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Presentation Transcript
Justified and Sanctified
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Good afternoon, everybody. Nice to see all of you today. Our topic today is *Justified or Sanctified*. That sounds like a dry topic, doesn't it? Justification. Sanctification. Heavy biblical terminology. But, you know, actually our Church of God tradition has confused these two things for years. And that confusion has caused us a *lot* of problems. Believe it or not, it has a lot to do with why we have so much trouble evangelizing people. It has a lot to do with why so many of our young people can't find their way into the faith.

I talked to several young adults recently who were clinically depressed because they didn't understand this subject. They didn't know that, but that was what was causing the problem. I believe that this topic has a great deal to do with our spiritual and emotional well-being, because it has to do with our personal relationship with God and with Jesus Christ.

So what *is* justification? *Justification* is the process that God uses to draw us into a relationship with Him. God is perfect. He's sinless. He's holy. He lives sin free. That's what He does. It's what He is. We, by contrast, are *unholy* and sinful. And the difference between our sins and God's sinlessness is what creates the gulf between us.

How does that work in real life? Years ago there was a teenage girl, in one of my congregations, who got pregnant by one of the boys in that congregation. She and I were fairly close until that happened, but no matter how much I tried to reassure her, she felt so guilty that she just gradually began to withdraw herself from our relationship. She was ashamed. And she felt guilty. And the boy felt guilty, too. His way of dealing with it was to run away. He joined the navy, so he wouldn't have to come into the presence of all these people that he felt he disappointed so much.

So, it works the same way with God and us. Our sins separate us from God. So how is God going to fix that? How is He going to draw us back to Himself? Even though, way deep in our hearts, we know that our sins have driven a wedge between us and God?

Well, let's look at a few scriptures today so we can learn from God Himself how He is going to do that. The first one is in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

2 Cor. 5:17 – *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone. The new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself, through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*

Okay, so He's going to reconcile us through Christ, but what does that do? Verse 19 answers that question.

V-19 - *...that God was reconciling the world to Himself and Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.*

So the first thing He does is make a covenant with us. And in that covenant, His part of the deal is, He's not going to hold our sins against us. Then verse 20 says:

V-20 – *We are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you, on Christ's behalf, to be reconciled to God.* So this statement implies that the circumstances are partly under our control, doesn't it. "Be reconciled to God." How do you do that? Well, in verse 21, it says:

V-21 – *God made Him, who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God.*

So Christ becomes responsible for our past sins, and He dies to pay for them. Then He gives us His perfect record to cover over those sins.

No, let's go to Romans 5 and verse 10.

Rom. 5:10 – *For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life. Not only is this so, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

So, when God justifies us, He charges the sins of man – and women, too, for that matter – to Christ, and He credits the righteousness of Christ to *us*. That's what happens. This aspect of justification is called *grace*. And it is one of two aspects of justification.

So Christ is our justifier. He is our Savior. He draws us to Him in the gracious act of forgiveness. He gets the credit and the glory for His committed sacrifice and His committed life. But is there anything that *we're* responsible for to be justified? You know, be reconciled to God? What should we do?

Well, there is. And we are told justification is *not* just of grace, but is also of *faith*.

Rom. 3:23 – *For all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came through Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood – faith that His blood shed is going to wash away our sins. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so that as to be just, and the one who justifies, those who have faith in Jesus. “Justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”*

So *our* part is to *believe* God when He tells us that we can be forgiven. Of course, even here, we’re so weak that even faith is also a gift from God, isn’t it? That’s amazing! It feels like we have to have faith, yet God does things to build it, doesn’t He – if we’ll participate in it.

But it’s still hard. You know, I don’t think that girl that I told you about felt forgiven for a long, long time.

Romans 4:3. Let’s look at that. What does the scripture say?

Rom. 4:3 – *Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*

Peter said that Paul said things that were hard to be understood, and this is a bit convoluted. So let’s turn it around. When a person works for wages, nobody considers it a gift when the employer pays him, because the person earned it. He didn’t just give it to him. He *earned* it. But in this case, the person has not earned anything because salvation is a *gift*. There isn’t anything you can do to earn it. Belief in Christ’s sacrifice, which is a gift, is *counted* to us for righteousness, because we’re believing that we can be forgiven, and then we’re taking action on that. We’re making a commitment. Christ died for us, and our part is to believe that we are forgiven of our past sins.

Now I mentioned earlier, we have been confused about this issue. Here’s part of the confusion. Many of us thought that we could earn salvation by our efforts to obey the Law. If you asked us if we believed that, we would have all said, “No,” because we’ve read the scriptures that say you can’t earn it. But, in actual fact, we *acted* as though we had to earn it. And that’s why so many of our young people have been so anxious and depressed over this issue. We would say they were forgiven, but we still had all these things we told them that they had to do in order to live up to the standard. They saw us eject people from the church for lack of performance. What other conclusion can you come to when people do that?

Romans 3:21. Notice what Paul says.

Rom. 3:21 – *Now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. The Old Testament Law and Prophets testified*

to a righteousness that comes from God that is apart from the Law. *This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference.*

So salvation is apart from the Law. Salvation is a gift, given by grace, who believe it – or we say, through faith. You know, sometimes people jump to the other ditch. I heard somebody say, the other day, that observance of the holy days was not a salvation issue. That's kind of misleading, isn't it, because, actually, no part of the Law is a salvation issue. Because we think about it that way, we think you have to keep the holy days if you want to be saved. So, see, I caught you, didn't I? So what's the solution to that? Salvation is apart from the Law. So there are some scriptures that we used to read and misunderstand about the Law and its relationship to salvation.

Rom. 2:13 – *For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it's those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.* “See, you do have to do all that stuff!” That's how we think, isn't it?

Then, James 2:24.

Jm. 2:24 – *You see that a person is justified by what he does, not by faith alone.* And you can go back and read the first part of the chapter, where he sets us up for that statement.

So these scriptures not only seem to contradict what I said, but they also seem to contradict the scriptures that we just read! I mean how do you reconcile that it's not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it's those who obey the law? And then righteousness is apart from the law? Doesn't that seem pretty contradictory? But we know the Bible *doesn't* contradict itself, don't we? So there's got to be a misunderstanding somewhere with us.

So what *is* the correct understanding? If we just look at these scriptures, we're missing a big piece of the puzzle. We don't see the whole picture. In fact, if we consider justification as the only component in the salvation plan of God, then we are *missing* another entire aspect, or component, in our thinking. What component is that? Well, that is called *sanctification*.

Sanctification is the process by which God makes us holy as He is holy – after we have repented. That's the process we get into when we repent and are baptized. No, I guess I can't really, technically, say that begins *after* we're baptized, because God does a lot of work on us before we're baptized, doesn't He? But the contract is ratified at that point, isn't it? That's when we're really held accountable for things that we agree to.

So, when He justifies us, we're then separated from sins that we've committed in the past. Now, some people say, “What do you mean? That's all sins.” Well, think about it. The only sins that exist are the ones that are in the past, aren't they? I mean, if they're the future, I haven't done them yet. But it does say that we're “forgiven of the sins that are past.” That's a quote. The past being everything that's happened before the present moment. If we are a believer – that is, if we have faith for salvation – after *justification*

by faith in Jesus Christ, then begins a life-long process of *sanctification*. And in that process, Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, comes, and as we progressively surrender ourselves to Him, lives His life in us, and gradually changes us into a new person, who is more and more successful at living sin free – but never perfect.

So, there are two elements, or components, to this process as well. We can see both in one scripture. Let's go to Ephesians 5:25.

Eph. 5:25 – *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, to make her holy – that would be sanctification, right? – cleansing her by the washing with water through the word. What's the water? The water is the Holy Spirit, isn't it? And the word? That's the Word of God.*

Let's talk about water. Romans 8:3.

Rom. 8:3 – *For what the law was powerless to do, in that it was weakened by the sinful nature – in other words, we couldn't keep it because we're so weak – God did, by sending His own Son, in the likeness of sinful man, to be a sin offering. So He condemned sin in sinful man in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who did not live according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what nature desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*

So, you'll notice that the law is *not* being tossed out the window here. Paul tells us plainly that the requirements of the law must be met. And we know that the sins that we've committed in the past are covered by His sacrifice, and that God is, through this secondary process, called sanctification, making us holy – helping us to learn how to obey the law more perfectly – not more perfectly, but better.

So the Holy Spirit plays a potent part in helping us to be sanctified and holy.

Ephesians 1, verse 4.

Eph. 1:4 – *For He chose us in Him, before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless in His sight.*

So, it's just that the required obedience comes from Christ living in us by the Holy Spirit, instead of by our own efforts.

We always saw works as part of the salvation process, when really they're a part of sanctification.

The secondary part of this process is the Word of God. That's the other element that God uses to sanctify us. Jesus dwells in us by the Holy Spirit, but He is also the Word of God. The Bible *is* the Word of God, because it's Christ's expression in print. It's what He taught, what He believed, how He lived. So how does that fit in?

Well, in Psalm 119:105, it says:

Psa. 119:105 – *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* So, through the Bible, Jesus guides us toward perfection, toward holiness. The law and the Word of God is like a roadmap that shows us our way to our destination, or the light that guides our way through a dark room.

Now, the Law doesn't justify us, you see, but it is an implement of sanctification. Living by the Law of God and all Christ's commands, without any violations, would be perfect sanctification, wouldn't it? So holiness is the obedience to God's Law. That's what the definition of it is. And that is the work that Christ is doing within us. Let's read that. I just said that, but is that really true? Let's go to Ephesians 2:8.

Eph. 2:8 – *For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and this, not from yourself. It is the gift of God – not by works, that no one should boast.* Oh, so, a lot of people would like to stop reading right there. They'd like to say we don't have any responsibility. We shouldn't do anything. But look at what it says. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* So that's what sanctification is. That's what God has been planning for a long time! He's going to sanctify all of us. And we have a part to play in that, but we should never think that we, alone, are going to accomplish that.

So, we're not saved from our own sins by our own efforts, but by being *justified* of our past sins through Christ, which is a *gift*. And then we're *sanctified*, or cleaned up, not by our own efforts to keep the Law, but by Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, doing good works through us, as guided by the Word of God. So God does that, too, doesn't He?

Look with me in Jude 1 and 2 for a minute.

Jude :1-2 – *Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ and called.* See, there it is again. It's all through the Bible.

Well, we asked if there's anything we had to do to be justified. And we saw that we had to *believe*. Is there anything that we need to do to be sanctified? Well, of course, there is. We have free will. We don't *have* to be justified. And we don't *have* to be sanctified. So, there's some element to both of these things for us.

Let's go to 2 Timothy 1:6 and understand a little about it. Paul said:

2 Tim. 1:6 – *For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.*

So, one of the things that we have to do is stir up the Holy Spirit. Listen to it. Allow ourselves to be motivated by it.

Let's read Romans 6, and verse 19, too. This is a very profound discussion about the relationship between a human being and what God does for us in sanctifying us. He says:

Rom. 6:19 – *I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity, and to everlasting wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness, leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. And what benefit did you reap at that time from the things that you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death. But now that you have been set free from sin, and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

So, our part is to surrender our whole lives to God. Why would we do that? Because we're so grateful for what He did in surrendering His life for us. It's a good deal.

We had some company recently, and they had a daughter who wanted to talk about baptism. She's just getting started on it and she asked me what she should be thinking about. I asked her, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ, out of His great love for you, gave His life so you could live? So that your sins could be forgiven?" And she said, "I do." And I said, "Then, are you willing give up your life every day for Him, just as He gave up His life for you?" And she said, "I think I need to think about that one." And that was precisely the right answer for her – at her stage of development – not trying to hide anything. That was the correct, honest answer.

So, we have to actively follow the commitment we made to Christ as a result of the commitment that He makes to us. And if we *do* that, our past sins will be forgiven, and Jesus Christ will begin to architect our salvation by sanctifying us.

So, the Holy Spirit won't *make* us do anything, because we have free will. But if we submit to it, it will take us where we need to go.

We need to be students of the word of God. If we don't turn the lamp on, it doesn't help much. I know some people – good friends – who are struggling with the loss of their son. When I think about comforting them, it's very hard, because they've never read the Bible. There are no reference points to work with. Resurrection. What does that mean to them? That means nothing. So, in fact, that might even make them feel worse, because it just sounds, to them, like empty talk. There are some of those "others who have no hope" that Paul talked about. So, I'm hoping that God will guide me to be wise in speaking to them about this issue, because they have asked me several times about it.

Okay. At LifeResource Ministries we value knowledge, but we value *application* even more. So what does this knowledge about the difference between justification and sanctification mean in everyday life?

Well, what do we call people who believe they can be righteous by their own efforts – like we used to think we had to do? You know, you get all upset when somebody says the holy days are not a salvation issue. They are a sanctification issue, aren't they? Not a salvation issue. What do we call people who believe they can be righteous on their own? Well, we call them *self-righteous* – righteous by ourselves. Have you ever wondered how God thinks about that? There is this scripture where the angels in heaven are astounded at God's plan. And the thing they just don't get is how He's going to take us from where we are to where He is. It's such a great gulf. And for God to look down on us, in all our weakness and imperfection, and observe us, believing that we can do it on our own, probably would be pretty funny if it weren't so sad.

One of the by-products, by the way, of self-righteousness is condemnation. So if we stop thinking the way we used to think, we probably won't condemn people so much any more.

I knew a young woman who was shunned by her church because of a personal sin. She wasn't baptized yet – hadn't made her commitment. The process of sanctification, enabled by the Holy Spirit within, had not yet begun in earnest with her. Or maybe not. I mean, God works in His own way, doesn't He? So, the question I have is – when we think about somebody being ejected from their own church for poor performance – is, "Who was it that Jesus said that He came to save?" He said that He came to save the sinners, for the righteous have no need of a Savior. Right? And Paul tells us that we're all sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God. So, that would be *all* of us, wouldn't it? If we follow the reasoning of the people that did that to her – you know, all those who want to see others removed from fellowship – ought to first remove themselves, I think.

I suppose, in this girl's case, if we had confronted those who decreed she should be shunned, they would have said, "Well, we haven't committed her sin." But I remember an instance where they brought a woman to Jesus who committed a sin, and He said, "Whoever is without sin, let him cast the first stone." Today we don't rock people, we just kick them out. But, in Jesus' eyes, apparently, a sinner is a sinner.

So, which sin is worse? The personal weakness? Or discouraging and stifling the growth of the Holy Spirit in one of God's little ones? I think I'd be looking for a millstone if I did that. It's pretty hard to be that kind of self-righteous if we believe God is in charge of somebody's salvation.

What other benefits can we derive from thinking about justification and sanctification as two distinct things – all part of salvation, but distinct from one another? Let's look in Luke 5:29.

Lk. 5:29 – *Then Levi* – Levi was one of the people that Jesus selected as a disciple – *held a great banquet for Jesus at his house. And a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, who belonged to their sect, complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners?"* You know, we're not supposed to let those people come to church with us. *And Jesus*

answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

Even criminals and the poor were fair game, weren't they? I used to think that people didn't like my religion because I kept the Sabbath. Later I learned that wasn't the problem at all. They might not want to *be* a Sabbatarian, but they didn't have any problem with *me* being one. So what was the problem? Well, they didn't like it that I used the Sabbath as an instrument of salvation, when it really was just an instrument of sanctification. They didn't like to hear me say, “If you don't keep the Sabbath, you can't be in the Kingdom of God.” What that implies is, that the law of God saves us – which we already saw, out of the Bible, isn't true. But if we say that God has led us to keep the Sabbath because it teaches us more about Him and His plan – that it's an implement of sanctification – then it implies that we're saved by Jesus Christ's sacrifice and sanctified by the word of God, which is exactly what the Bible tells us. So, then our argument with those folks is just, “What part of the law do we have to observe?” It brings us much closer.

So I think that can increase our ability to do outreach to other people. We used to think of the church as a *spa* for the saints, and actually, Jesus said it was a *hospital* for sinners. And if we start realizing that, then, I think, we'll do a lot better in our work in the community and helping other people to learn more about Jesus Christ and what He's teaching us – what He can teach them.

What else? Let's look in Isaiah 55:9.

Isa. 55:9 – *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways – that's Isaiah 55:9 – and My thoughts than your thoughts.*

You know, all of us who have read through the scriptures, understand how futile it is for us to try to be like God. He's immortal. He's not affected by a physical body and it's pulls. He's more intelligent than we are. He's holy. He's *way* above us in every way. And to try to *earn* our salvation by becoming like Him, well, it's not only foolish beyond belief, at it's core, it's discouraging, because it's *impossible*.

The idea is, that the only sins we repent of are forgiven. People think that. Now, how ridiculous is that? Have you ever met anybody who died perfect? I haven't. I've been a minister in the Church of God for a long time, and I have done a *lot* of funerals – and a lot of people that I loved and who were rock-solid in the faith – but there wasn't a one of them who was perfect yet.

What does that mean? Well, they all died, sinning every day and not knowing a thing about it, because they didn't realize what the sins were. Fortunately, we're not saved by our own efforts. What it tells is, we do have to make a turn around. We have to repent. Then, as God perfects us, we repent more and more, and change as we're able. But it also says that we're forgiven of sins that are past. So all those folks who were sick and died

imperfect, when they died, they were forgiven of their past sins, weren't they? That would be *every* sin, wouldn't it? How encouraging is that?

Let's continue reading in Isaiah. There's something even – maybe – more encouraging than that right here.

V-10 – *For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returns not thither, but waters the earth and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word that goes forth out of My mouth. It shall not return unto Me void. But it shall accomplish all that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

So one of the places that God plants the word of God is us, isn't it? That's what He's talking about. If we've grown up in the church, we've heard hundreds of thousands of scriptures read in our ears. We have studied the Bible. We have seen it lived in the life of others. It is *in* there! And, as God promises us, that word that He has implanted in us will not return to Him empty.

Turn with me to Hebrews 2. Let's look at this scripture.

Heb. 2:10 - *...in bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.* “Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of our salvation,” we're told. He's the architect of our salvation. Jesus Christ is the man with the plan. He's the one that's overseeing our salvation. He's taking care of it.

I've come to learn more recently that real spirituality has mostly to do with taking care of people and doing the things for them that they can't do for themselves. So, if that's true, wouldn't it follow then, that God, who is a Spirit, would do the same for us? We can't get rid of our past sins, so He takes care of that. And we can't live perfectly sinless either. So He steps in there and sanctifies us. And by these two aspects He gives us salvation.

Let's look in verse 11.

V-11 – *But the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.* Isn't that amazing? “...the One who makes men holy.” It doesn't say, “...the men who are making themselves holy.” It says, “...the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the *same* family.”

Rom. 2:3 – *So then, when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them, and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?* See, we're not even totally responsible for that! God guides us to that as well. God is in charge of *every* aspect of our salvation from beginning to end. Each one of us is a project that He is totally committed to, and He's going to work on,

until we're finished. Our repentance, our justification, our sanctification – the whole package!

When we self-righteously stop thinking that we have to earn our own salvation, and then realize that God is going to take care of us – that we don't have to worry – what do you suppose is going to be the result of that kind of thinking? Well, how about gratitude? How about relief? How about love? Of course! It's just a natural by-product. What is the love of God? Obedience. That's what we're told – that the love of God is obedience – isn't it?

So, it's a perfectly formed plan. It all folds itself into itself over and over again. There are so many interconnected elements that all work together for our benefit – for our salvation – so that we can have eternal life with God as His children. I know so many people who labor under the burden of false belief on this issue. They think they have to live up to some kind of standard. They're going to live up to some kind of standard, but it's not going to be them doing it. And they doubt their own will and commitment. I just wish that we could all simply understand Jude :24. Jude said:

Jude :24 – *Now unto Him, who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before His presence of glory with exceeding joy. Who's going to present us faultless? Are we going to present ourselves faultless at the resurrection? No, no we're not. We're all going to die still with sins. And when we get presented faultless, it will be because of something that Jesus Christ does. The One who saved us and perfected us is going to present us faultless before God the Father. And it will be His accomplishment. But it's an accomplishment that He's going to accomplish for us. To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.*