

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Salvation, Session 14, Justification, Number 3, Systematic Formulations and Adoption, Part 1

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on Salvation. This is session 14, Justification, Number 3, Systematic Formulations and Adoption, Part 1.

We continue our lectures on Salvation and the topic of Justification. Having reviewed Roman Catholic and Reformational understandings, we continue our Systematic Formulations, this time looking at the basis of Justification.

Its source is God's grace, and its basis is Christ's saving work. The Bible paints a panoramic picture of Christ's saving accomplishment. It begins with the essential precondition for redemption, the Incarnation, and ends with its essential finale, the Second Coming.

In between are Christ's sinless life, death, resurrection, ascension, session, pouring out the Spirit at Pentecost, and intercession. But the core, the heart, and the soul of Jesus' saving work is his death and resurrection. I wrote a book on Christ's saving work some years ago, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son, the Work of Christ*, which has two parts.

The first discusses his saving events, everything from his Incarnation to Second Coming, with the main focus being, of course, on his death and resurrection. And the second part surveys the seven biblical pictures that the Bible paints of Christ's saving accomplishment. It's a reconciliation; it's a redemption; it's a legal substitution; it's the Christus Victor motif or victory, second Adam and new creation, all these, and sacrifice.

He's a sacrificial priestly picture as well. These are the pictures that the Bible paints to interpret his nine saving events, which, at their core, again, are his death and resurrection. When Paul summarizes the gospel he preaches, he includes both Christ's death and resurrection.

I'm thinking of 1 Corinthians 15:3, and 4. I passed on to you, as most important as I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4. Moreover, the apostle also includes both of Christ's most important deeds when speaking of the ground or basis of justification in Romans 4:25. Christ was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification, Romans 4:25.

People commonly err when they are perplexed by how a God who is love could possibly condemn sinners. They are correct in asserting God is love, 1 John 4:8 and 16. They are incorrect in overlooking the fact that before John says God is love, he says God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him.

1 John 1:5. God is both absolutely holy and absolutely loving. To compromise his holiness or his love is to distort the biblical picture of his person. As we saw in the last section, God's grace is the source of our justification.

Without his incomparable love, we would never be saved. But how can a loving God declare sinners righteous when they are so unrighteous? How in his love can he maintain his moral integrity and justify the ungodly? The answer lies in the complexity of Christ's cross. Jesus, our substitute, saves because his cross affects our standing before God, both negatively and positively.

Negatively, Christ's death turns away God's wrath, Romans 3:25, 26. Positively, his death procures righteousness, Romans 5:18 and 19. These are two ways in which scripture presents Christ's cross as the basis of justification.

We'll treat the former first. Four times, scripture teaches that Christ's death is a propitiation, as in Romans 3:25 and 26, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:2 and 1 John 4:10. Again, Romans 3:25, 26, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:10.

Christ's death is a propitiation. Romans 3:25, 26 is the key passage because it is most developed. Paul had set forth Romans' thematic statement in 1:17, the revelation of God's righteousness.

Then in 1:18 to 3:20, he expanded on another topic, the revelation of God's wrath against sinners. Now he returns to the epistles theme in Romans 3:21. But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the law and the prophets, 3:21.

All humans are sinners who lack this saving righteousness and gain it by trusting Christ, Romans 3:22 and 23. God's grace justifies sinners through Christ's vicarious death, which is both a redemption, Romans 3:24, and a propitiation, verses 25 and 26. This is scripture's main text on propitiation.

Quoting Romans 3:24 through 26 from the ESV. Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness because, in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins.

It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus, Romans 3:24 through 26. In light of

scripture's witness to God's holiness, justice, and love, we must ask, how can God save sinners while keeping his moral integrity intact and satisfying his justice? The answer lies in these verses. In his forbearance and his clemency, God did not bring immediate judgment on sins committed before Christ came.

Instead, he, quote, passed over former sins, Romans 3:25. He forgave Old Testament saints on the basis of final atonement to be made in the future. He forgave them ultimately based on the work of Christ to come and immediately based on the Old Testament saints' response to the gospel message in the Old Testament sacrifices.

Although it was, quote, impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins, close quote, the Old Testament sacrificial ceremonies depicted the gospel, Hebrews 10:4. But God still had to deal with sin. He had to make atonement once and for all with a sacrifice whose efficacy would extend to Old Testament saints, Hebrews 9:15. God did this when he, quote, put forward Christ as a propitiation by his blood, close quote, Romans 3:25.

Luther states it plainly. There was no remedy for guilt and wrath except for God's only son to step into our distress and himself become man, to take upon himself the load of awful and eternal wrath and make his own body and blood a sacrifice for sin. And so he did out of the immeasurably great mercy and love toward us, giving himself up and bearing the sentence of unending wrath and death.

Luther, Epistle Sermon, 24th Sunday after Trinity in a book called The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther, volume 9, pages 43 through 45. Christ died in our place. Dying the death, we should have died.

God punished his son with the punishment we sinners deserved. God thus showed, quote, his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus, Romans 3:25. God's propitiating his justice in the work of Christ enables God to remain holy and just while justly declaring righteous all who believe in Jesus.

So, Christ's death negatively, if you will, is a propitiation. Christ's death positively procures righteousness for everyone who believes. Jesus' cross not only satisfies God's wrath, it also gains the righteousness we need for justification.

Paul presents this in his powerful contrast between the first and second Adams, Romans 5:18 and 19. As through one trespass, there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act, there's justification leading to life for everyone. For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous, Romans 5:18 and 19.

Paul first contrasts Adam's one trespass with Christ's one righteous act, verse 18. Adam's sin brought condemnation. Christ's act of dying on the cross brought, quote, justification leading to eternal life, verse 18.

The apostle then says basically the same thing in different words. Adam's primal sin made many to be sinners in God's sight, and Christ's obedience to death, even death on a cross, Philippians 2:8, made many to be righteous in God's sight, Romans 5, 19. Paul presents the two Adams as accomplishing condemnation and justification for their respective people.

Mu correctly interprets Christ's deed in verse 18 of Romans 5, quote, Paul wants to show not how Christ has made available righteousness and life for all, but how Christ has secured the benefits of that righteousness for all who belong to him. Some have interpreted verse 19 in moral categories, but Mu asserts correctly that this is a misinterpretation quote. To be righteous does not mean to be morally upright, but to be judged, acquitted, cleared of all charges in the heavenly judgment, close quote. Mu's epistle commentary on the Romans and those quotes came from pages 3, 4, 3 and 3, 4, 5. Our performance is never the ground of our justification; rather, scripture consistently presents that ground as Christ's saving accomplishment, presented in terms both negative, turning away God's wrath in propitiation, and positive, securing righteousness by his substitutionary death.

We are not justified by any faith at all, just any faith, but by faith in the Christ who atoned for us. Justification's means is, of course, faith, not works. Paul repeatedly teaches that the instrument that connects us to God's grace and justification is faith.

This already appears in his purpose statement, as the italicized words show. I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written, quoting Habakkuk, the righteous will live by faith, Romans 1:16 and 17. After dealing with God's judgment on sin, from Romans 1:18 to 3:20, Paul returns to his purpose statement and quickly explains what he's talking about, quote Romans 3:22, the righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, Romans 3:22.

Even when explaining propitiation, Paul says that it is received by faith, 3:25. A verse later he tells of God's justifying, quote, the one who has faith in Jesus, verse 26. In case we missed it, in the next five verses, he underlines the fact that people are justified by faith, not works.

Romans, I've been saying five; it's Romans 3; sorry, that was 3:25, 3:26, and now 3:27 through 31. What, where then, is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law is it excluded? By one of works? No, on the contrary, but by a law of faith.

For we conclude that a person is justified by faith, apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles, too? Yes, of Gentiles, too, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not.

On the contrary, we uphold the law, Romans 3:27 through 31. Paul devotes the next chapter of Romans to a discussion of faith and teaches that faith and grace are inseparable. We cannot have one without the other.

This is why the promise, he says, quoting Romans 4:16, this is why the promise of salvation is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants, not only to the one who is of the law, but also to the one who is of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all, Romans 4:16. Paul is even more emphatic later in Romans 11:6. Now, if it is by grace, then salvation is not by works.

Otherwise, grace ceases to be grace, Romans 11:6. As a means of salvation, faith and works are antithetical. Grace's natural complement is faith, and faith alone is the means God uses to declare us righteous. Justification's imputation, Christ's righteousness.

When God unites believers to Christ, they gain all of his spiritual benefits. Justification, therefore, is never alone, and believing sinners are not merely justified. Simultaneously, believers are regenerated, declared righteous, adopted into God's family, set apart as God's saints for a lifetime of growth and holiness, and more.

So, although justification itself does not involve moral transformation, no one is justified who is not also transformed by God's grace in regeneration and progressive sanctification. However, to define justification in terms of transformation, as Roman Catholic theology does, is to confuse soteriological categories and to harm God's people. It harms them because it encourages them to strive to please God in their lives, a good thing, as a means of being accepted by him, a bad thing.

Believers are accepted by God once and for all when they believe in Christ, and he declares them righteous because of Christ's righteousness. Justification is a forensic or legal term that portrays God as the judge who declares righteous all believers in his son. God works on moral improvement in the lives of his people as a result of regeneration and by means of progressive sanctification, but not in justification.

But if our good works are not the basis of God's declaring us righteous, what is? The answer is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers, the topic to which we now turn. Imputation is the act of crediting something to someone or something. Imputation is a banking term, a commercial term.

It's the crediting of something to someone or something. Scripture teaches three imputations. The imputation of original sin, the imputation of our sin to Christ, and the imputation of his righteousness to believers.

First, God imputes Adam's primal sin to the human race. Romans 5:18 and 19. We've been over it a number of times.

Second, God imputes our sin to his crucified son. Quote, he made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us. Second Corinthians 5:21a.

Third, God imputes Christ's righteousness to everyone who believes in him. Completing 2 Corinthians 5:21, God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, completing that statement, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Romans 5:21b.

Our concern is with the third imputation. Affirming this imputation is not based on any one passage alone but on the combination of three passages, as Brian Vickers has shown. His book is called Jesus, Blood, and Righteousness.

Paul's Theology of Imputation, Justification by Grace Through Faith, in a series called Explorations in Biblical Theology, which I edited. Brian did a nice job in this book. Three passages are the basis of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers, and the doctrine is really a combination, combining those three passages into one teaching.

Number one, Romans 4:3. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness. Romans 5:19. Just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Romans 5:19. And then 2 Corinthians 5:21. He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Romans 4:3. Romans 5:19. 2 Corinthians 5:21. Combining these three is the best way to teach the doctrine of Christ's righteousness, imputed to our spiritual bank accounts.

The first passage looks back at God's appearing to Abram in a vision and declaring, Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield. Your reward will be very great.

Genesis 15:1. When God promises childless Abraham countless offspring, Abraham takes God at his word and scripture says, Abraham believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6. Paul cites this text to prove that Abraham

and everyone else is justified by faith, not works. Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as for righteousness.

Now to the one who works, pay is not credited as a gift, but as something owed. But to the one who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness. Romans 4:3 through 5. Through faith, God imputes, credits, and reckons righteousness to Abraham and everyone else who trusts Christ as Lord and Savior.

The second passage, which we've already studied, reveals that just as Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden made many sinners, so Christ's obedience unto death will make many righteous. Both expressions are from Romans 5:19. Thomas Schreiner has previously written in his Romans commentary that to those in Christ, God graciously imputes Christ's righteousness.

At precisely this point, the contrast between Adam and Christ emerges, and the wonder of grace shines brightly. As sons and daughters of Adam, we enter the world spiritually dead and sinners, but God, in his grace, has reversed the baleful results of Adam's sin by imputing the righteousness of Christ to us. Such an imputation is an act of grace.

It is totally undeserved. Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, page 290. The third passage is justly celebrated.

2 Corinthians 5:21. God made him who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Luther labeled this text a happy exchange.

Quote, Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not.

Luther's works, volume 48, pages 12 and 13. God so identified the sinless Christ with our sin that he could say he made him who knew no sin to be sin. In Peter's words, 1 Peter 3:18, Christ also suffered for sins once for all.

The righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring you to God. 1 Peter 3, 18. By virtue of union with Christ, we become the righteousness of God.

That is, God imputes Christ's righteousness to us and accepts us. Murray Harris in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, page 455, is clear. Quote, although the term legitimate, to account, to reckon, is not used in verse 21, compared to verse 29, it is not inappropriate to perceive in this verse a double imputation.

Sin was reckoned to Christ's account, verse 21a, so that righteousness is reckoned to our account, 21b. As a result of God's imputing something that was extrinsic to him, namely sin, believers have something imputed to them that was extrinsic to them, namely righteousness. In another epistle, Paul shares the result of this imputation.

He regards knowing Christ as his supreme value and is willing to give up everything else. His highest goal is, quote, to gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. Philippians 3, 8, and 9. Combining these three texts yields good results.

God, the supreme judge, declares righteous all who trust Jesus' death and resurrection for salvation. The Father declares us righteous in Christ and accepts us based on his righteousness, not our own. This is what Luther called alien righteousness.

Quoting him, now it is certain that Christ or the righteousness of Christ, since it is outside of us and foreign to us, cannot be laid hold of by our works. Luther, Third Disputation Concerning Justification, 1536, Luther's Works, volume 34, page 153. The imputation of Christ's righteousness to believing sinners explains a lot.

It explains how Paul says believers, quote, are justified freely by his grace through the That is in Christ Jesus, Romans 3:24. It explains how God could say of a believer, quote, to the one who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness, Romans 4:5. It explains why Luther regarded justification as the article on which the church stands or falls and why Calvin called it the main hinge or principal axis on which Christianity turns. Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, book three, chapter 11, paragraph one.

As with every other biblical teaching, free justification redounds to the glory of God. We move next to what I like to call Justification's shy little sister, adoption. Justification gets all the press, but adoption is not as important as justification historically in church history; it is a warm and winsome doctrine.

Here's an overview of that, which we'll cover in the remainder of this lecture.

Adoption: first, I get a biblical prelude as usual, then adoption, systematic formulations, our need for adoption, the source of adoption, adoption's basis, the means by which we lay hold of it, adoption, and union with Christ's will round out our systematic formulation. Adoption, biblical prelude, summary.

Even though the theme of adoption isn't prominent in the Old Testament, the Lord is the father of Israel, and Israel is his son. Since Israel was God's son, his firstborn, God promised to fulfill his saving promises to them, even when they sinned in dramatic ways. The Davidic king also was the son of God, representing the nation before God.

When we come to the New Testament, we learn that Jesus is God's true son and that all those who are children of God, all those who are adopted, are adopted by virtue of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. The wonder and glory of being God's son is celebrated in the New Testament, and our sonship reveals God's amazing love and care for us. At the same time, believers are to live in a way that befits their adoption so that they reflect to the world the character of their father.

The adoption of believers is an already but not yet reality. Believers are now adopted, but the fullness of their adoption will be consummated on the last day when believers are granted new bodies in the resurrection. Adoption, adoption, systematic formulations, systematic formulations.

We build upon the solid biblical foundation, which I've just summarized, to explore a systematic theology of adoption. This vital yet neglected teaching is perhaps the warmest of the New Testament, as Jim Packer reminds us in his famous book, *Knowing God*, 20th-anniversary edition, page 201. If you want to judge, Packer says, how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child and having God as his father.

If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means he does not understand Christianity very well at all. Everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new and better than the old, and everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish is summed up in the knowledge of the fatherhood of God. Father is the Christian name for God.

Adoption's need: I have repeatedly made the point that to understand the aspects of the application of salvation, we need to understand the need for each one of them. Adoption's need is not merely that we are orphans, as much popular teaching has it. That's not wrong to say that, but God has dug a much deeper pit for us than just merely being orphans.

Adoption's need is bondage, slavery to sin. As with all aspects of the application of salvation, adoption is best understood against human's need for it. We need adoption because, due to the fall and our own sins, we are enslaved to sin.

Paul says that before adoption, we were in slavery under the elements of the world, Galatians 4:3 and that after adoption, it is said of each believer, quote, so you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir, Romans, Galatians 4:7. Adoption is thus God's gracious application of the salvation accomplished by Christ, in which God frees slaves to sin and welcomes them into his own family as sons or daughters. John speaks more strongly than Paul. This is how God's children and the devil's children become obvious.

There are two types of human beings for John: children of God and children of the devil. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother or sister, 1 John 3:10. John divides humanity into two equally observable groups, God's children and the devil's children. Yarbrough captures John's idea, quote, based on his reader's divine parentage, John is confident that God's true children, like those of the devil, ultimately cannot conceal their identity, close quote.

Robert Yarbrough, 1-3 John, Baker Exegetical Commentary, page 196. Specifically, John points to doing right and loving one another as the litmus tests of true spiritual pedigree. God's children reflect their father, whom John describes as God is light, 1 John 1:5, and God is love, 1 John 4:8 and 16.

Scripture also describes people becoming God's children in another way: regeneration. Here, the need is spiritual death that separates people from God. His antidote is to make them alive spiritually, causing them to be born again, John 3, verses 3 and 7. So, there's an overlap in the Bible's teaching.

Two images are familial: the courtroom image of adoption and the death-to-life image of regeneration. The product of both is the children of God, the born-again children of God's regeneration, and the adopted children of God's adoption. Adoption's source is the love of God.

We will see that the means of adoption is faith in Christ, but is faith its ultimate source? The answer is no. The ultimate source of people becoming God's children is his will and love. Paul sets this forth in Ephesians 1, verses 4-5 and 11.

In love, God predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ. According to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has blessed us with in the beloved. That is only verses 4 and 5 of Ephesians 1, not verse 11.

Here's verse 11. In him, we received an inheritance because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who worked out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will. Ephesians 1:11.

In the first text, Ephesians 1:4 and 5, God's love for people is behind their sonship. All this accords with the quote, the purpose of his will and redounds, quote, to the purpose of his glorious grace. In the second text, believer's inheritance, one result of our adoption, follows from his plan to save.

John likewise, John likewise, traces our sonship to God the Father's awesome love for us. 1 John 3:1. See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children. And we are.

1 John 3:1. Adoption highlights the Father's love for his children. As Yarbrough asserts, quote, the love's greatness lies in its effects. It makes people tekna theou, children of God.

The love's greatness also lies in its purpose. The Father bestows such love in order that, hina clause, John and his readers might enjoy his familial favor. Yarbrough, 1 to 3 John, page 196.

Adoption's basis, Christ's person and work. Its source is the grace of God. It means faith.

Its basis is Christ's person and work. On what basis did God adopt slaves to sin as his beloved children? Did he simply pronounce them his own? No. For he had to redeem them from their state of bondage, and for that, the death of his son was necessary.

Thus, the basis for our adoption is the person and work of Christ. First his person. Unlike believers who become sons or daughters of God by grace through faith, Christ always has been the eternal son of God by nature.

When scripture ascribes agency in creation to the son, it implies his eternal sonship. Paul does this. The Father, quote, has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the son he loves.

For everything was created by him. In heaven and earth, the visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. Colossians 1:13, 16.

Hebrews does the same. Quote, in these last days, God has spoken to us by his son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him.

Hebrews 1:2. Moreover, Paul teaches that, quote, when the time came to completion, God sent his son born of a woman born under the law. Galatians 4:4. The second person of the Trinity did not become the son of God at the time of his incarnation, but he who existed eternally as the son was sent by the Father into the world at his incarnation. Second, Christ's work.

The eternal son of God died to deliver those enslaved to sin. The atonement motif corresponding to adoption is redemption. This involves three things, a state of bondage, the payment of a ransom price, and the consequent state of freedom of the sons of God.

Quote: when the time came to completion, God sent his son born of a virgin under the law to redeem those under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Galatians 4:4 and 5. Earlier in the same epistle, Paul more explicitly defines the son's redemption. Quote, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us because it is written, cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.

Galatians 3:13. We lawbreakers were under a curse, that is the penalty the law threatened to the disobedient. In grace, Christ paid our penalty by dying as an accursed man in our place.

As a result, we enjoy the Christian freedom of God's children. Stott does not overstate the importance of this text. Quote, this is probably the plainest statement in the New Testament on substitution, John Stott wrote.

The curse of the broken law rested on us. Christ redeemed us from it by becoming a curse in our place. The curse that lay on us was transferred to him.

He assumed that we might escape it. In our next lecture, we'll keep going with adoption, this time looking at its means, which is faith in Christ as Redeemer.

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