

“Those whom he called he justified”

A sermon preached by Henry Dixon
at Poplar Baptist Church, on 2nd July 2017

“²⁸And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8.28 – 30, ESV)

Introduction

We have been thinking recently about verses 29 and 30 of Romans chapter 8. We have been seeing that these verses speak about five stages in the outworking of God’s eternal purpose to save his people:

1. Foreknowledge
2. Predestination
3. Calling
4. Justification
5. Glorification

These five stages have sometimes been called “the golden chain”, going from God’s purposes in eternity before the creation of the world, through our present lives, and on into God’s purposes in eternity in the future. All five of these things apply to all those who belong to Christ. All true believers have been foreknown by God. The same people who are foreknown are also predestined to become like Christ. The same

people who are predestined are also called. The same people who are called are also justified. And the same people who are justified are also glorified. This means that if any of these “links” applies to you, all the other “links” in the “chain” also apply.

Last time we were thinking about the middle “link” in the “chain”, how those who were predestined by God were called by God. We saw that the word “called” is used in two ways in the Bible. The less frequent way it is used is to describe the general call that God has issued to all mankind to repent and to believe in Christ. The more frequent way in which it is used is to describe the way in which God authoritatively summons people to come to him and believe in Christ, and at the same time works inside these people to change their hearts, to give them understanding of the Gospel and a desire to repent and to believe in Christ. It is clearly in this second sense in which the word “called” is used here. It is those whom God foreknew that he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. And it is those whom God predestined that he called in this sense of giving an authoritative summons to believe in Christ.

I said last time that many of us who attend meetings of this church know from our experience exactly what this is talking about. We can remember a time when we had no interest in the God of the Bible. The Bible was a book that we never read, and which had no appeal for us. We would do anything rather than attend a true Bible-believing church. We had no idea of our sin. We thought of ourselves as basically good people, who had a reasonable chance of going to heaven. We thought of Jesus as just a prophet, or just a good teacher, but certainly not the only Saviour. We used to think that any religious person who sincerely followed his religion would probably go to heaven.

But then something happened. We heard an accurate explanation of the Gospel. God opened up our eyes to the truth of our sin. We realised that we were at the very edge of hell. Then we realised the answer that God has provided is to give a Saviour to die on the Cross for our sins. We realised that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who became a man, and who died on the Cross in the place of sinners. We were drawn to him. We did not want to do anything else but believe. The thought of not believing was unthinkable. The only thing we wanted to do was to believe on Christ. We repented of our sin and trusted in Christ.

The great good news is that for those who have been called by God in this sense, all the other things in verses 29 and 30 are true. If you have

been called with this effectual call, then it must mean that, long before the creation of the world, God knew you and loved you, and decided to save you. It must mean also that he has predestined you to be conformed to the image of his Son. You WILL one day be like Jesus. It must further mean that you are justified. And it must mean that you are already glorified. God has given you his glory. It is just waiting to be revealed.

Today I want to think about the fourth “link” in this “golden chain”, justification, and the words that are in verse 30, “and those whom he called he also justified”.

We spent quite a bit of time on explaining the word “justified” a few months ago, but some of you have joined us since then, and those who were here could I am sure benefit from being reminded about this very important truth.

What does it mean to be “justified”? When God justifies a person he declares a person to be righteous, to be good, in his sight. God says about that person that he is “not guilty”. God acquits that person. God gives to that person a righteousness that is not the person’s own righteousness. It is God’s righteousness. God clothes that person in clean spiritual clothing that is spotless, and makes the person fit for heaven. God “imputes”, or reckons to that person the righteousness of Christ. A great swap takes place. The guilt of the sinner is laid on Christ, and Christ’s righteousness is placed upon the sinner. God looks upon that person as though the person were as righteous and sinless as Christ himself.

To be justified is entirely undeserved. It is not paid for, or earned or deserved at all. We are not justified as a result of any good works we have done. We are not justified in exchange for anything we have done. We are not justified by being baptised, or by receiving the Lord’s supper, or through fasting, or through praying, or through tithing, or through making sacrifices, or through women not wearing makeup and jewellery, having long hair and wearing long dresses, or through serving God by evangelising. To be justified is entirely a free gift, given to us by God solely because of his grace, his undeserved kindness.

We receive the gift of being justified by faith alone. But even this faith is not some sort of virtue that makes us justified. Faith is simply the means by which we receive what God has done for us. Even the faith by which we receive our status of being justified is a gift of God, so we cannot even boast about that.

How is this justification possible? How can God say of guilty sinners that they are not guilty, without God himself being guilty of some sort of deception or injustice? The answer is that it is possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus. When Jesus died on the Cross he made a sacrifice which paid for all the sins of all those who truly trust in him. The wrath of God, which should have come upon us, was poured out upon Jesus as he hung on the Cross. The debt was been paid in full. There is therefore nothing left to be paid. The justice of God has been satisfied. The demands of the law of God, which called for the eternal death of the sinner, have been fully met. The debt that was owed to God is fully paid. So it is not only the mercy of God that calls for our forgiveness. It is also the justice of God that demands that the person who trusts in Christ **must** be acquitted. If a person who trusted in Christ was not acquitted for his sins, then God would be guilty of injustice, because he would be punishing the same sins twice.

Let me take you back to the great classic passage on how we are justified which teaches these things, Romans chapter 3 verses 20 to 26. I know that this is “revision” for some of you, but please be patient if you already understand these things, because I know that there are some who attend who still do not see how we are justified.

²⁰Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. ²¹But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – ²⁶he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

The apostle has been speaking in verses 9 to 19 in this chapter about the universal sinfulness of mankind, not only of Gentiles who did not have the law of God, but also of the Jews, who had the knowledge of the law of God from the Ten Commandments and other Old Testament teaching. He has demonstrated from a series of quotations from the Old Testament that all alike are guilty of sin. So he says in verse 20 that “no-one will be declared to be righteous in God’s sight” – justified –

“by observing the law. Rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”

This is the mistake that so many make. They think that it is through their own efforts that they can make themselves worthy of going to heaven. Different religions try different means. Roman Catholicism says that if you are baptised as a Catholic, and receive the mass, then you will have the power that you need to live a good enough life to get you into heaven, or at least into purgatory, from where you may graduate to heaven after a period of time if enough people on earth say masses for you. Islam teaches that if you follow the five pillars of Islam – making the right profession of faith, praying five times a day, giving to the poor, fasting during Ramadan and going on pilgrimage to Mecca – then you can have a reasonable hope of going to paradise, if not immediately, then after a period in hell. Jehovah’s Witnesses effectively rely on living a good life and telling people about their religion to make themselves worthy of living on the New Earth. Members of various groups that call themselves Christian rely on being baptised in a certain way, or keeping certain Old Testament laws, or doing evangelism, or dressing in a certain way, to make themselves right with God. But we see here that our human efforts – whatever they may be – will never make us fit for heaven, because we are so sinful, and God is so holy.

But then, the apostle says in verse 21, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.” Now, God has provided a different righteousness, a different status of being good enough for heaven. This is not our righteousness, through our own efforts, which can never make us good enough for heaven. God has given to those who believe his righteousness, which will makes them acceptable to him.

Then he says in verse 22, “his righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” This righteousness from God is not given to us on the basis of our works. No, it is simply through faith in Jesus Christ, and not through works.

The reason why it has to be by faith and not by works is because we are all sinners. We are all in the same boat. “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (verses 22 and 23). Therefore the only way that we can be justified, declared to be not guilty, is by God’s undeserved love.

This was made possible “through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (verse 24). We were slaves of sin and the devil, but God has set us free from slavery by the price that was paid by Jesus.

Verse 25 explains how we can be justified without God being guilty of breaking his own law. "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement". The literal translation of this is that God presented Jesus as a "propitiation". What is a propitiation? It is a sacrifice that turns away wrath. The wrath of God that should have come upon us was poured out on Jesus as he hung on the Cross. God was satisfied with the payment that he made. The benefit of this sacrifice is received "through faith in his blood".

So God is able to declare us not guilty, without in any way compromising his justice. "He did this to demonstrate his justice". In the past God overlooked the sins of those who trusted in him. But now he has made a payment for their sins, thus providing a just way to forgive us our sins. "He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" (verse 26).

So, the person who trusts in Christ is declared by Almighty God to be not guilty – for ever. Once God has declared in your favour, that acquittal can never be reversed.

Now, tie all this up together with what we have been seeing about this "golden chain" of God's eternal purposes of salvation for his people. The apostle says that those whom God called he also justified. Have you known the call of God upon your life, leading you out of darkness and into his light? Have your eyes been opened to see your sin, and to see that you are a sinner who deserves hell? Have you come to see that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who died on the Cross in the place of sinners? Do you believe with all your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead? Have you come to the point where you have abandoned all confidence in your own goodness to make you right before God? Have you been moved by God to repent of your sin and to place all your trust in Jesus to make you right with him? Do you know that your only refuge for your failings as a Christian is in what Jesus did on the Cross? If your answer to these questions is "yes", then this must mean that you have been called. And if you have been called then you have also been justified. You are not guilty! You are acceptable to God!

You no longer need to fear that you might somehow lose your salvation and be condemned. You no longer need to struggle and strive to make yourself acceptable to God. You do not need to worry about what others think about you. You no longer need to prove yourself, to yourself or others. God says you are OK! Not because of any virtue of

your own, but because of what Jesus did on the Cross. All your sins have been fully paid for.

If you have been called by God then these things are true for you even if you have not yet been baptised. They are true even though you fail as a Christian. They are true even though you will carry on failing every day till your dying breath.

Sometimes I speak with believers who say something like this to me: “I know I am terrible sinner. I am haunted by the dreadful things I have done in my life as a non-Christian. But worse, I am deeply ashamed of the things that I have done as a Christian, and the things I still do. I know that I cannot get to heaven by my works. I know that Jesus is the Son of God. I know that he died on the Cross for my sins. I believe with all my heart that God raised him from the dead. I know that faith in what Jesus did on the Cross is the only way I can be saved. I cannot say how many times I have asked to be saved I do not want to sin any more. I want to live a new life by God’s grace. I can see that my life has changed and that I have been born again. Yet, in spite of all these things, I dare not say that I am going to go to heaven when I die. I am fearful that somehow I might “blow” it before I die, and land up in hell.”

If that is the way that you have been thinking up till now, then hear the Word of the Lord: “Those whom God called he justified”. If you would truthfully describe yourself in the way that I have just described, then there is very strong evidence that you have been called by God. And if you have been called by God, you have been justified. God has declared you not guilty, for ever. All your sins, past, present and future, are already paid for. You are not condemned. Believe God’s promise. Bank on what he has done for you. Trust that Jesus’s blood pays for all of your sins.

Knowing that we are justified should have an enormous impact upon our lives. Let me mention some of them.

1. It should fill us with joy and confidence, in the Lord. The knowledge that we are, definitely, justified by God should fill us with hope. We can KNOW that all the blessings of heaven are ours, for sure. We therefore do not need to become despondent when we suffer problems in this life.
2. It should destroy all boasting and pride. How can we be proud if we know that all that we have received is by the undeserved kindness of God?

3. It should stop us trying to prove ourselves, or to impress others. What is it that leads us to try to impress others and make them think well of us? It comes from not properly realising that we are justified by God. When we know that God has said that we are OK, we do not need to worry about impressing others.
4. It should make us very accepting of all other believers, whatever their failings, and whatever their cultural, social or racial differences from us. Our brothers and sisters in Christ have been accepted by God in exactly the same way as we have, by grace alone, which we received through faith alone. If God has accepted me, how can I not accept them others?
5. It should make it impossible to have a condemning attitude towards others. You and I are sinners saved only by grace. How can we judge and condemn others for their sins, when we ourselves are guilty of similar sins, and have been forgiven by God.

What about those among us who cannot say at this moment that they know that they have been called by God in the sense of this authoritative call, and therefore cannot say that they are at the present moment justified? What is the message to you? The message is, come to Christ. Receive from him God's salvation. You are in great danger. You are a sinner. If you were to die today, or if Jesus were to come back, you would go to Hell. But Jesus has died on the Cross to make it possible for sinners like you and me to be saved. His death is sufficient to pay for all of your sins, and the sins of millions and millions of people. God is offering Jesus to you, and all that comes with Jesus: forgiveness of sins, a new life, the right to go to heaven, the privilege of being part of his people, to know God for ever. This is a free gift. You do not have to pay anything for it, or pay for it. Receive his salvation. Ask him to save you. Trust him to give you eternal life. Now.

This booklet contains the edited notes of a sermon which was preached by Henry Dixon. A recording of the actual sermon that was preached may be found at

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