***The Message of Easter  
RO26-02***

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We are studying Romans 3:24-26. This is the second segment on the topic of "Justification by Faith."

**Easter**

This is Easter Sunday. This would be a good time to review some of the things that commonly occupy the thinking people on the subject of Easter. However, I should precede those remarks with the fact that you may find that there are some things that you've always held and practiced about Easter that may come as a shock to you when you discover where those things came from. One of the places that we have picked up a lot of misconceptions is on this subject of the special Christian days, such as Easter and Christmas, and so on.

**Easter Sunday is a Non-Biblical Holiday**

So, to begin with, we should state that Easter Sunday is a non-biblical holiday. It has become a tradition to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it is not an event of a biblical sponsorship. Of course, it is a very fitting event that we as Christians should observe in a special way, because it is the climax of God's solution to the human sin dilemma. Easter represents God's climax to solving the problem of sinners needing absolute righteousness. So, there isn't, in itself, anything wrong with observing the resurrection day of Jesus Christ when all this thing was settled once and for all. It is a very special day.

However, having said that, I want you to recognize that Easter is not a biblical holiday. Somebody may immediately (if you have a King James translation in front of you) point out Acts 12:4: "And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him;" that is, to keep Peter. Herod had imprisoned Peter, the chief spokesman of the disciples. Then you have this phrase in Acts 12:4: "Intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people."

There are some people who have looked at that and said, "Aha, Easter is in the Bible." But you will observe, if you check your notes, if you have a good Scofield Bible, that the original Greek there does not say "Easter" at all. It's the word for "Passover." What Herod was trying to do was to have a special event on Passover by killing Peter. But the King James translators had, by the year 1611, so absorbed the idea of a special holy day called "Easter," that they could not restrain themselves from putting the word "Easter" there when they knew very well that the translation of the Greek word was "Passover." But they said, "Well, we'll put our word in that we observe at that particular time," because, of course, Easter did fall at that same point in time.

**We no Longer have any Holy Days**

So, this is the reason I say that Easter does not come from the Bible. Easter is in no sense a holy day. There are no holy days in the dispensation of the church. That disturbs a lot of people. The Jews had holy days. Sabbath was a holy day. You could get killed for working on a Saturday when you were in the dispensation of the Jews under the order of Moses. But we have no such thing in this day of the church. You can't get killed for working on Sunday. The reason you can't is because Sunday is not a holy day. Easter is not a holy day. Christmas is not a holy day. Good Friday is not a holy day. There are no holy days.

This is very clear in the Word of God. The book of Galatians was the great book that was so dear to the heart of the reformers, because it was the book of Christian liberty. And in that book of Galatians, which the apostle Paul wrote to a group of people who were going back as Christians to the Old Testament order of holy days (and all that business) that Paul was writing to them on this occasion. And he called their attention to the fact that, as Christians, there is no holy day. Sunday is just like Saturday; Sunday is just like Monday; Sunday is just like Tuesday; and, Sunday is just like Wednesday. They're all the same days.

Now, what the Lord may lead you to do on Sunday as against what you may do any other days of the week is perfectly legitimate. We set Sunday aside as a day for particular worship and gathering in the Lord's name. And that's probably right and fitting. But we do that as a custom that has come down to us from the practice of New Testament Christians. We do not do it because the Bible says, "Sunday is a holy day, and here's what you will do on Sunday." We have no instructions for that in the Bible. All we have is the fact that the believers gathered on that day.

Therefore, in Galatians 4:10-11, Paul says in rebuke to them: "You observe days and months and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest I bestowed upon you labor in vain." Paul says, "I move through the churches of the province of Galatia, and what do I find? I find Christians who are observing holy days." And Paul says, "That really scares me. I think: what has all my effort been for?" I have used the word 'grace' 5,000 times if I've said it once among you. I have taught you the freedoms and the differences from the Old Testament order. And when I get here, what do I find you? You people are holding holy days. You have Sunday holy days, and you have this day holy days." He says, "I'm really afraid of you. I'm afraid of where you're going."

Do you know what he was concerned about? He said, "You're going to get to heaven and lose rewards. That's what you're going to do, because you're hung up with Satan's religious systems."

So, for that reason, we warn you, first of all, on this happy Easter Sunday that it is not a holy day, though it is a fitting day that we should remember the special thing that God accomplished through the death of Christ, and through His resurrection on this day, almost 2,000 years ago.

However, it is a day which, through history, has absorbed a lot of pagan notions. And this is the point where you could ask yourself, "Now, why do I do this on Easter?" You wouldn't know. You have to actually go back in church history and say, "Now, let's take a look at this. We're in the New Testament church. Here's this special day called the Resurrection Day holiday. Now it is called Easter – it wasn't at first. And, later on, it moves on, and you wonder, "Now, why do I do this and this and this on that day?"

**Easter Bunnies**

For example, what verse in the Bible tells us about the Easter bunny? We're talking about the white kind with the long years, and the little tail on it. There are many children in Sunday school today who are going home from their Sunday school class, to the great consternation of their parents, bringing home a little bunny. They got it in Sunday school. It is the Easter bunny. They're bringing it home. And the kid comes home and says, "Here it is. It's Easter Sunday, and I got a bunny." Now what are you going to do with it? Get more bunnies, maybe, but there you are. We have refined that. To remove that problem, we give chocolate bunnies instead. A lot of kids got chocolate candy bunnies in Sunday school today. So, we have real bunnies and chocolate bunnies. What's that got to do with Easter?

**Hot Cross Buns**

On Good Friday, some of you good pagans made us some little cakes. You made us little round cakes. And you took some frosting and you made a cross on it. It's called a hot cross bun. And you ate it on Good Friday. Some of you are guilty. Why did you make those hot cross buns to eat on Friday, huh? You don't know. But you know you're supposed to do that on Easter, don't you?

**Hard-Boiled Eggs**

Of course, there is the old hard-boiled egg, and you have painted it all up, and added things to it, and done one thing and another. There's your hard-boiled egg, and it's colored different colors. And probably we could go to several homes, and find a bowl of hard boiled colored eggs. Why do you do that? Because it's Easter? Don't you understand? Oh.

**Ham**

Of course, a lot of you are (I hope you're not) having ham. You're having a special treat that you have at Easter. You come up with ham. Why are you commemorating Easter with ham? Why the pig meat at Easter time? Where did that thing ever get started?

**Lent**

Then some of you have been real good for 40 days. You'll be a really bad tomorrow, but up to now, preceding Easter for 40 days, is that period called Lent.

**Ash Wednesday**

It began on a Wednesday called Ash Wednesday, which was observed in the history of the Catholic Church, and people do it today. You go to church on that day, and the priest makes some ashes, and he marks a cross on your forehead, as a sign that Ash Wednesday has begun. And from then, for 40 days, you're going to behave yourself. People give up things for this special season in order to honor God.

**Nimrod and Semiramis**

I should alert you to a little bit of why we do these things. It all goes back to a fella in the Bible named Nimrod. Nimrod married a woman called Semiramis. Nimrod married Semiramis. Now, Semiramis remembered Genesis 3:15, where God said that he was going to send a Savior. He told Adam and Eve, "Now you're in trouble. You've lost your innocence. You'll now need absolute righteousness to come to heaven. I'm going to make a provision for you."

Well, Nimrod married Semiramis, and they had a son whose name was Tammuz. Semiramis, apparently, remembered Genesis 3:15. She was under Satan's guidance, and, as always, Satan wants to counterfeit the real thing. She made herself the fulfillment of that promise of Genesis 3:15. She said, "I am the woman, and Tammuz is the seed that God has promised. (She would call God "the Supreme Being.") And the word was put out by Semiramis that this son, Tammuz, had been born in a miraculous way without a human father. Isn't that interesting?

**The Mother-and-Child Cult**

Nimrod began Babylon; the Tower of Babel; and, the culture of Babylon that eventually stemmed from that. So, here we have Nimrod and this religious system. This was the first organized religious system in the world, countering the system that God had. Now, that's important. This was the first systematic, organized, satanic, anti-God, religious system. Nimrod and Semiramis supernaturally and miraculously conceived a son called Tammuz. The Tower of Babel was probably a temple, in part, which was being built to the worship of this cult, because the cult that developed was that Semiramis, with Tammuz, was presented as the mother-and-child cult. That's how it was known in the ancient mystery religions.

Archaeologists have found literally hundreds and hundreds of little images of a mother sitting holding a baby in her arms. Of course, you've recognized it immediately as Mary and Christ, because later on, the Roman Catholic Church looked at this pagan system and they said, "We're going to absorb vast numbers of people into the Roman Catholic system, and we can do it more easily if we can let them feel at home in this system. They're already worshiping a mother and child as being an access to God. (And that's the point of the mother and child – access to God.) We'll call the mother Mary; we'll call the child Jesus; and, and we'll let them keep on all the customs and all the heathen pagan practices that they have done up to now. And they'll feel allegiance and loyalty to the Roman Church. So, this is what they did.

**Ashteroth**

This mother-child cult moved to Phoenicia from Babylon. There it came under the name of Ashteroth and Tammuz. And this mother-and-child cult spread all over the ancient world with different names in different countries, but it was the same thing.

**The Sign of Tammuz**

Now here, in Phoenicia, another thing was added. A symbol was added for Tammuz the son. The son was added as the sign of Tammuz. And you know that through ancient cultures, the son was worshiped as a God. Why? Why was the son worshiped? In part, because the sun was Tammuz, the son of Semiramis, and he was worshiped under that symbol.

**Child Sacrifice**

The mother and child cult came over into Canaan, and it was worshiped under the name Baal. You've heard of Baal worship many times in the Bible. The Jews just could not keep their hands off of Baal worship. They were just so absorbed, and they were so drawn to worshiping this mother-and-child cult under the system known as Baal worship, which included feeding human beings alive (their babies) to the mouth of Baal as he sat there in his image. They would build a fire, and they throw their babies in as worship offerings to the Baal system. This was all mother-and-child.

From Phoenicia, it moved over to Pergamus in Asia Minor. After Babylon fell, Pergamus in Asia Minor became the center of the mother-and-child cult worship, which was called Satan's Throne. Now the reason it is called Satan's Throne is because Pergamus became the center of the mother-and-child cult worship after Babylon went out of operation.

From Pergamus, it went to Egypt. In Egypt, it was called Isis and Horus as the names of the mother and the child. In Greece, it was called Aphrodite and Eros. In Rome, it was called Venus and Cupid. Venus was the mother, and Cupid was the child.

Archeology has confirmed this with these images all over the ancient world. Satan is so brilliant. I'm telling you, he is smart. Just like the Bible says, "No one has ever been created who had more discernment, intelligence, and smarts than the devil." And he came up with a magnificent plan. You have to respect him for the idea that he put together here to counter the real person of the Son of God when He came.

**Holy Water**

Well, of course, out of this Babylonian system, and its Tower of Babel setup, there came certain doctrinal positions. Semiramis, the mother, was presented as the way of approach to God. Therefore, she was given the title "The Queen of Heaven." "The Queen of Heaven" title is now applied by the Roman Catholic Church to Mary. If you were to read your Old Testament, you would find that the Jews worshiped the Queen of Heaven on occasion. When they fell into idolatry, one of the idols that they were worshiping was the Queen of Heaven, who was this mother of the mother-and-child cult Semiramis. She grace salvation through certain rituals. The way Samaritans gave salvation was by taking water, and she would bless this water so that it became holy water. Then you would come, and Samaritans would sprinkle her followers with this holy water, and thus dispense salvation to them.

**The Roman Catholic Church**

Of course, the Roman Catholic Church has picked that up and said, "Let's use it. We'll say the same thing. We'll just take it right into the system. Then the pagans will feel at home with us."

**Purgatory**

Semiramis gave not only this kind of ceremonial cleansing, but she also taught about the purgatory after death.

**Confession to a Priest**

She also taught that if you went to her priest, her priest could absolve you from your sin as you confessed it to them.

**Resurrection**

There was a special things that was propagated about Tammuz (and here we come to Easter). The story was that a wild boar came upon Tammuz while he was out hunting one day, and the board killed him. Then, three days later, a most marvelous thing happened. Three days later, Tammuz came back to life. All of this, mind you, was before Jesus Christ ever showed up on the human scene in human history. And all of this was before all that He did came to pass, but which Satan knew was predicted (was coming).

**Easter Ham**

So, the story went out that the boar killed Tammuz. And here, I suspect, folks, is where we get the Easter ham. I suspect that here is where the connection is as to why we eat ham at Easter time as a special meat. It's because of the commemoration of the boar that killed the Tammuz.

**Lent**

Then, subsequently every year, they would come to the death of Tammuz and his marvelous resurrection to life again, and the temple of virgins would commemorate that with a 40-day period preceding it. Before they came to the feast day here, commemorating the miraculous resurrection of Tammuz, the temple virgins for 40 days would observe a period of special mourning. Of course, that the Roman Church took that and that has become what is today known as Lent. So, if you observe Lent, you're just joining the pagan temple virgins in commemorating the miraculous resurrection of Tammuz.

**Astarte and the Feast of Ishtar**

Some of them would actually carry on a fast, and this fast would end on a day which was named after Astarte. Astarte was one of the names of Semiramis, the mother. In Ninevah, she was called Ishtar. The feast day commemorating the resurrection of temples was called the Feast of Ishtar.

**Easter**

The English-speaking world changed this word to Easter. There is word the word "Easter" comes from. Easter is the name of the "Astarte," who is Semiramis. That's the connection. So, when you are celebrating Easter as a holy day, you are celebrating the only holy day that there is connected with this (for the Bible does not connect anything to this). The holy day that you're celebrating under the name "Easter" is the holy day of commemorating the supposed resurrection of Tammuz in the Babylonian false pagan worship cult.

**Hot Cross Buns**

This resurrection of Tammuz was celebrated with a little cake that was made. This cake had upon it the first initial of Tammuz's name. To us, it's a "T," but in the Babylonian alphabet it was a cross. That's why, on the cakes commemorating the Feast of Ishtar, the cakes are called hot cross buns today. They are offered to the Queen of Heaven. Again, you will read in Jeremiah, as he describes this cult worship, in Jeremiah 44:16-19, and in Jeremiah 44:25, Israel repudiates God, and actually begins worshiping Semiramis and Baal (who was Tammuz). And they go through all of the problems. In Ezekiel 8:13-14, you have the women observing 40 days of Lent for Tammuz before the Feast of Ishtar, and Ezekiel is condemning them for doing it. In Ezekiel 8:6-10, you have the desecration of the house of God, for they actually brought this mother-and-child cult into their temple. That's how bad their idol worship became in Israel. This cake was offered to Ishtar, the Queen of Heaven, of the mother-and-child worship.

So, God actually sent Israel into captivity for this very thing – for observing the same kind of paganism that many churches are observing this day.

So, it is amazing that, in the Phoenician alphabet, this "T" comes out as an "X," and that this was presented on these cakes, and it stood for Tammuz. It is found in many, many altars in ancient temples. You'll find this Phoenician "T" (this "X"). You can go into churches today, and you see this "X" all over. ... What do you think it means? You may say, "I know. It stands for "Christos. It stands for Christ." No, it doesn't. You see that "X" on altars, and so on, and you may say that much, and we may accept that – that that's what you mean by it. But its origins are actually pagan. It's the "T" for Tammuz in the Phoenician alphabet.

**Ahab and Jezebel**

We could go on with this. Of course, Ahab, as you know, married Jezebel, and she brought the Babylonian system of Baal worship into Israel. And then it went from there, and got worse and worse.

**The Hard-Boiled Egg**

The hard-boiled egg is an interesting feature. You might want to know about that. The Babylonian story on this was that a mystical egg fell from heaven onto the Euphrates River. And this egg was pushed to the shore by the fish, and a group of doves sat on this egg and they hatched it. And out of this egg came Semiramis. The egg broke, and there was Semiramis. She was called Venus; Astarte; and, all these other names. Here Venus (or Semiramis – whichever you want to call her) came out of that egg. Here was the way the ancient people had secured the presence of the Queen of Heaven. This brought about a celebration in the month of April, which we've already covered. Since Semiramis was called Ishtar in Ninevah, it became known as the observance of Ishtar in April, which was then changed to Easter in the English language.

The worshipers of Astarte (the worshipers of Semiramis) observed 40 days of Lent preceding this time to celebrate this whole event. The egg then was converted by the Roman Catholic Church into the sign of new life breaking forth. But actually, the truth about the matter is that, in China, the hard-boiled eggs were colored them. They did a great deal of coloring of eggs. And this is all tied back to this whole mother-and-child cult invented by Nimrod and Semiramis, way back at the dawn of history. We've lost track of where these pagan practices begin. So, we have to go back to the records. And we have to start researching what ancient people have written for us, and what the scholars have researched and put together. And we can then begin to see the thread by which it has come down to us today. So, here we are practicing things such that, actually, God sits in heaven, and He shakes His head: "40 days of Lent. My, My. Pig meat celebrating the resurrection of My Son. My, My. Hard-boiled eggs – colored with a Mickey Mouse face on them. My, My. Hot cross buns." Well, at least they taste good. That's not bad.

**The Pontifex Maximus**

Well, we could go on and on with this. There are many other interesting facets that were added to this. Of course, Rome took over all of this. The Romans Caesar's themselves then took the supreme place that Semiramis once held, and they call themselves the Pontifex Maximus. Well, the Pope is called The Pontifex Maximus today, because he took over the role of the Roman emperors after Rome fell.

**The Fish-God Dagon**

So, we have this whole thing, including the fisherman's ring on the pope's hand, which incidentally, happens to be the symbol of the fish God Dagon, which was part of this ancient pagan system. All of this has come down to us in this kind of perverted form.

**The Resurrection of Jesus Christ**

Easter, in theory, seeks to celebrate a supreme moment in history. Anytime we talk about Easter, that's how we're going to talk about it. We're going to think about it in the fact that it can have a true significance. It marks the death of Jesus Christ as the Son of God for the sins of the world, and His resurrection again. There is nothing wrong with having a special day as such just so that we don't add all of these human viewpoint traditions, and just so that we're not putting all these things that came directly from paganism and say, "This is what we do at Easter," as if it had some spiritual significance. That's my point.

I don't want you to stop enjoying Easter. I just want you to be careful that you do not attach pagan practices as if they were things that God approves of. But the supreme message of Easter is a very significant one. It is the message of justification by faith. So, it is very fitting that on this Easter Sunday morning, in spite of all the pagan features that are attached to this, there is a real solid body of truth that we have to enjoy on this event. And no more fitting verse could we come to than Romans 3:24, where we have now come.

**The Reformers**

For here is the verse that made the difference during the Reformation era. Here is the verse that suddenly broke upon the 16th century world after 1,000 years of spiritual darkness. The reformers (men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Zwingli) had suddenly looked in Scriptures, and they say, "Here is the answer. I have found it. I found the answer. After all this misery that I'm going through," for these men knew that they were not right before God. They had all the problems of the image of God in them, and of the testimony of creation. So, they were trying to do the same thing that the pagan cult of the mother-and-child cult was doing. That's all they knew. That's what they were taught. And they said, "This is not doing it. This cannot be the answer. This cannot satisfy a holy God.

A person like Martin Luther would go to the extreme where they would pick him up practically dead in his cell sometimes, as he would abuse his body physically in order to try to drive the sin out of himself.

**Justification by Faith**

Well finally, along came, through the study of the book of Romans, Paul's formal declaration of what Easter Sunday was really all about. And it just exploded like a Fourth of July spectacular over their minds, as suddenly they realized that through that darkness and superstition that they had been taught by the Roman Church (who had picked it up back there from Semiramis and Tammuz and Nimrod), that the real truth was right here. And it was the magnificent truth of justification without human doing. Here is a doctrine that I hope you will learn and learn well. This was the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation: "Justification by faith." And peace flooded the souls of thousands and thousands and, in time, millions of people, because finally these men went back to this verse right here. They went back to Scripture, and they understood what God had done to satisfy Himself and His holiness, and to enable Him to take sinners into His heaven. This is the solution.

Paul begins here by explaining his main theme now in this book: justification by faith. God, in love, has made it possible for sinful humanity to receive absolute righteousness simply as a gift. A sinner can become as perfect in God's eyes as Jesus Christ is. Consequently, he will spend eternity in heaven. And once a person accepts this absolute righteousness apart from human doing, he can never lose it again.

Please remember that the transaction for your sins includes the past sins; the present sins; and, all those terrible things you're still going to do that you have not yet done. God deals with your sins as a package deal: past; present; and, future. God does not deal again with that pagan notion that came with those Babylonian doctrines. Babylonian doctrines says, "I can forgive your sins up to this point right here. I can take care of everything that's passed. You're clean right now. I sprinkle you with the water. I absolve you by the priest. I do whatever the ceremony calls for. Then from then on, it's up to you again. If you do something out here that's wrong, you're right back in trouble again." That's where that idea comes from: that one cannot be saved and remain saved; and, that you're saved today, and you're lost tomorrow. Where did it come from? Right back there from Semiramis and Tammuz and Nimrod. They invented the whole system. And Christians, in time, as Christianity became corrupt, absorbed the whole thing. It's a package deal. It's an irreversible transaction. So, let's go here.

**Justified**

Romans 3:24: "Be justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." "Being justified looks like this in the Greek. It's a great word: "dikaioo." "Dikaioo" means "to be declared righteous" – to be told that you have no moral guilt. That is the idea of "dikaioo." The word in the New Testament describes a position of righteousness, the standard of which is God Himself. When the Bible says that a person has been justified, it means that that person has been declared to be as righteous as the triune God.

**Justification**

The word "justification" is a theological word. It's a technical word. It is a word that we use to convey the idea of this Greek word. The idea of justification in the Bible is the act of God removing from the believing sinner his guilt and his penalty (the penalty of spiritual death) which that person has incurred because of his sins; and, instead, God bestows upon him the righteousness of Jesus Christ. When a person believes in Jesus Christ, please remember that you are placed in Christ. Up to that time you are in Adam, but when you believe in Christ as Savior (and that's the key), you trust in Him (that's the translation of that), you rely on Him for salvation, you are placed in Christ.

**In Christ**

It is God the Holy Spirit who does this? That's why God the Holy Spirit is the agent of justification. Justification is applied to you specifically when you believe in Christ as Savior. All justification is, is a declaration. It's a declaration by God. In other words, God is the judge of all the universe. You stand up before God. God looks down upon you, and He makes a decision about you. He says, "You're guilty," or "you're not guilty. And justification is a declaration that you're not guilty.

You're still a sinner, but what God is saying is that God in His Holiness has had your penalty paid by His Son. Therefore, if you're willing to accept the gift, God will say, "All right, you're not guilty." That's the idea of justification. It's a judicial act. It's an act of God. God is the judge. The lost sinner is the defendant. The justification is the formal declaration of acquittal. Now, get that. Justification is the formal declaration of acquittal by God relative to the guilt of the sinner. God is saying, "You're not guilty anymore." And the judge pronounces the sinner as absolutely righteous, because he has done no more than to believe in Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

What God does when this happens is, because you are in Christ, you have now come into the realm of absolute righteousness. And this absolute righteousness is imputed to your account. It is credited to your account. That's what 2 Corinthians 5:21 says. Let’s read it again: "For He has made Him (Jesus Christ), who knew no sin, to be sin for us (to pay the price of sin), that we (who are sinners) might be made (that is, might be declared) the righteousness of God in Him (in Christ)." Because you are in Christ, you have His righteousness credited to your account. And the way you get in Christ is you trust Him the Savior.

Now, once you are in, you cannot ever get back out. It is a birth situation. This is what the Bible calls "the new birth." So, once you're born again, you're in the family.

Let's look at the grammar back here at "dikaioo." "Dikaioo" is in the present tense, which means that this is the constant condition of the believer. Once God has said, "Not guilty," God can never reverse that. Even God can never reverse that. Once you have accepted Christ, God says, "You're justified." That can never be reversed. It's in the passive voice, which means that you receive that. You can't see this from the English. First of all, present tense tells us that it goes on forever (once God says, "You're saved"). Then it says that it's passive voice. You Greek students know that passive voice means that it is something you receive. Active would mean that you did it. But because it is passive, that makes it very clear that it has to be justification by faith.

That's why the rallying cry of the Reformation was "justification by faith," because up to then, the Roman Church had been teaching them justification by works. And they had found that it's passive voice, and they would know. These men could read Greek, and they said, "Look there. That's passive voice. That means that is something that is done for us. It's not something we earn. It's something that has to be given to us." That's when they read this thing here in Romans, and they said, "That's the answer. In God's name, why haven't we found this out sooner? We've been sitting here beating ourselves in our bodies, and agonizing in our souls, and there it is on the pages of Scripture, just as clear as day: "*being* justified. Something is done for us. And what does justification mean? It's being told that you're no longer morally guilty. You are free of any penalty. And it takes a judge to tell you that.

It's also participle in its form, which is a statement of a principle. It's a status of a certain class of people – those who believe.

**Paul and James**

Now, I want to point out here that James and Paul both speak on justification, or on salvation. Sometimes people ask the question: well, aren't James and Paul talking about this in a different way? That is because Paul says that you're justified by faith; but, James says that you're justified by works. The Roman Catholic Church comes down hard on James and says, "You see, you have to deserve the salvation that Christ provided. You have to deserve it first." So, the Roman Catholic Church tells its people: "You must do a lot of good things. Then finally, God may say, 'OK, you deserve to come to heaven.'" But the Bible says, as we read Paul, that salvation is by faith. Whether you deserve it or not is beside the point. God knows that you don't deserve it. But what He's interested in is: will you take it as a gift?

Well, Paul and James are not in opposition to one another. Let me just briefly point out that Paul's speaks on how to be saved, while James speaks of how one's salvation is evidenced. Paul tells you how to be saved: by faith. James tells you how other people are going to see that you're saved: by the divine good works that you produce. They're both looking at justification in the same gift-of-God fashion, but one is looking at it from the point of how you enter it; and, the other is looking at it from the point of the fact that now you're in it, how you demonstrate it. And they are not in conflict with one another at all.

If you read James carefully, you'll discover that James is constantly saying, "You can go ahead and talk about being saved. You can go ahead and talk about being justified. But I'm going to tell you that our father Abraham believed God, and it was declared that he was justified because of that. He was declared righteous. Our father Abraham also demonstrated that he had justification by being willing to offer his son Isaac when God said, "Do it." The works of Abraham demonstrated the proof of the justification that God had given him. The fact that Abraham was willing to offer up Isaac did not secure justification for him, but it certainly proved that it was there. He indeed was a man who was trusting God.

So, that's the difference between the two. Paul speaks about a right *eternal* fellowship with God, while James speaks about a right *temporal* fellowship with God (your right conduct). Paul really considers justification from the viewpoint of pre-salvation; and, James deals with justification in terms of a post-salvation condition. Paul says that a sinner can be justified only by faith, apart from works, while James says that only those justified by faith will be able to produce divine good works. And that's the important thing.

There is one more very critical word here. This is what elated the reformers so. They finally looked at this verse and said, "Being justified is God declaring something about me," and then came the precious word "freely." That is the Greek word "dorean." This comes from the word "dorea," which means "a free gift." The point that this word stresses is that something comes to you without your having to pay for it.

2 Corinthians 11:7 says, "Have I committed an offense in abasing myself that you might be exalted because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?" The Corinthians gave the apostle Paul a lot of trouble. The Corinthians were a very carnal church. It was the worst church in the New Testament. And they gave Paul a really hard time. And Paul is sarcastic here. He says, "Have I abased myself because I didn't press money out of you, and I preached the gospel to you freely?" What is he saying? He said, "I didn't come to you and say, 'Now, listen. I'm a preacher. The Bible says that you're supposed to finance the preacher's livelihood so that he can devote himself to research the Word of God, and to feed your soul spiritually.'" Paul says, "I did my own money earning. I worked at my trade as a tent maker when I was in Corinth because young people were so out of line with God's divine viewpoint that I didn't even want to take your money. So, Paul says, "Did I do a terrible thing because I preached the gospel to you freely?" That is the same Greek word "dorean."

That will give you an idea of what Paul means here when he says, "The salvation (the justification) that God gives us is 'dorean.'"

There's another aspect to it that I think is significant. Let's look at John 15:25 for a moment, where this word is used concerning Jesus Christ: "But this comes to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law: 'They hated me without a cause.'" The word "cause" is this Greek word "dorean." Jesus Christ is saying is that His own nation, the people to whom he was sent as their Messiah Savior, hated him without any reason." So, we get salvation without any reason. We get justification without any reason. The apostle Paul preached the gospel without any demand. In other words, the key feature here is: it's a gift.

When those reformers read that, they said, "Well, what in the world am I doing all this penance for? What am I reciting all these prayers for? What am I doing all of this climbing up the stairs of churches on my knees? Why am I doing all this crossing and all this sprinkling? What am I coloring all these stupid eggs for, and observing all these holy days? Suddenly it burst like a light upon their souls that only could have come from heaven: "It's 'dorean.' It is freely."

Now, you can't really respect that word in English. Only the Greek gives you all the beauties of what God says that He's doing. The word is stressing a gift of God. It is not a reward. It's not a payment. It's undeserved.

So, God, in His love for sinners, has to have a right to say that you're justified. God doesn't just say, "Well, you're justified because I say so." No, you're not. You're a sinner. We're sinners. We are all sinners. God has to pay for that. Someone has to pay for that. God says, "I have paid for those sins. Now I can say that you're justified." God cannot compromise His own holiness. His righteousness must be met. His justice must be satisfied.

So, He meets the standards of both of these, and the death of Christ spiritually and physically on the cross for the sins of the world provided this ground. And you notice that it is, "By His grace." That is the word "charis." We've seen that many times. This means a friendly disposition. It stresses the absence of any doing from our sin nature: "Through (by means of) the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The redemption is the "apolutrosis." This is a compounded word. It's a heavy redeeming word. And it adds this preposition to mean: "The *really* releasing ransom – the *really* paying of a ransom." This is the complete, absolute paying for anything you owed.

So, actually, you stand before God, and you can say, "I don't owe a thing for my sins," because you've had an "apolutrosis" redemption. You have had the price amply (and more than) paid for. That is the idea. The release for a ransom is what this means. And that is in the redemption that He alone can provide that is in Christ Jesus.

**Imputation**

So, God's plan puts every believing sinner in Christ. Because you are in Christ, you have absolute righteousness. The absolute righteousness of Jesus Christ is credited to your account. That's called imputation.

So, God is truthfully able to pronounce the sinner justified. God is truthfully able to say, "You have absolute righteousness," and nothing can ever reverse this formal declaration once it has been made. You will always remain justified once God says that you are. And you will always remain heaven-bound once you have been justified, because there's no authority in the universe higher than God to reverse Him. There's no court above God. If he says, "You're not guilty," then you're not guilty, and no one is ever going to change that. And the reason He says, "You're not guilty" is because someone has paid the price. So, He can say that.

However, He will not shut this down your throat. That's another part of the message of Easter. You must accept the offer by His grace of receiving this kind of declaration of not guilty. Justification means the verdict of not guilty. He will give it to you. He will credit to your account the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

So, He declares you to be justified. No human act has been involved. What did you do? You didn't do a thing. You just said, "OK, I believe you. I accept it." And that's why you cannot change this. You're not involved.

So, I hope you will take out with you today the realization that while Easter has a very precious meaning to us as believers, it is highly contaminated. But on the other hand, Easter is the end of the line. The event of the resurrection of Christ set the final ground which enabled God to say, "I now declare you to be absolutely righteous." And that is a heavenly message indeed. That is a message of joy, and that is the message of Easter.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1975

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