

## The Covenants, Grace, And Law (Part 4)

### Justification

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The last time I spoke we were just beginning to get into a very critical part of this disheartening series of events that we have been watching unfolding over the past several years (in the Worldwide Church of God). In this case, it was the subject of **justification** and what it provides to the believer. This sermon is mainly going to focus on *justification*—that is, (1) what it is; (2) its effect on the believer's relationship with God; (3) what it does and what it does not do; and (4) its relationship with grace and faith.

We have a tendency to think of this as a more technical subject, and maybe indeed it is. But please do not overlook its importance to what has recently occurred in the church of God regarding the covenants. I think it can be truthfully said that the changes made, to a considerable extent, hinge on an incorrect understanding of this *doctrine of justification*.

In the previous sermon, I prefaced what I said about justification by means of two illustrations. One was that, though the terms used in the Bible are different from those used in the ordinary business of life, what these terms accomplish is no different than what we would use in the ordinary business of life. The Bible simply has its own special vocabulary. For example, the Bible uses a term—like "covenant," "testament," "faith," "justification," "sanctification," "salvation"—and yet there are very clear synonyms for each one of these words that we use almost daily.

For example, a covenant is nothing more than a contract or an agreement. The only difference between these words and their synonyms is the situation in which they are used. "Covenant" is usually used in a situation where one wants to interject a sense of solemnity. It gives the inference that "God is involved in this agreement."

Additionally, I also said that **faith** is involved in every formal agreement—like a business contract, or like a marriage, or like treaties between nations. The people involved in these agreements (contracts, compacts, covenants) have faith that what they are doing is the right thing. They have faith that the other people involved in the covenant are going to carry out their portion of the agreement. That is, the terms of the agreement. So, faith involved in the biblical subject is in no different position than the faith we would use in [for example] a marriage agreement.

A second one is that we are not dealing with anything unusual when the Bible uses the term *justify*. It simply means "to align, to bring into agreement with a standard." I used the illustration of justifying a document in a computer, or aligning a wall (as in construction) with a plumb line. When a document in a computer is justified, does it do away with the edge of the paper that it is aligned against? I mean, somebody would think that you were out of your tree if you said, "Well, I justified this. Now I don't have an edge of the paper." When a wall is aligned with a plumb line (proving that it is indeed perpendicular and upright and therefore justified), does it do away with the standard? That is, the plumb line. Well, of course not.

Right about here, in reference with biblical justification, we are hit with the term **grace**. All grace means though, at its simplest, is **gift**. Grace is something freely given. It is unearned. What God freely gives—when one meets the conditions of repentance and faith—is *forgiveness for the purpose of justification*.

As we begin this sermon, let us open to the book of Romans. We are going to be spending a great deal of time there. I could have chosen either Romans or Galatians to go through, but I chose to go through Romans. Either one of them we could go through, because the major subject is the book of Galatians is "justification by grace through faith." The major subject at the beginning of the book of Romans, in its doctrinal portion, is the same thing. It is "justification by grace through faith."

**Romans 4:15** Because the law works wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

Now, IF we take the statement that "justification by grace through faith does away with law" to its extreme (as far as we might want to take it, in terms of applying it); THEN, brethren, there is no such thing as *sin* any longer. IF the extreme of these people is that grace through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ does away with the law (nullifies law), THEN there is no such thing as sin. Therefore, Christ died in vain.

In addition to that, it *violently* flies in the face of two very clear facts: (1) Two thousand years after Christ shed His blood to pay the penalty for sin—thus providing *the means* for justification—we still must repent of sin in order to be forgiven. That has not changed. Therefore, sin still exists. Therefore, law still exists. Therefore, the Ten Commandments still exist—because sin is the transgression of that law. How can this be if there is no law to transgress? (2) The New Testament record of Jesus Christ's and the apostles' exhortations to the Christians **not to sin**, especially after one is forgiven.

We are going to look at some verses in John 8. This is the occasion when the woman was brought to Christ, having just been taken in the act of adultery.

**John 8:2-5** And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came unto Him; and He sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said unto Him, "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act." Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what say You?"

**John 8:10-11** When Jesus had lifted up Himself, and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, "Woman, where are those your accusers? Has no man condemned you?" She said, "No man, Lord." And Jesus said unto her, "Neither do I condemn you: go, and sin no more."

Condemnation would have meant the death penalty because "the wages of sin is death." What we have here is Jesus giving an example of *righteous judgment under the terms of the New Covenant*. First let us consider who He is, so that we can see His authority. Number one is that He was Immanuel—He was "God with us." If there was anybody who understood for the New Testament (for the New Covenant) the application and administration of the law of God for the church, it was Jesus of Nazareth. So, consider this authority. He was not only Immanuel (God with us), He is also the Head of the church.

Now, why did He make the judgment that He did? Under the terms of the New Covenant, the church is **not** a civil entity. It has no civil authority to carry out the death penalty. But is the law of God done away? No, it is not. Romans 6:23 still says, "The wages of sin is death." The death is merely *delayed*. The sin is still there, and the death penalty is still there; but the church is in a peculiar and very interesting position in relation to law. The law of God is **not** administered by the church in the same way that it was by Israel when they made the covenant with God. It is the same laws, but a different administration.

Are adultery and lust (two sins involved in this episode here) still sins under the New Covenant? Absolutely! And so is the breaking of the other eight [commandments]. But the church, out of necessity, has to administer it differently. Forgiveness of this woman is implied—because He (Jesus, God with us, Immanuel) said that He did not condemn her. Even though it is not stated directly, He did not condemn her.

But did He say, "Go, and don't be concerned about committing adultery again"? Remember this is the Head of the church. What did He say? He said, "Go, and don't break that law!" He justified her in relation to this one law, and said, "Don't break it." His forgiveness did not do away with the law! It is ridiculous, right on the face of this, to conclude that when grace clears us and brings us into alignment with what we have been out of alignment with (that is, the laws of God) that it eliminates all, or even some of what we are out of alignment with unless there is a clear statement or example in God's Word.

In the paper that I read, and in the sermon that was given, they [WCG] made it sound as though obedience on a voluntary basis is something new. Brethren, it has **always** been *voluntary*. That is what free moral agency is. "Free" means, "unhindered."

Let us go back to the area of the Old Covenant, to Deuteronomy 30, to a very familiar scripture.

**Deuteronomy 30:15-19** See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil. [Okay, we have a choice. It is voluntary!] In that I command you this day to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply. And the LORD your God shall bless you in the land whither you go to possess it. But if your heart turn away, so that you will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that you shall surely perish, and that you shall not prolong your days upon the land, which you pass over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live.

God commanded them—and us—to **choose life**. Did you get that? *Choose*—under the Old Covenant. It is not something new, under the New Covenant. There is nothing new at all about that. He did not hold any more of a gun to Israel's head than He does to ours. He did not force them! He told them what He wanted. He said, "Choose life. Choose obedience to My commands." But He did not twist their arms. He just said, "If you go this way, it's going to be good for you. If you go that way, it's going to be bad for you. If you go this way, it's going to be a blessing. If you go that way, it's going to be a cursing. I want you, I **command** you, to go this way; but you are free to choose."

Do you understand what God does in regard to our choices? There is a very loving purpose behind what He says and what He does. There is a very practical purpose behind what He does. Turn with

me to the book of Proverbs. When you see what I am going to say here, you are going to say (if you are a parent) that you do, and you did, the same thing in regard to your children. Any loving parent is going to do this.

**Proverbs 22:6** Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

**Proverbs 22:3** A prudent man foresees the evil, and hides himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.

First of all, the word **train**. It literally means to narrow in, to hedge in. Like any concerned parent, God limits our choices by commanding us regarding what He expects of us; but we are still free to choose. Children (and *we* really are "a child" in relation to God) cannot handle a large number of choices. It confuses them, because they do not have *the experience* to know which is the right choice—nor *the character* to make the right choice. So a parent (in order to protect a child, and at the same time provide instruction for right development) will tell the child, "I want you to follow a certain procedure." Or, "I want you to go in a certain direction when you go from point A (like home) to point B (to the school, or to a store, or something of that nature)."

That is one of the basic functions of God's law in relation to us. God's law **is** the procedure—or the way—that He wants His children to go in any given situation. I am going to give you a very clear example of how He limited Israel's choices during their trek through the wilderness. This is so obvious. What did He feed them? Well, He gave them roast beef. Sometimes they had chicken soup. Every once in a while, they had champagne. On top of that, they had buffalo steaks—and maybe elk and deer (venison). Now, you know that is not true! He limited their choice to **manna**, and they did not like it. They did not like it at all.

Do you understand the lesson here? Manna symbolizes **the Word of God**. Most directly it symbolizes the Word of God as supplied by Him. And when Jesus Christ came, He said, "I am the manna that came down from heaven. And, if you eat of Me, you will live forever." What God is showing here is that He wants us to receive our spiritual food from **only one Source**. They were upset that their choice of food was so limited. But, like any good parent, God was limiting their choices **for their good**—and ours, because it was written for our admonition.

Did God tell them, "You can worship on any day you want"? No! He said, "I want you to worship on the Sabbath." He limited their choices, to one day out of the week. Do you begin to see what the law of God does? If we follow God's way as shown by His law, we are narrowed in our choices but still free to choose.

Is it not interesting that when Jesus came—apparently in His first discourse (at least, the first one that was really recorded) in the Sermon on the Mount—He said, "Narrow is the way that leads to life. And broad is the way that leads to destruction." What was He saying? He was saying, basically, the same thing that God said in Deuteronomy 30. He said, "**Limit your choices to God's law**. There's plenty to pick and choose from out there, but this is the only way that's going to lead to life. Therefore, narrow your choices down."

Recall again what Paul said in I Corinthians 6:10. We need to see that again, and be frequently reminded of what he said there. It would probably be better to read more verses, but I just want to pick up on the sense of what he was saying.

**I Corinthians 6:10** Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. [Those all break God's law.] And such were some of you: but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Do you know what he said there? In different words, he was paraphrasing what Jesus said. I will put it very plainly. He said: "Obey the laws of God. Don't steal. Don't lust. Don't covet. Don't be a drunkard—**because you are justified.**" He gave that as the very reason they should obey the law of God—*because* they are justified. And so Paul said, "**Choose life**—because you have been justified." And so **justification** is given as the reason—indeed, the obligation—for voluntarily choosing life. That is, choosing not to sin.

Now, let us look at a thunderous exhortation. And I mean it. These are probably the strongest words in the New Testament. This is perhaps the most powerful exhortation that there is.

**Hebrews 10:24** And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.

*Love*—the keeping of the commandments. *Good works*—a lot broader, but still within the same theme.

**Hebrews 10:25a** Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. . .

What is in view here? It is not directly said, but it certainly looks like the Sabbath is in view here. Times of meeting—with God (having fellowship with Him) and others of the same mind. So, he says:

**Hebrews 10:25-26a** Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully. . .

"Sin willfully"—the breaking of God's law and doing it in a rebellious way. Consistently practicing it, and in a bad attitude.

**Hebrews 10:26b-27** . . .after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

Brethren, to whom is this written? It is written to Christians. It is written to people who have received the grace of God. It is written to people who are justified. And Paul is warning these people: "**Don't sin!**"

**Hebrews 10:28** He who despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses.

That is, under the Old Covenant administration of the law. Now look at this—New Testament, New Covenant:

**Hebrews 10:29-30a** Of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the

[new] covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know Him that has said, "Vengeance belongs unto Me, I will recompense."

Who is going to carry out that death penalty? God Himself! "The wages of sin is death."

**Hebrews 10:30b** "I will recompense," saith the Lord. And again, "The Lord shall judge His people."

That is, Christians—His children. So, IF we sin after having received grace (and the sin implied, right in this context, could easily be the Sabbath—which has now been reduced to no longer being commanded and holy), THEN we trample under foot the Son of God through whom we have been justified by grace.

Perhaps the key word here is **obligation**. The carnal mind hates being obliged.

**Romans 8:7** - The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be.

The carnal mind hates being obliged—that is, required by God to do anything. In their vanity, they are going to obey Him "because they love Him." Why then does God say in such strong, thunderous, and threatening terms (to His own children, those who are supposed to love Him) that we had better not sin? Somebody slipped a cog somewhere along the line.

Let us go back to Romans 4 again. We are going to look at a series of scriptures. I am not going to do much comment at this point, because the scriptures themselves are pretty much self-explanatory.

**Romans 4:16** Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.

So, it is by grace through faith.

**Romans 5:1-2** Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

**Romans 5:6-9** For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure [or, perhaps] for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commended His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

Are you beginning to see what is developing here? That is, that the words *faith*, *grace*, and *justification* are being used interchangeably. It is as though, when Paul uses one, you can read in the others—because they are all part of the same step (I will call it) in this process.

**Romans 5:9-11** Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by

the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement [or, reconciliation].

Let us leave there, and go to the book of Hebrews.

**Hebrews 6:19** Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil.

Now, let us flip back to Hebrews 4. You can study these verses later; but I will connect them, here in a little bit.

**Hebrews 4:14-16** Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly into the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

**Hebrews 7:19** For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw near unto God.

**Hebrews 7:25** Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them.

**Hebrews 10:19, 22** Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus. . . . Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

**Ephesians 2:13** But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ.

**Ephesians 2:18** For through Him we both [Jew and Gentile] have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

**Ephesians 3:12** In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him.

*Justification*, by grace through faith in Christ's blood, secures for us access into the very presence of God and more of God's grace. The emphasis here is upon the word **access**. You will recall how the Israelites' relationship with the tabernacle, and with the temple, pictured this. They were denied access into the Holy of Holies. In fact, they were not even allowed into the holy place. Only the priests could go into the holy place—which was the first room inside the tabernacle, and the temple. And they could go in there only in the performance of their duty. Whenever David put them into courses, they might only be in there two times during the year. That is, the ordinary priests could only go in there about two times a year.

So, what about the ordinary Israelites? They **never** got in there—not at all. And so no sacrifice (no single sacrifice or multitude of sacrifices)—no quantity of good works of law, or any good works—gained them entrance into where God lived (in His presence). They were completely shut off from

any direct access into God's presence. Only the high priest—and he only once a year, on the Day of Atonement; and only after he made a sacrifice for sin, underwent ritual purification through washing, and the donning of special clothing—then he was allowed in.

God very clearly is showing us that we are not righteous enough to be in His presence. Nowhere does the Bible say that justification does away with law—and that is because it is not a property of justification to do so. ***Justification brings us into alignment with a standard.*** With God, justification is *a gift*. It is unearned on our part. It cannot be earned, because our works are flawed. They are unacceptable. We are unacceptable. It is justification—by God's grace, through faith in Christ's blood—which brings us into alignment with God's standard and therefore into a status of "righteous" in the eyes of God. THEN we have access to God.

In principle, this is no different than if we break a law of man (commit a crime) and go to jail. Once the penalty has been paid and we are squared away with the law that we have broken, we are then let out of prison; and once again we have free access to the public. But the major difference—between that scenario and God—is that we cannot pay the penalty and still have His purpose continue in our life, because we would be dead.

Let us go back to a few of those verses, and we are going to pick on something that I did not mention as we went through them.

**Romans 5:9-10** Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

First of all, in verse 9, look at the word shall. "Shall" indicates something that is going to take place ***in the future***. Justification is something that takes place in the present. When we are justified, salvation is still yet *future*. That is what that verse is saying. We have been justified by the blood of Christ, but salvation *shall* come. I want you to notice this distinction. I want you to notice very clearly. Salvation is shown to NOT be the property of justification; but justification is a necessary step towards salvation (which shall be given afterwards).

Now, notice the word **for** at the beginning of verse 10. It is the connector, showing that what follows is going to be a further explanation of the statement that he just made in verse 9. Salvation is given afterwards. In verse 10, where it says "We shall be saved by His life" [indicates] salvation is given *afterwards*—because Christ lives, not merely because we are justified.

Understanding this is important, because the common understanding among Protestants is that justification equates with salvation. I said "Protestantism" because that is the direction that they [in WCG] are headed. The Protestant group that they are most like—or, developing in that direction—is the Church of Christ. And the Church of Christ rejects the Old Testament altogether.

**Hebrews 7:24-25a** But this man, because He continues ever [That is, He is alive; and we are saved by His life. He "continues ever." It is talking about Christ.], has an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore [or, because of this] He is able also to save them. . .

These verses agree exactly with Romans 5:9-10. Because He is alive, we are saved by His life—because He can continually intercede for us.



**Hebrews 7:25b** Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost. . .

That word uttermost more correctly means *continuously*. It is a never-ending thing.

**Hebrews 7:25c** . . .that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them.

So it is Christ's intercession on our behalf, on a daily basis, which assures salvation—not justification.

**Hebrews 4:14-16** Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us [Christians] therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

If justification saved us, why, brethren, would there be any need to hold fast? Why would there be any need to come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy after that? You know the answers to those questions—because justification does NOT mean salvation. It is, indeed, a step in that direction; but it is not the property of justification to give salvation. But why?

**Hebrews 6:1-6** Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, [Notice this next phrase.] let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we do, if God permit. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.

That dovetails precisely and exactly with Hebrews 10. The reason justification cannot impart salvation is because ***God is not finished with us yet!*** He is not finished with us at the time of justification. We must **go on to perfection**, and we can still *fall away!* John Ritenbaugh, Herbert W. Armstrong, did not put that in the Bible. And yet most of Protestantism will tell you that once you have received the blood of Jesus Christ, you have it made and you are heaven-bound.

God is **not** merely trying to save us after justification. Those of you who are older might remember Mr. Armstrong saying, "If all God is trying to do is save us, why doesn't He take us off to our reward after we accept the blood of Jesus Christ?" The answer is—God is still proving us. He is testing us. He wants to see if we are going to be faithful. And as the Master Potter, He is creating us **in His image**.

That is why God expresses His concern in such strong terms—thunderous and threatening terms, in chapter 10. If it was all finished at the cross, such language is totally out of place. Therefore, *justification* IS a done deal at the stake—but NOT *sanctification* unto holiness and *salvation*.

**Romans 3:19-20** Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

What God was, and is, showing is that every man's life—every work of man—has been flawed by sin. Our God is **a holy God**, and He will not abide sin. He will not live in the presence of sin. He will not have sinners in His Kingdom, destroying things (like Helel did, becoming Satan). We are going to have to be proved, tested, changed—before He is going to give us eternal life.

**Romans 4:21-25** And [Abraham] being fully persuaded that, what He [God] had promised, He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Let us understand this now. **Justification** is NOT a pardon. Justification is NOT acquittal.

**Romans 4:5-8** But to him that works not, but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describes the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputes [accounts] righteousness without works [or, apart from works], saying, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."

Now, why is justification NOT a pardon or an acquittal? The reason is because both *a pardon* and *an acquittal* leave the implication that the person is guilty (or, might be guilty). I will give you a case that most of you can remember. Do you remember when Richard Nixon resigned as President? He resigned under a cloud of guilt, did he not? But he had not been tried in a court, had he? So the man who followed him into the presidency was Gerald Ford. And what did Gerald Ford do? He pardoned Richard Nixon. Oh, that caused a great uproar within the country because there were many people who said, "Richard Nixon is guilty. No pardon is going to wipe that out of there. Put that guy on trial, and let's get this thing done." The pardon did not erase the sense of guilt that many, many people feel.

What do you think is going to happen at the end of the O.J. Simpson trial here, if he is acquitted? Do you see what an acquittal does? It does not erase the possibility that this person really is not righteous. Neither does a pardon erase the possibility that the person is not righteous. But **justification**—by grace, through faith—*clears* and *cleans* to such a degree that the person is declared and **IS righteous!** To the extent of even the scrutiny of God! Let that sink in. **There is no more guilt.** And that is why we are given access to God—on the basis of the absolutely and totally flawless and sinless righteousness of Jesus Christ. We will never be more acceptable to God as when we came to Him through Jesus Christ.

**Romans 3:24-25** Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

Because we have sinned in the past, the wrath of God is against us; and that wrath is stated right in the law. "The wages of sin is death." That expresses God's wrath. And though God could execute His wrath immediately, He does not. He forbears. He puts up with (as it were) our sins *for His own purpose* .

But there is somewhat of a danger in this. You might recall what Ecclesiastes 8:11 says.

**Ecclesiastes 8:11** Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

And so, IF God doesn't punish, THEN there is the possibility that the person will think that he's getting away with something. Well, he is not—not at all. But God forbears, until the time is right for Him to *call* and to *reveal* to each person the real Jesus and God's purpose. That is, the Kingdom of God—the gospel. As this person believes, the sacrifice of Christ comes into effect as the propitiation.

Here is another one of those words that we do not use very often. Propitiation is the noun form of the verb "propitiate." And to propitiate means to gain, or regain, the favor of. Jesus Christ gains, or regains, the favor of God for us. Propitiation has the sense of an appeasing force. *Appeased* means to bring to state of peace or calm—to pacify. Wrath gives the impression of anger, of intensity, of disturbance, of a conflict.

Picture in your mind's eye, if you can, the blood of Jesus Christ coming *between* an angry God (as it were) *and* us (a terrified human being). And the blood of Jesus Christ is **an appeasing force** that goes forward and blocks out, and calms down, and makes possible conciliation—or, we might say, reconciliation. Thus, when propitiation is used in theology, it refers to Christ's sacrifice as *the means* of regaining favor with God—which was lost through our sins. It is a force that holds back, in this case, the wrath that is intended against us.

Get this, please. Even though Christ has sacrificed Himself for this purpose, God is still in no way forced to allow the blood of Jesus Christ to apply to us. Here is where the **grace** comes in!

God is not constrained to give us forgiveness. He does not have to do it. Even though Christ has done this, He still does not have to give us forgiveness. Nothing—absolutely **nothing apart from Himself**—makes Him do this. This is why it says that it is *freely given*. It is given wholly from the depths of His own love for us and for His purpose. It is totally and freely given solely as **His gift!**

There is nothing tied to grace that has anything to do with eliminating laws. Nothing! As it is used here by Paul, it only has to do with *freely given forgiveness* which brings us into alignment with God's law; and thus, because of this, we are accounted as righteous—with the righteousness of the One who made the sacrifice of a sinless life. According to these verses that we just read, **justification** applies most strongly to sins that were **previously committed** (sins that are past) to demonstrate at the present time.

Connect that with Romans 5:9-10. Salvation is the future. You and I are *between* the time we were justified but we have not received salvation yet. So justification applies most strongly to sins that were previously committed. I said "most strongly" because justification does have an effect upon what follows—because of the relationship that it establishes for us with God. The reason is that

because, without justification, there would be nothing that follows. There would be no access to God. There would be no receiving the Holy Spirit. There would be no sanctification unto holiness. There would be no salvation.

So **justification** is a necessary step in God's plan for our salvation. It is part of the package—or, the process—by which God is reproducing Himself. But justification does not give us *carte blanche* to do whatever we good and well please in the future, does it? Do you remember what Paul said? "God forbid," he said. "How can we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" He said that, if we have been justified, it is unthinkable that we should sin.

Do these "no law" advocates believe that they can murder, steal, lie, and lust? No, they do not believe that. They know better. They know that—if people did that—the community, the society, the church, or whatever would break down immediately. Do you know what? They still hate God's Word. They still hate God's law. The carnal mind is *enmity against* the law of God.

I want to remind you of something here. In I Corinthians 3:3, to converted people Paul said that they were **yet carnal!** In other words, carnal minded people can still be in the church (can still be converted). They have not overcome the carnality that is within them yet.

And the carnal mind hates God's law. That hatred must break out and reveal its enmity. So what do they [these "no law" advocates] do? It is too obvious to say that you are allowed to murder, or lie, or steal. It is too obvious for them to say that. And so they focus their enmity on what? On the Sabbath, on tithing, on the holy days (which they surely must believe are "the least of the commandments"). I will tell you, brethren, that is *inconsistent* and that is *hypocritical* for them to do that.

Do you know what Jesus said about people who teach and say such things? You know very well what He says, but I'm going to read it for you anyway.

**Matthew 5:17-20** Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

You know what law He was talking about. You can tell right from the Sermon on the Mount—because He went right into adultery, right into lust, right into hatred. But why do they pick on the Sabbath, tithing, clean and unclean, the holy days? I will give you three reasons. First of all, because they are not mentioned directly as commandments in the New Testament.

Second, because these are laws which will most clearly identify their religious position to their friends and relatives. You cannot hide it from your neighbors if you are keeping the Sabbath (not for very long). And if you make friends with somebody, and you go out to a restaurant, and you are careful about what you eat—without saying it, you reveal something about yourself. Do you think that the fact that you are tithing is not being revealed to your friends and relatives (especially your relatives)? Jesus says, "If you are going to deny Me, I'm going to deny you. If you deny Me before men, I'm going to deny you [before the Father]."

And third, because these [laws] might be particularly and personally costly for those people to keep. What people do is take this simple truth of what justification accomplishes (knowing full well that we can never, on our own flawed righteousness, earn our way into God's presence and the Kingdom of God) and then use that as the excuse for saying that justification is salvation. And I will tell you—Satan has really pulled a clever one here, because what that does is virtually cut off all *motivation for good works* .

And so they try to emphasize that they will obey God out of their love for Him. But in doing so, they nullify free moral agency as the vital *means* of internalizing the law of God as our small part in working with God to produce the image of God, and they cut off growth and production of the fruit of the Spirit all at once.

Now, if you think that is not so, please rethink it. Just think about what happened to that church's income when it was announced that tithing was voluntary. The love of God is really showing now!

Back to the book of Romans, and I think that we will stop with this verse (although there is always in me more that I want to say). But this is such a beautiful verse.

**Romans 3:31** Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid [He says, "It is unthinkable!"]: Yes, we establish the law.

Paul has used these terms—faith, grace, and justification—interchangeably. One word here, one word there—depending upon which nuance he wanted to bring to the fore, so that we get a complete picture of what is going on here. Here he is talking about faith, and within the subject of justification he says, "No, faith in the blood of Jesus Christ **establishes** the law!" (Not "does away with it.") It no way invalidates God's laws (of and by themselves). None of God's law!

I want you to notice something. In your Bible, it very likely says "the law." Well, let me inform you of something. It does not say that in the Greek. If you want to prove this out, get an Interlinear and you will read it. The definite article is not in front of—does not precede—either word "law" there. Let me read what it says in the Interlinear.

**Romans 3:31 (Interlinear)** Law then do we nullify through faith? [A question Paul asks, with no definite article.] Not let it be! But law do we establish.

*Establish* means cause to stand, confirm. You might say, "What difference does it make?" If it said "the law" in this case, it would have meant either the entire Pentateuch or a specific law. But writing as he did, he meant *law in general* as a legal argument. Any law! Man's law, God's law, the Ten Commandments, the sacrifices—everything is included within that blanket. He says, "Faith establishes law." It remains for other areas to tell us about a specific law, or body of laws, that might be set aside. So faith then (used here in connection with grace and justification) **establishes** law. It does *not* do away with it.

And when one is justified, he is justified for the very reason that he is out of alignment with what he is being measured against. So after justification, you do not throw away the standard. Indeed, the standard becomes more important than ever—because we do not ever want to get *out of alignment* again. We need the law's guidance to tell us part of what we must do and to warn us when we are going out of the way.

Let me summarize something here, then. (1) Justification brings us into alignment with God's law and imputes the righteousness of Christ to us. (2) Justification provides access to God and opens the way for us to receive grace in its fullness, to work out our salvation with the mighty help of God. And (3) justification in no way does away with law.