and we are free. We are acquitted. We're innocent.

Although someone else might take our punishment they can never take our guilt. The marvelous thing about Christ standing in our place is he not only took our punishment, he took our guilt. We walk a way free and clear – acquitted, justified, treated as righteous. Once we're treated as righteous it means we have all the privileges that go with that. Just like when a person escapes and gets a "not guilty" verdict on a felony count he doesn't lose his right to citizenship and

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voting and the like. So it is when we have been acquitted. All the privileges go with that. Therefore, Paul says in Romans 5, "Since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God access into grace."

Have you ever tried to get an appointment with a famous person or a busy person? Access is hard to get. But because of justification we have access to God. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God and we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know they are working out for the good.

Flowing out of justification, we know that we are accepted in the beloved. Ephesians 1:6 tells us that we're accepted in the beloved. We're told in Romans 8:1 that there's no condemnation against us. There's no further charges. All charges are dropped and the case is settled and the charges aren't reinstated. We know our worth because of what God has done for us. God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Jesus on the cross has seen the fruit of the travail of his soul Isaiah 53. We're the fruit of the travail of his soul. He is satisfied. We know our security in him that we are more than conquerors and that nothing can separate us from his love. The writer of Hebrews goes on to say, We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed but those who believe and are saved.

Justification is God's faith statement in us. It's God declaring us righteous when we're not. It's his calling us a saint when we're a sinner. It's a faith statement. Just like God asks us to have faith in him, he turns around and has faith in us. Just like when Jesus first met Simon. In the first day, day number one, he calls him Rock. Says you're a stable person. In actual fact Simon was anything but stable at that point. Through the process of being with Jesus however he would come to that person that Jesus saw him as. Jesus justified him in terms of renaming him on day one.

That's what happens to us when we come to Christ. On day number one, we're called Saint. We're declared righteous. Even though we may not feel like it. Even though in actual fact we may not be there. God sees it through faith and knows that it's happening. He knows what the end verdict is and therefore nurses us all the way from day one right up to the end verdict. He knows that we have responded to and believed upon his Son.

Justified by faith. Faith not just an intellectual assent, not just a checklist not just an easy believism. But a faith which commits our whole life to God and wholly relies upon him and serves him. That kind of faith is the faith, which produces our justification and acquittal before God and the giving of eternal life.

Lord, in worship service like this we can in our mind come to terms with our eternal destiny. Lord, there is a moment coming when we will stand before you and give an account. In advance, Lord, those of us who know you give you thanks for Jesus. We're not nearly so aware at this moment of the joy that is going to fill our hearts when that scene actually takes place. We're going to want to run over to Jesus and throw our arms around him and love him, embrace him. We'll be so conscious of what we have been saved from. Already now we've begun to enter in, already now we've begun to rejoice and give thanks. Already now eternal life has come to us. Already now all guilt is gone. God has given us a pardon – Calvary – we praise the name of the Lord. Lord, every time the devil tries to come at us and condemn us we realize that he is the accuser of the brethren. But you are the justifier of

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those who have faith. We thank you. For persons here who are unsure of who they are, unsure of their worth, Lord, let this great scriptural truth that we are justified by faith be that steel backbone which supports all the rest of their life. For those who may not know you we pray that there will be a coming to you today, a willingness to take your offer, to bear our sin at Calvary. Thank you for your life given to us. In the name of the Lord. Amen.