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Justification

Galatians 2:15-21

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you for the love, the joy and the peace that you bring us. We thank you for the gift that you give us of salvation, the gift that you've given us of your Son, the gift that you've given us of your word, Lord. And this is the part where we come together to open up your book to ask for the presence of your Holy Spirit so that we might understand with greater depth what it is you've given to us in all of these gifts. And so this morning, Lord, I pray for the presence of your Spirit, may you accompany us, may you make us able to make this of lasting value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well we're in the book of Galatians and thus far we're at the second chapter and Paul is writing to the Galatian church after having met in Jerusalem with the leaders of all the churches. And this gathering of the church leaders was known as the Jerusalem Council. They met to address a number of issues that the church was facing, not the least of which was the false teaching of the Judaizers that was centered in the churches in Galatia. *Galatians*

2:4 says: And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage).

These Judaizers were a group of false teachers who were committed to spreading the false gospel that we referred to last time as the gospel plus. The Judaizers agree that the cross of Christ was absolutely necessary for salvation. They did not agree that it was sufficient. Their version of the gospel plus was the gospel plus all of the ritualistic requirements of Judaism especially including the right of circumcision. Now according to these false teachers, faith in Christ's death and resurrection had to be accompanied by something else. It had to be accompanied by something else in order for someone to be truly saved. Well, Paul saw right through that. And as we saw last week, he recognized that the temptation to embrace the gospel plus was so pervasive that it even affected his fellow church members. I mean, they were not so blatantly off as to demand circumcision but they did come under the influence of the Judaizers enough so that Peter refused fellowship with the Gentiles even though previously he had already acknowledged that this was God's will. Worse yet, Peter wound up pulling some of the other leaders including even Barnabas, and Paul had no hesitation towards calling them out. In *Galatians 2:14*, he says: *But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live*

in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?" You see, Peter and even Barnabas himself had gotten sucked into another version of the gospel plus. At first Peter understood very clearly that the gospel was meant for all men and women, whether they be Jew or Gentile, male or female, free or slave, and now Paul is horrified that Peter's now beginning to treat Gentiles like second class Christians.

If you remember back in Acts 10, that's where we find out Peter learns and he's instructed by God that the gospel is not going to be just for the Jews but for the Gentiles also. You have to understand this was a stunning turn of events. You have to understand the Jewish mindset at this time. The Jews considered themselves to be holy particularly compared to the Gentiles. I mean they had rituals and ceremonial cleansings that they believe made them more acceptable to God than the Gentiles who had no such rituals. These were God's chosen people who were raised with a history in which God insisted on at one point in these rituals for the Jews' very survival. You know the one lesson that pervaded much of the Old Testament is a lesson that God insisted on teaching them over and over again is that he is holy and we are not, that he is altogether other than who we are. When God came down to Mount Sinai to give the ten commandments, he told the people this in *Exodus 19*. He said: *You shall set bounds for the people all*

around, saying, "Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live." That's almost inconceivable for us to think about God being so flawlessly different from us that for God's people to even come near to him would be a fatal mistake, I mean, they would not only be executed but they would be executed by an arrow or a stone so that in disposing of them, no human would ever even touch them. God was so transcendently holy that he regarded our fallen presence as so offensive as to warrant capital punishment. And God would consent to come down to his people only after some elaborate precautions had been taken to ensure that they had sanctified themselves enough to withstand his presence without dying. And God continued his instructions to Moses by saying this, he says: *When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain.* So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, *"Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives."* Then it shall come to pass on the third day, in that morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.

I think it was R.C. Sproul who pointed out that when God consented to descending to this mountaintop, even the mountain, though it was an inanimate object, had the good sense to quake. I mean it quaked because God was terrifying. The Jews of the Old Testament were steeped in the notion that God was so holy and so other that if you dared to attempt to transcend that holiness without taking these elaborately detailed precautions, you would pay for your affront with your life.

Even the dietary laws of the Old Testament were designed to reflect God's holiness. God's people were to separate themselves from everybody else, that is from the Gentiles, and they were to separate themselves in many ways and one of those ways was in what they ate. God set aside certain foods as acceptable or holy only to him and other foods were unacceptable. You see, what separated us from God, what made us unholy was our sin. And what changed everything was the cross of Christ. And by paying the price of our sin, Jesus drained the law of its power. Colossians puts it this

way. It says: *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that -- now that's the ten commandments, that's the law, that's what this handwriting of requirements was -- having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. You see, now that Jesus had paid our penalty, everything, everything was different. I mean all of that was now changed because Jesus had broken down this wall that separated us from God and no longer was any food to be regarded as holy. When Peter was first given instructions about opening up the gospel, it wiped out the requirements of the law not just for the Jews who followed all of the rules including the diets but also for the Gentiles who followed none of those rules. So you can imagine how tempting it was for the Jews to see themselves as superior Christians who not only accepted by faith Christ's death on the cross but also practiced all kinds of rituals and even diets that set them apart from all other people. Well, God was putting an end to that and Peter was the man he chose to first bring that good news to the Gentiles.*

Peter in Acts 10 is confronted with this vision that God gives him

telling him that all of these forbidden foods in the Old Testament are no longer forbidden, that the animals that he could no longer eat he could now eat. And this is how Peter's vision unfolded in Acts 10. It says: *The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." And a voice spoke to him again a second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.*

This was part of God's progressive revelation. This is the God of the Old Testament instructing Peter that now that Christ has risen, much of the Old Testament demands of separation due to God's holiness have been abrogated. Because Jesus's ultimate sacrifice had been accepted, the penalty of our sin that separated us from God was no longer in effect. And so the need to be separated and sanctified by ritual and diet was also no longer needed. Well,

this is great news for the Gentiles, but it was a huge culture shock to the Jews. And it was something that most of them did not want to give up. I mean, it is what had separated them from the others, and even though God through Christ had broken down this wall of separation, there were still many who felt very comfortable, even superior to others by strictly adhering to those rituals and rights as if they added an extra dimension of value to their lives. This is exactly the allure of the gospel plus. I mean in this case for the Jews, it was the gospel plus all of the things that they had done from their youth. You know, these rights and rituals were something that they practiced as well as their parents and their grandparents and every generation they could think of before them. And so you consider Peter's reaction. I mean, God is speaking to him in a vision and he's telling him these dietary laws, they no longer apply. Peter's response? "Not so, Lord! For I've never eaten anything common or unclean." You know, instead of appreciating his newfound freedom, Paul instead resents the notion that he's being asked to violate these ancient rules. I mean God was saying they were no longer necessary and Peter's insisting, oh, yes, they are. So three separate times God shows Peter the vision until finally he capitulates. *Acts 10* says: *And a voice spoke to him again a second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common."* This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. So after receiving the

vision, Peter agrees, he meets with Cornelius, a devout Gentile believer and clearly now Peter has seen the light, he now understands that the gospel is not just for the Jews but the Gentiles as well and he begins to show genuine courage by actually sitting down to a meal with Gentiles. I mean, you don't understand how unheard of that was. You just didn't do this. In *Acts 10*, he says: *Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean."* Well, that courage and that understanding that Peter had, it crumbled and it crumbled under the pressure that he felt from the Judaizers. Their view of the gospel plus held that anyone who didn't employ the very same rituals as the Jews would be ceremonially unclean and therefore not fit to eat with. And they insisted that these Gentiles who only had faith in Christ and not the plus of these ritual cleansings, well they weren't fit to eat with. And sad to say, Peter capitulated to them. Not only did he stop eating with the Gentiles but he got others to join him in his error. And here's how Paul in *Galatians 2* puts it, he says: *Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite*

with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

You know, we find here Paul is confident. He's so confident that he's confrontational and you know that's not usually the way that we do things. We greatly prefer to slam people indirectly, kind of behind their backs, not so much to their faces. Paul was somebody who said it right to your face and I've had both treatments from fellow Christians. There have been people who have confronted me to my face and people who have chosen to go the other route. I have to tell you, I have absolute respect for people who disagree with me to my face and very little respect for those who go the other route. So Paul not only confronts Peter to his face but due to the seriousness of the charge, he confronts them -- quote -- "before them all." It was John Calvin who said public sins must receive a public rebuke lest people get caught up in the sin. And clearly we find out that not only was Peter involved in this but Barnabas got sucked in as well. So Paul says: *But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"* Paul says, hey, Peter, I've seen you in the past living like the Gentiles do, enjoying the freedoms that they have, to eat what you want to eat, with whom you want to eat it, whenever you

want to eat it, and now I see you trying to compel the Gentiles to go backwards to the way you used to be when you used to live like a Jew. He says what gives, Peter? Well, Paul answers his own question and he introduces us for the first time to a word that has a very deep theological meaning. I don't want to scare you away because there is a great blessing in understanding this word but it is a theological concept. The concept is justification and the word is "justified." Here's what Paul says in *Galatians 2:15*. He says: *We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!*

Well, there you find four times in one paragraph the term "justified" and so we want to know, what is justification? Well, obviously it comes from scripture and it means on the simplest level "to be made just; to be declared righteous." Now, my working definition of "justification" is that it's a declaration by God to God that on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross, that the just demands of the law have now been met. That needs a little

bit of unpacking. You see, justification is something that God declares to himself and to the universe. And so we might ask, okay, what is it that God is declaring? Well, let me take myself as an example. I was justified by faith in May of 1973. And at that time God declared to himself and to the universe that I, Tom Mortenson, a sinner, had fully met the demands of the law through Christ. Now you have to understand, the law demanded my death. I mean the Bible is clear on that, to sin is to warrant death. *Ezekiel 18: The soul who sins shall die.* It's a very simple declarative sentence. And you add to that statement this other statement made by God in *Romans 3:23: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* and you get a sense of the problem that all of us human beings have. All of us are under a death sentence because all of us fall short. And when Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden, they not only ceased to be perfect but they made imperfection a legacy they would pass on to every subsequent son or daughter, and that includes you and me. We are now fallen creatures created originally perfect in Adam by a God who was transcendentally flawless, whose very perfection makes it impossible to have fellowship with us in our sin. I mean, if you have a hard time imagining sin being that devastating, just think of it in terms of darkness and of light. God says he is the light. He says: *This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.* Well,

if God is absolute light with no darkness whatsoever, how could he possibly fellowship with us who because of sin have embraced living in and are comfortable with the darkness? I mean God even refers to our planet not as mother earth as everybody thinks we're called, he's got a much more accurate description of who we are. He calls this place where we live "the darkness." I mean the Bible goes so far as to describe the earth that Jesus came into this way in *Matthew 4*, he says: *"The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."* See, Jesus was that perfect light dawning on a people who were dwelling in spiritual darkness. But you see, the problem wasn't so much that we dwelled in the darkness. The problem was that we loved it. *John 3* says: *And this is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*

So back to me and my justification. Now in May of 1973, God made a declaration about me. This was the day that I got saved. And God declared that day that I, Tom Mortenson, a child of the darkness, in love with the darkness, had placed his faith in the one who was light itself, and I can tell you that was a miracle. I mean it was all God and not me because I was powerless. I was under a death sentence by virtue of my sin. People say the law held me captive.

We use phrases like "the law held me captive" or "I was under the law," and I could see where that could be confusing. You know when we talk about the law, what we're really talking about here is the ten commandments. And what the ten commandments are, I can almost guarantee you, is not what many people think they are. I still run into lots of folks who think the ten commandments are a list of rules that you adhere to in order to make yourself good enough for God, good enough to get to heaven and it's not so. The ten commandments are a simplified projection of the standard of God's perfection. They are not ten things that you need to do to get to heaven. Instead they are ten standards that serve to show us that you will never get to heaven by trying to be good enough. I mean remember, God's standard here is absolute perfection. You know, we're born already guilty of Adam's sin but look at our own sins. I mean, God makes it clear that to violate one tiny part of perfection is to violate all of it. He says in *James 2:10*: *Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.* And *Galatians 3:10* says: *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."*

Now I've said the commandments are kind of like a balloon. You know, you can find a tiny, tiny little pin and prick the balloon in

the most obscure spot, it doesn't matter, the whole thing's going to blow up. And God's law of perfection is just like that. See, it doesn't matter what kind of sin or how great our sin is. To commit any sin is to utterly shatter and blow up our perfection. You know, the ten commandments tells us that we are required to never lie, ever; to never steal, ever; to never covet; to never commit adultery, ever; and what it says is do it once and you've shattered your perfection and you're forever lost. I mean we often times think we have ten different commandments to work on. How about the very first commandment? It says in *Exodus 20:2*: "*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.*" I maintain you don't have to worry about the other nine, we can't do the first one. We can't even remotely get through the first one. I mean God says that we are to place nothing in our lives ahead of him. And by that standard alone, every one of us stands guilty because every time we sin, we place that sin itself ahead of God. We don't need the other nine to arrive at the point that we realize that we're doomed. Just remember, it's James who tells us that if you fail in one tiny point of the law, you're guilty of failing all of it. You can't prick a balloon by just taking a little tiny bit of it and think that you're going to get away without it all blowing up. And God's law blows up all of our ideas of goodness.

And so to bring me back to the day that I was justified, God met me powerfully and I by faith accepted that Jesus Christ took my place and was executed instead of me. Justification is God declaring that my sentence had been fully paid for by the crucified Christ. I had absolutely nothing to do by virtue of works or accomplishment in my justification. I supplied the sin and the darkness; Christ supplied the light and the forgiveness. And by substituting his perfect righteousness for my sin, he justified me so that I now stand before God perfect, not for what I've done, but for what Christ has accomplished. Justification simply states that Christ has paid my price and because of that, I now stand before God in Christ perfected.

And you know, we've been talking about the gospel plus, how desperately people want to add something of their own efforts, something that they could do to add to what God has done for them on the cross. Can you see how insulting that must be to God? I mean, how could I possibly contribute anything? I mean I was a child of the darkness, in love with the darkness, dead in my sins and under God's wrath when Christ went to the cross for me. And that's why God says in *Romans 5:8*: *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been -- here's that word again -- justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of*

God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. So here stood Tom Mortenson in the court of God's justice condemned already by virtue of his sin, now through Christ's death and resurrection I stand justified by his blood, reconciled to God by the death of his Son and saved by his perfect life. This is how we Protestants see justification. The Bible describes justification this way in Romans 3:20. It says: For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it -- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

You know it was that last sentence and that last word, "justified" that really caused the split between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. It was the way both parties understood justification. Roman Catholics traditionally understand justification to mean a process whereby man and God cooperate in making man worthy of heaven. According to Catholic tradition, justification gives man the grace that he needs to produce

meritorious works, and those meritorious works in turn produce yet more grace enabling him to progressively grow more and more justified and/or worthy of God. And as the process is never fully completed in this life, man needs to go to purgatory after he dies in order to work out his sin, and purgatory is a place of temporary punishment where you work out the penalty of your sin so that in the end it really is just you working out your own justification making yourself worthy of God.

Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic monk who was paralyzed by a fear, and the fear that he had was that he would never be able to make himself justified enough. Until one day he came upon this scripture in *Romans 1:17* where it says: *The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."* And by the grace of God he finally realized that righteousness does not come through a cooperative effort between God and man but solely through God by virtue of faith in Christ and his work on the cross. Luther once summed up his position by saying this, he says: "The first and chief article is this: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification. He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works and merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in

Christ Jesus, in His blood. This is necessary to believe. This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law, or merit. Therefore, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us."

See, if you compare the Catholic and Protestant views side by side, you'll see there's a tremendous difference in the way we both view justification. To the Roman Catholic church it was an ongoing cooperative effort between God and man in which God did his part and man was required to do his part as well. To Luther and the Reformers, justification was completely, totally, and solely a gift given by God and applied through faith in Christ's finished work on the cross. Man was in no position to cooperate with God because he was so radically fallen, he was incapable of seeking after the help he so desperately needed. You know, the scripture that I quoted before, *Romans 3:23* says: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* Well, that word "freely" is critical to understanding justification. That's a Greek word that is rendered in the ESV as "as a gift." Well, the actual Greek term means "without a cause." And what it means is that God justifies us without any conditions, without any causes on our part. Well, some folks say, well, what about faith? I mean, isn't it so that faith is a condition necessary to receive justification? Well

faith is the means by which we receive justification but God is very clear to point out that faith, that is saving faith is a gift given by God alone. You know, there's only one reason why everyone and anyone comes to Christ. It's the reason that transcends every other reason. You don't need to get deeply theological. All you have to say is every single person in this room who came to Christ came to Christ for one reason. You know why? Because you wanted to. It's really that simple. We all come to Christ because we wanted to. The issue is where did the "want to" come from? That's the issue. And why did I want to and not my neighbor? Well, the answer is those who want to have been given the greatest gift a human being can ever receive. *Ephesians 2* says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* See, by grace alone we are saved through faith alone in Christ alone. It was that understanding that faith alone is what justifies us before God that drove Luther to split from the Catholic church. It is that understanding that undergirds everything that we as Bible-believing Christians understand the gospel to mean.

You know this is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Happened 500 years ago when Protestants and Catholics divided, and that was never Martin Luther's intent. He just wanted

to stop the church from drifting into error. The problem is drifting is something that all churches do naturally. And just as the law of entropy causes all physical systems to eventually break down, so our fallenness, our sin nature, causes us to ceaselessly drift from truth into error, into lies. I mean it begs the question, does the drift that caused the original Reformation still exist? And the answer is yes. It still exists because the drift is a symptom of the sickness that has afflicted mankind since the fall of Adam. Drift is what Paul is referring to in the whole book of Galatians. It is the problem that is ongoing in the Galatian church. It is the problem of the gospel plus. Listen to what Paul says in *Galatians 1:6*. He says: *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.* See, Paul can't believe that the church is not anchored in the truth but it's already starting to drift. See but this is nothing new in the spiritual history of man. I mean, Adam and Eve drifted from perfection to disobedience. And after God through the flood wiped out the entire earth, Noah's offspring drifted into the Tower of Babel. And after God raised Abraham and freed his people from the Egyptians, Israel drifted into idolatry, faithlessness and rebellion. And when the church was established in the book of Acts, Paul looking forward to the future described in detail the

drift that they could expect. This is what he said in Acts 20. He says: *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.* Peter said in 2 Peter 2: *There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who brought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.* And even Jesus said in Matthew 24: *"See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' And they will lead many astray."* You see, the scripture is clear that the drift from truth to lies, from light to darkness, from faithful to faithless, will always be a part of the battle for the church. And the danger comes when we're drifting so slowly, so incrementally that we as church leaders don't even recognize it. Well, by God's grace and by the example that we have in the book of Galatians itself, we recognize how easy it is to drift. And the drift is all about the gospel plus.

So let me reduce the gospel plus to its most simple element here. Let me put it as simply as I can. God is not interested in religion. He's not interested in a series of regulations and rules of do's and don'ts, of accomplishments that I can claim and then

dare to lay at God's feet as justification for my entry into heaven. There's only one form of justification that saves and that's the justification that Christ alone can bring. When the only way that I can get to heaven is that I recognize that God has done it all, nothing to thy throne I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. And I can truly say that God hates religion because religion is the enemy of what God truly wants and that is relationship, and relationship is harder. You know, if the truth be told, I think many of us would find it very, very tempting to have a huge set of rules and regulations that we have to go to and check off and we could just say, okay, I qualify, I'm going to heaven. See, my job is not to tell you all about the rules and the regulations and all of these different religious things that you have to do in order to get to heaven. My job is to grow your relationship with Christ. I mean somebody once asked me, what is your job? I said, it's my job to help my people fall deeper and deeper in love with Jesus Christ. That's what I've been tasked with. To get to know the God who was so holy that even the mountains quaked when he descended to it, who became a man and allowed himself to be stripped naked and executed in order to pay the penalty of your sin and my sin so that we might be justified, that's declared righteous through Christ's payment of sin. Because the more you fall in love with Jesus, the more you're going to do what the ten commandments demand, not because you must, because

you're going to find it's what you want to do because you're in love and you're in love with Jesus. And the reason why you're in love with Jesus is that you've fallen in love with the one that all of those commandments point to, the Lord Jesus Christ. *1 John* says: *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he has loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray.*

Father, what an incredible gift we have been given. Lord, I just want each and every one of us every time we hear that word "justification," every time we think of that term "justified" to recognize what gift we have received, that Jesus Christ himself has paid the price. Our debt is now paid in full. Because of him we can stand before you, God, perfected in Christ. We thank you, we praise you, we worship you for this great gift. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.