

# TheoTalk

*Engaging Theology that Matters*

## Who is Jesus?

### Part 3: Savior of his people

In this lesson we will consider what it means that Jesus is our Savior: our rescuer from God's holy wrath for our sin, and the giver of eternal life we can enjoy now and will enjoy forever with Him. We'll begin by considering the problem of sin, then celebrate how God graciously forgives our sin and imputes to us the very righteousness of Christ so that, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, we who deserve God's wrath for our sin now stand holy and blameless before Him, as His adopted children. (Note: due to the length of this lesson, you will likely need to break it into two parts)

#### Key Takeaways:

1. God rescues us from sin through faith in Jesus Christ by imputing (assigning) our sin to Christ, who absorbed God's wrath for our sin at the cross, leaving no condemnation for us to bear.
2. God rescues us from sin through faith in Jesus Christ by imputing (assigning) to us the very righteousness (obedience) of Christ, that we might stand before God as His holy, adopted children.

#### Discussion:

#### **Read Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:23**

*What is sin?*

#### **Romans 5:12-14**

*How did sin enter the world?*

Before the Fall, Adam was the head and legal representative of humanity. In this sense, Paul says, Adam was a "type" of Christ. In the Bible, a "type" is someone or something that points to someone or something else. Adam is a type of Christ, in that Adam and Christ are heads (legal representatives) of fallen humanity and redeemed humanity, respectively. Since Adam was the head of the human race, his sin could be and was imputed (assigned) to all human beings. Since Christ is the head of redeemed humanity, our sin could be and was imputed (assigned) to Christ at the cross. Likewise, His righteousness could be and was imputed (assigned) to us in our union with Him through faith.

Understanding why it cost Jesus so much to make this a reality for His people requires a clear understanding of the nature of sin and its affects upon us.

#### **Ephesians 2:1-3**

*How did our sin affect and define us before God made us His in Christ?*

*Why is it important to understand the deep darkness of our sin and its effect upon us?*

Apart from God's infinite mercy and amazing grace, we would be forever condemned and without hope. The good news of the Gospel is that, in making us His, God graciously regenerates or restores our ability and desire to know and follow Him, thereby compelling us to place our faith in Christ to bring us into a *right relationship* with Him. And the moment we place our faith in Christ, God justifies (acquits) us from all charges of sin, thereby reconciling us to Himself. But how can the Holy God forgive and justify sinners while remaining true to His holy character? Paul tells us in Romans 3.

### **Read Romans 3:9-26**

*How can the holy God justly forgive and, thereby, justify sinners like us?*

When God unites us to Christ, by grace alone through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9), Christ's wrath-averting sacrifice (propitiation) cancels God's wrath for our sins so He can forgive us for our sins and restore to us a right relationship with Him. Amazingly, our justification (right-standing) before God doesn't stop there.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:21**

Consider this marvelous exchange! The holy God imputed (assigned) our sins to Christ at the cross. There, through Christ's substitutionary death on our behalf, God canceled our sins and His holy wrath we deserved for our sins. Having removed our unrighteousness, God imputed (assigned) Christ's righteousness to us. Paul refers to this as God "justifying" us in His sight: granting us a new and righteous identity in Christ, through which we are acquitted of all charges before God as judge, and ultimately restored to a right relationship with God as Father.

Let's explore the beautiful doctrine of justification, first, by focusing on the forgiveness Jesus purchased for us at the cross. To grasp why Jesus had to *die* to secure our forgiveness, we must first understand that His once-and-for-all (New Covenant) sacrifice on the cross was foreshadowed in the Old Covenant sacrificial system, especially in the Old Testament annual Day of Atonement.

### **Read Lev 16:1-34**

*Why did God demand such a precise and detailed process for the Israelites to experience forgiveness?*

The New Testament Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were tempted to offer sacrifices at the Old Covenant temple again. Notice why the author says they must not do so.

### **Hebrews 10:1-18**

*According to Hebrews 10:1-4, 11, why were the Old Covenant sacrifices incomplete?*

*According to Hebrews 10:10-14, 18, how and why did the New Covenant sacrifice of Christ complete and replace the Old Covenant sacrifices?*

*What was God focusing on (looking forward to) as the basis of forgiveness for Old Testament saints?*

### **Read John 1:29; 1 Peter 3:18**

*What was it about Jesus that made Him the perfect and final sacrifice for sins?*

Whether they knew it or not, God's mercy toward Old Covenant believers was based solely upon what Christ would accomplish for them at the cross. This must be true, since only the atoning work of Christ could satisfy God's justice so that He could justly justify sinners (Romans 3:26). Under the Old Covenant, God used the sacrifice of animals to point to the final Lamb of God to come (John 1:29) and, thereby, allow Old Covenant believers to experience forgiveness. But because the Old covenant sacrifices were incomplete, they had to be offered repeatedly. We who are in Christ rest in the knowledge that His single, once-and-for all sacrifice was wholly sufficient to pay for and cancel our sins before God, forever.

**Read Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 John 2:12**

*What do the verb tenses in these verses reveal about the nature of our forgiveness in Christ?*

*If all our sins (past, present, and future) have already been forgiven through our union with Christ, why should we confess our sins (e.g, 1 John 1:9)?*

In the New Testament, the word "confess" means, "to say the same thing." In 1 John 1:9, "confess" means to say the same thing about our sin that God does. Specifically, it means acknowledging that we have sinned and that God has already forgiven us for our sins. In other words, if we belong to Christ, we don't confess our sins to get forgiveness, since we already have all the forgiveness we will ever need. We confess our sins to enter and enjoy the forgiveness that is (already) ours in Christ; a fact that, when understood, compels us to get up from our sin and continue moving forward with Him.

*How would your view of yourself change if you lived each day as God's (already) forgiven, child?*

*How would your experience with God change if you lived like His forgiven child, even in the midst of your darkest sin?*

*How would the way you interact with others change if you lived like this was true?*

-----Good Stopping Point -----

Forgiveness of sins would be wonderful enough! But in justifying us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, God not only imputes (assigns) our sins to Christ who cancelled them at the cross, He imputes (assigns) Christ's perfect righteousness to us. Why was this necessary for our salvation?

**Read Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48; Romans 2:13; Romans 3:9-12**

According to these passages, how are we justified before God?

God demands full and perfect obedience to His Law (Leviticus 19:2). Echoing Jesus in Matthew 5:48, Paul says in Romans 2:13 that only those who obey the Law perfectly will be justified before God. But which of us can or will obey God's Law perfectly? None of us, Paul says in Romans 3:9-12. But if that is true, then justification before God is impossible, unless another fulfills the Law for us. Thankfully, Jesus has done so for us.

**Read Matthew 3:13-15; Matthew 5:17**

*What did Jesus say He came to do?*

**Read Philipians 2:4-8; Hebrews 5:7-9**

*What did Christ's righteousness (obedience) include?*

**Read Romans 5:18-19; Philipians 3:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:21**

*What did Christ's righteousness accomplish for us who are united to Him by grace through faith?*

Jesus lived the perfect life that we don't live, thereby fulfilling the righteous requirement of God's law. Christ's perfect righteousness allowed Him, the spotless Lamb of God, to justly pay for and cancel our sin which God imputed (assigned) to Christ at the cross. Having removed our sin, God justly imputed (assigned) Christ's righteousness to us, in order to acquit us of all charges before Him as judge and, as we read in Galatians 4 and elsewhere, to make us His children forever.

**Read Galatians 4:4-7**

*For what purpose did Jesus redeem us?*

Paul says Jesus came to redeem us who were under the Law from the Law's requirements, that we might be adopted by God the Father as His children. To redeem us from the Law's requirements that stand forever (Romans 2:13), Jesus not only needed to pay the penalty for our rebellion against God's Law, but fulfill the positive requirements of God's Law for us. Because He did so, we who are in Christ are no longer slaves to the Law (accountable to a Law we could never fulfill) and therefore relegated to the status of servants in God's household. We are now God's righteous, adopted "sons" with Christ, whose Spirit lives in us and continually woos us to enjoy an ever-deepening relationship with His Father!

Pause for a moment and let this breath-taking reality sink in. Bask in the hope-filled truth of what God says about you, His adopted child in Christ:

- **You are deeply loved by God** who chose in eternity past to adopt you as His child (Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 8:12-17).
- **You are fully pleasing to God** because you are united to His righteous Son (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- **You are totally accepted by God** who calls you His child and delights in you, just as He delights in His Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1; Romans 8:29; Ephesians 2:4-6)
- **You are complete in Christ** since, in Christ, you have everything you need to experience the fullness of (eternal) life that is now yours in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 2:10; Colossians 3:1-4).

*How would your experience with God change if you believed and lived like these things are true?*

*How will these truths help you resolve past sin(s) you may have been hiding or afraid to reveal?*

*How would your current struggle with sin(s) change if you believed God's view of you doesn't change, even when you sin?*

*How would you treat yourself differently if you saw yourself as God sees you in Christ?*

*How would the way you interact with others change if you saw yourself as God sees you in Christ?*

### Additional Study

“Atonement” is an important Biblical word that can refer, generally, to all Christ has done to forgive our sins and render us righteous in God’s sight. More narrowly, it refers to Christ’s substitutionary, “wrath-of-God-averting” sacrifice for sins, through which God cancels our sins and reconciles us to himself. To think more about the atonement:

- Read [Getting to the Heart of Atonement](#)
- See Grudem's, *Systematic Theology*, *The Atonement*, pp. 568-580

“Justification” refers to God’s declaration that those who have been united to the righteous Christ by grace through faith are now righteous in his sight. Our righteousness in Christ includes forgiveness of sin (Romans 3:24; Romans 3: 28), and God imputing to us the very righteousness of Christ (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21). For more on the doctrine of justification:

- See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Justification, pp. 722-732.
- See, [The Doctrine of Justification](#)

For more on what it means to be united with Jesus Christ see, [Do You Know Union with Christ?](#)

For more on living like one who is deeply loved, fully pleasing, totally accepted, and complete in Christ, read Tim Keller’s very short, hope-filled book, [The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness](#).