

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Salvation, Session 12, Justification, Number 1, Historical Reconnaissance

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on Salvation. This is session 12, Justification, Number 1, Historical Reconnaissance.

We continue our lectures on the Doctrine of Salvation, turning our attention to justification.

At the beginning of these lectures, we said that we would investigate historical theology at three important places, one of which is justification. Here's an outline of what we hope to cover together. After the brief biblical prelude, then historical reconnaissance, the Roman Catholic view of justification, the Council of Trent, and then the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Trent is in the mid-1500s, and that catechism is 1992. And then the Reformation and justification. Then, there is justification, systematic formulations, its necessity, its source, its basis, the means that faith does not work, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

That is our outline. A two brief biblical summary again. Righteousness in the scriptures should be defined not merely as covenant faithfulness but as conformity to a norm and conformity to a standard, and the standard is ultimately the holy character of God himself.

Since God is righteous, his righteousness manifests itself when he judges and punishes the wicked for their sin. At the same time, we see God's saving righteousness for those who trust in his salvation. We've also seen that God's righteousness is forensic; God's righteousness is also forensic and not transformative.

We are declared righteous, not made righteous. I might mention in passing that is exactly true. God's righteousness is declarative, is forensic, it belongs to the courtroom, it's not transformative.

But salvation is both. Salvation is transformative; aspects of it are just not justification. We are declared righteous, not made righteous.

Remarkably, God's saving and judging righteousness come together at the cross. God, in his great love, sent his son to bear his wrath and display his love for the world. The son, because of his great love for the Father and for us, willingly bore that

wrath so that on the cross, both God's holiness, his judging righteousness, and his mercy, his saving righteousness might be displayed.

For those who trust in Christ, God's righteousness is imputed to them via union with Christ. Believers are justified by faith alone, and yet, as it is often said, such faith is not alone. Good works are necessary for justification, but they function as the necessary evidence or fruit of justification, not its basis.

Historical reconnaissance, the Roman Catholic view of justification, the Council of Trent, 1545-1563. Historical theology is simply essential for this topic. We must understand these debates to understand the Bible's teaching properly.

The Council of Trent was an ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church, held in Trent, Italy, in three sessions between 1545 and 1563. The council was the Catholic response to the Reformation's theology and criticism of the Church's ecclesiastical abuses. Reformation criticized Roman Catholic theology but also criticized Roman Catholic life abuses.

The council elucidated and redefined Rome's doctrine, especially in light of Reformation attacks, corrected many ecclesiastical abuses, and gave them credit. The reformers were just outraged that priests, oh, they didn't marry, but they had concubines and all kinds of illegitimate children. Rome was embarrassed.

Rome responded by trying to clean up its act. The council made clear and redefined Rome's doctrine, being more specific in light of Reformation attacks, corrected many ecclesiastical abuses, and strengthened papal authority, the Pope's authority. It was the beginning of the counter-reformation through which many former followers of Rome were reclaimed.

I'm just giving historical facts. The Council of Trent rejected many Reformation doctrines, including sola scriptura, the view that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority for theology and ethics. Rome said no, it is indeed our authority, but it is our authority along with holy tradition.

They are dual authorities, and of course, in Rome's view, they don't contradict, and at times, the holy tradition gives us information that is not really clear in scripture, for example, the doctrine of purgatory. It's not taught in scripture. As a matter of fact, Rome used to use some proof text, but it largely abandoned them because they were so bad.

But the holy tradition does teach it. Well, as Luther said, the scriptures must judge holy tradition because it contradicts itself for one thing, and more importantly, at times, it contradicts the Bible. So, Rome rejected sola scriptura, which, as I said in a previous lecture, does not mean we only use the Bible, but that the Bible is supreme.

Of course, we appeal to tradition, to our reason; could we do theology without thinking? And even to our experience, but that sola scriptura means not the Bible alone, but the Bible alone as our chief norm, the so-called norming norm that sits in judgment on our reason, our traditions, and our experience as the supreme test of truth for both doctrine and ethics. Rome also rejected sola fide, that justification is by faith alone, teaching it is by faith and works. In 16 paragraphs, chapters they're called, the council's first decree on justification set forth the official Roman Catholic doctrine, and make no mistake about it, in opposition to Reformation theology.

Here's a summary of that decree, promulgated in January 1547. The council uses the word justice, whereas we would use the word righteousness. They're actually synonyms, but we would say righteousness is imputed to us, they would say Christ justice, that's what they mean by that expression.

Preparation for justification, the first thing, first chapter, first point. Adults must prepare themselves for justification. In the fall, free will was attenuated and bent down. That's a quote, but not extinguished.

God's prevenient grace, we've heard that before, allows adults to convert themselves to their own justification. Pardon me while I gasp again by freely assenting to and cooperating with that said grace. Notice that grace is necessary, right? And the fall affected human beings, even the human will. It attenuated that will.

It changed it in a negative direction; it bent it down, but it didn't extinguish it. In other words, we are spiritually wounded but not dead. Furthermore, this notion of prevenient grace, as we see in St. Augustine, means God's grace that prevenes, that precedes, that comes before faith.

Is that a biblical teaching? Yes. Although I have a hard time exactly finding the word grace used that way, the concept is clearly biblical. God's grace comes before faith.

But as St. Augustine said, this grace does not merely free our will and enable us to choose God, it actually saves us. And it is not universal; it is particular. God gives it to his own people.

Of course, Arminius disagreed and taught universal preceding prevenient grace came to every human being, enabling him or her to believe the gospel and be saved. It's a brilliant move. It is the glue that holds together John Wesley's Arminian theology because it enables him to preserve human freedom in salvation, which is really what he's up to, at the same time, acknowledging God's grace.

So, Wesleyanism is not a works-based theology, and it is a grace and faith-based theology. The question for me is, does the Bible teach this view of universal

prevenient grace? My own answer is it does not. I mentioned before Brian Shelton, my former student, who is a godly fellow, and we agreed on so much.

We disagreed on what prevenient grace was. He is an Arminian brother. To this day, we have good fellowship.

At my encouragement, among other things, he wrote a book on prevenient grace, and I'll give you the summary again. Good treatment of historical theology. Good job on systematics.

It is the glue that holds an evangelical Arminian systematics together. It's much better than that of Charles Finney, or of Norm Geisler, or of Clark Pinnock, who don't teach this universal prevenient grace and thus have a will similar to what I just read about Rome, that's not really in bondage to sin. Oh yes, Wesley said, he wrote tons of stuff.

Notes on the whole Old Testament, notes on the whole New Testament, translated the Bible. I don't know how many horses he wore out, but he went by horseback preaching the gospel everywhere, and the true gospel, for that we rejoice. He wrote all kinds of tracts and treatises and so forth, but one textbook, if you will, one academic book, and that is on original sin, and he believed in it.

But what he gave with the one hand, he took away with the other because of this doctrine of universal prevenient grace. As a matter of fact, there is no such thing as any human being unable to be saved because God's grace comes to all and nullifies the effects of the fall in one area: the will. So Calvinistic theology books talk about the inability of sinners to be saved; there's a section called total depravity, inability.

The best Arminian textbooks talk about gracious ability, technically affirming inability, but practically it doesn't exist. Anyway, Rome is similar, as I said. Back to Brian Shelton's book, he is good in historical theology, no question; he has a PhD in that. Good in systematics, my goodness, he learned that from me, he did, but I'm trying to be funny here.

It's Arminian systematics, but it is logical, coherent, and all right; it makes sense. The hinge that it all turns on is this universal, prevenient grace that the doctrine of salvation turns on. He and I agree in many, many other areas: the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, and so forth.

But the weakness of his good book on prevenient grace is in its biblical foundations. I thanked him; he didn't even ask me, but he dedicated the book to two persons, one is me, and to my former teacher Robert Peterson, who disagrees with much that I wrote about in this book, because he encouraged me to write this and treated me fairly. Well, praise the Lord, it is true.

Trent says there's preparation for justification. Yes, our wills are affected by the fall, but they're not extinguished. We can convert ourselves to justification by freely assenting to and cooperating with God's preceding grace.

So, we get grace, and then we have to cooperate with it. When we do that, we actually get more grace that enables us to be saved. Definition of justification, according to Trent.

Justification is not a declaration of righteousness. You know what? They're straightforward, aren't they? They get an A for being frank but an infusion of God's grace. Again, the paragraphs are called chapters, chapters 7 and 16.

God's grace enables us to be justified by the righteousness inherent in us. That same is the justice, we would say righteousness of God, because that it is infused into us from God through the merit of Christ. Further, justification does not involve the forgiveness of sin alone but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man.

Chapter 7 blatantly rejects Luther and Calvin's understanding of the gospel. Justification is a declaration of righteousness. When they say it's an infusion of God's grace, Rome then consistently attacks Protestantism for perpetrating a legal fiction.

Those are not my words. The great Roman Catholic philosophical theologian Carl Rayner, who dominated Vatican II, documents were written of a conservative Catholic sort. They all were rewritten based on his powerful influence, and we ended up with the strengths and weaknesses of Vatican II.

Good things. Catholics are encouraged to read and interpret the Bible. Before, they weren't encouraged to read the Bible.

If you can believe that, they weren't. Now they are. However, the church was led in the direction of inclusivism.

My goodness. Rahner's concept of anonymous Christianity. Those who feel their existential need for God's addressing them in the world, even through their world religions, cast themselves on God's mercy.

This is inclusivism. As a matter of fact, it's questionable as to whether Vatican II hopes for universalism the way liberal Protestant theologians do. In any case, this is a very important criticism.

Karl Rahner said the Protestant doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ is a robe thrown over a corpse. It's a legal fiction. I have two responses to that.

Number one, it is not a legal fiction. It's a legal truth. The elements of the aspects of the application of salvation come from different spheres.

Two of them are legal. Adoption is in the family court. We'll turn to that after dealing with justification.

God adopts into his family; he puts his family believers in Christ as Redeemer. He accepts them into his family, and he calls them his sons or daughters. That's in the family court.

Justification without apology is a legal doctrine. It's in the criminal division of the court where God as Father declares righteous everyone who believes in Jesus to whom God credits the saving righteousness of Christ. This is not a legal fiction.

It's a legal truth. Furthermore, this notion of a robe thrown over the corpse is totally wrong because, yes, two of the eight or ten aspects of the application of salvation, it depends on how you count them, are faith and repentance two, or is conversion one, like that? It doesn't matter to me.

Two are legal, adoption and justification, but all of them are not legal. Some of them are transformative. Regeneration involves, as we have seen, God imparting new life to sinners, and that is transformative.

As a matter of fact, I have no problem calling that an infusion of grace. But justification is not an infusion of grace. My goodness, to say justification is an infusion of grace is to confuse the gospel with the Christian life.

And so even today, we meet friends, good friends, and neighbors, not only Catholic but Protestant, who are seeking to come to be God's people by being good Christians. No, you become God's man or woman by believing in Jesus. And yes, you want to live for him, but your good works will never ever save you.

God gives us the Holy Spirit. That is an infusion of grace. We get grace.

It is transformative. So, if we combine, if we, justification is not transformative, it's declarative, it's forensic, it belongs in the courtroom. However, it is not alone.

God regenerates. God sanctifies his people, not only constituting them as saints once and for all, saints in initial sanctification but giving them his spirit and beginning to transform their lives. So, with respect for Rome's frankness, this is embarrassing.

Justification is not an infusion of God's grace. It is exactly a declaration of righteousness, as we can see. By the way, I have a problem with systematics.

Do you put historical theology up front and then do the exegesis and the systematics in light of it? That's what we're doing this time. It's debatable. Or do you put it after the exegesis, maybe before the systematics, or after the exegesis, after the systematics, to evaluate it? You can't win.

So, I'll do it here in detail and just refer to it later. Anyway, for good or for ill. Faith and justification, according to Trent.

We are, quote, justified by faith because faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and the root of all justification. That's chapter 8. Good works, merit, and justification, quote, life eternal is to be proposed to those working well unto the end and hoping in God, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Jesus Christ and as a reward, which is according to the promise of God himself, to be faithfully rendered to their good works and merits. It's saying it's both faith and works.

One more time. Eternal life is for those working well unto the end and hoping in God, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Jesus Christ. Amen, I can say amen to that part.

It's the, and that gets me. And as a reward that is, according to the promise of God himself, to be faithfully rendered to their good works and merits. No.

The only good work that saves us is Jesus' good work on the cross. Calvin also has a section of the Institutes, Book 3, chapter something or other, under justification. Christ merited grace and salvation for us.

That is true. That is true. And we rejoice in that.

And we acknowledge salvation is by works. But Jesus' works, never our works. Increase of justification.

I'm stifling another gasp. Increase of justification. People have been justified, quote, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the church, faith cooperating with good works.

Increase in that justice, read righteousness, which they have received through the grace of God and are still further justified. This is a merit theology. People have been justified, quote, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the church.

No. No. Through faith in Christ alone.

By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Faith cooperating, Trent says, with good works. They increase in that righteousness or justice, which they have received through the grace of Christ and are still further justified.

It is impossible to increase the righteousness of Christ imputed to our spiritual bank account. It is why God accepts us. It is why the reformers have a doctrine of the assurance of salvation.

Because if it depends upon my merit, if it depends upon my increasing the righteousness of God mercifully given to me, I'll never be sure of salvation. This theology makes hypocrites or depressed persons. I do not speak with a mean spirit, but I am aroused as an exegetical theologian.

Assurance of salvation. Here you go. This is the vain confidence of heretics who claim their sins are forgiven or boast of. These are quotations, vain confidence of heretics, quotations who claim their sins are forgiven, and quotations who boast or boast of confidence and certainty of the remission of their sins.

Still quoting. Rather, he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved, close quote. Therefore, quote, let no one herein promise himself anything as certain with an absolute certainty.

It is the confidence given to believing sinners from the word of God that anyone who trusts the Lord Jesus Christ, that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8.1. That nothing will separate us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord, Romans 8.38 and 39. This is a biblical confidence of sinners who trust Jesus as Lord and Savior. And yes, it involves not only the imputation of Christ's righteousness but, according to Romans 4, the non-imputation of sins, which Paul quotes from Psalm 32.

Blessed is the man or woman. Blessed is the person whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the person against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

In Romans 4, Paul speaks of the righteousness of Christ in these very terms. Truly blessed, he says, is the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works. And he quotes Psalm 32 right there, which actually speaks technically of the non-imputation of sins.

The positive imputation of Christ's righteousness is equivalent to the non-imputation of sins. Yes, we must persevere to the end to be saved, as we'll see when we study the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. But we do so, we must do so, and we will do so by the overcoming grace of God.

God's preservation assures our perseverance unto the end. We don't promise ourselves anything. God promises, as in 1 John 5. I write these things, 1 John 5:12. John says I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you might know that you have eternal life.

Rome actually did teach the assurance of salvation as a gift given by God to certain super saints. 1 John 5:12 was not written to super saints. It is written to garden variety Christians who, in their historical context, have been abused by false teachers who taught defective Christology and Christian ethics and rejected the people who would not buy into those false teachings, shaking the dust off their feet and leaving them a bruised and battered congregation.

To them, John writes, you know you have been born again because you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who shed his blood for the forgiveness of our sins. To them, he writes, you know you have been born again because God teaches you by his Spirit to love one another. You know you have been born again because you do not practice sin as you did before you were saved.

You practice righteousness even as Jesus Christ is righteous. These things I write to you, 1 John 5:12, who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. Loss of justification.

This is among the documents of the Council of Trent, which Rome regards as much an ecumenical council of the Christian Church as the Council of Nicaea or the Council of Chalcedon, where the definitive Christological settlement was reached. Loss of justification. Quote, God forsakes not those who have been once justified by his grace unless he be first forsaken by them.

Still quoting, wherein no one ought to flatter himself up with faith alone. Quote: the revealed grace of justification is the received, sorry grace of justification is lost not only by infidelity, unbelief that means, whereby even faith itself is lost, but also by any other mortal sin whatever. However, faith is not lost.

Rome distinguishes between mortal and denial sins. The first are those that condemn us in the sight of God. The latter are lesser sins.

And here they're teaching any mortal sin involves the loss of justice, of righteousness, of justification. And God holds on to us as long as we hold on to him. Let no one flatter himself with faith alone.

The people of God who believe in Jesus don't flatter themselves. They exalt in the Lord Jesus Christ and his saving blood and righteousness. And they enjoy the free forgiveness of sins and the assurance of salvation in Christ.

Recovery of justification. Those justified by grace, if they fall away, quote, maybe again justified through the sacrament of penance. Close quote.

This involves contrition, confession, absolution, and satisfaction not, quote, for the eternal punishment, which is together with the guilt remitted by the sacrament, but for the temporal punishment. This is in chapter 14 of the statements of the Council of Trent.

Here is Rome's pattern, instructions, and steps to forgiveness. No one commits a serious sin. Contrition, confession, absolution, satisfaction.

Contrition is an inner serious sorrow and regret for those sins. Confession, acknowledging those sins. Frankly and openly in privacy to a priest ordained by a bishop in the Roman Catholic Church.

Absolution, hearing the words of priestly forgiveness in that same context. And then satisfaction, performing certain works in satisfaction, rendering human doing to demonstrate the reality of our confession. Saying so many Hail Marys, saying so many Our Fathers, the Lord's Prayer, and so forth.

Rome holds seven sacraments. One is penance or confession. That forgives, according to Rome, the eternal punishment.

Temporal punishment is necessary to cut one's years down in purgatory. In case I don't say it, later on, the documents of Vatican II reinforce Rome's teaching of purgatory. How could it be otherwise? The statements of a council or a pope speaking *ex cathedra*.

That is, every statement of a pope is not dogma but statements of a pope promulgated in his official role on the seat of Peter. Those statements and those of councils are reckoned not just doctrine but dogma. They cannot be changed, and Catholics must believe them to be faithful Catholics.

Now, American Catholics are not faithful; they believe what they want. A friend of mine taught at Geneva College near Pittsburgh, and different Christian colleges have different approaches. It was a very Roman Catholic area.

Geneva accepted Roman Catholic students and taught them the Reformed faith and the evangelical and Reformed faith. A friend of mine was teaching a class of maybe 100 students, and after winning their confidence as a Bible teacher and as a man of God who would love them regardless of their background, he said, how many of you are Roman Catholics? Half the hands went up. How many of you believe in purgatory? A handful of hands went up.

They don't have the right to pick and choose like that. That's Americanism, not Catholicism. Oh, my word.

Anyway, justification or righteousness or justice can be lost, but it can be gained again through the sacraments of the church: perseverance and justification. Quote: Trent taught if he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved.

There follows, actually that's true, but it has to be rightly understood within a whole complex of theological understandings. There follows a transition from the first decree on justification to canons. We move from decrees in chapters to canons.

After this Catholic doctrine of justification, this is a quote, which whosoever receives not faithfully and firmly cannot be justified, it has seemed good to the Holy Synod, General Assembly, to subjoin these canons, that all may know not only what they ought to hold and follow, but also what to avoid and shun. This is a quote, this is a transition from the statements to the canons. After this Catholic doctrine of justification set forth in what I just summarized, it's more involved.

I gave the most important parts. Whosoever receives not faithfully and firmly cannot be justified. It has seemed good to the Holy Synod to subjoin these, to add these canons, that all may know not only what they ought to hold and follow, but also what to avoid and shun.

Then, in 33 canons, you can be happy. I'm only going to give you three. In 33 canons and statements, the Council condemns all who disagree with Catholic doctrine. Here's a sample.

I'm reading this as a person who taught the theology of John Calvin and the theology of Martin Luther many times. I know who the target is for these canons; sorry, it's a bad play, a bad pun. Canon number nine, if anyone sayeth that by faith alone the impious is justified in such wise as to mean that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to be obtaining the grace of justification and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed of by the movement of his own will, let him be anathema.

That means damned. I'll translate that one. If anyone says that by faith alone the ungodly are justified in such a way that they mean nothing else is required to be done to cooperate in order to obtain justification, and that it is not in any way necessary to be prepared by one's own free will, let him be damned.

Again, they're not beating around the bush, and they're not giving opaque statements, are they? Maybe now you see, you understand why I think this is important. Canon 11, if anyone sayeth that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, righteousness of Christ, or by the sole remission of

sins to the exclusion of the grace and the charity, love, which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost and is inherent in them, or even that the grace whereby we are justified is only the favor of God, let him be anathema. Translation, if anyone says people are justified either by the righteousness of Christ imputed alone or by the forgiveness of sins, omitting grace and love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and that is infused into them, or that grace simply means God's favor, let him be damned.

It's exactly what Luther said it was. It is the goodwill of God when we deserve his bad will. It is God accepting us when we deserve his displeasure.

Rome is not merely disagreeing with these things. First of all, when they set forth their doctrine, they then, in the transition, say you must believe it to be saved. If you don't, you are lost.

Now they're saying if you do believe the Reformation doctrine, you are damned, 33 times. The last one I'm going to give you is number 33 itself. If anyone sayeth that by the Catholic, capital C, doctrine, touching justification by this holy synod inset forth in this present decree, if anyone says the glory of God or the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ are in any way derogated from, and not rather that the truth of the faith and the glory in fine, the glory ultimately of God and of Jesus Christ are rendered more illustrious, let him be, you know what? Sorry, I either laugh or cry.

If anyone says this official teaching of the Council of Trent setting forth Roman Catholic dogma concerning justification set forth both positively and negatively in these statements, that that teaching detracts from the glory of God or the merits of Christ, rather than setting forth the truth of the faith and promoting the glory of God in Christ, let him be damned. In our next lecture, we'll become more modern and deal with the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992.

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