

LD 23; Rom. 3:20-31; Phil. 3:7-9; Right with God I. The Need for Justification II. The Basis of Justification III. Responding to our Justification

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we return to our catechism series this morning, we ask this important question. Are you right with God? Is everything good between God and yourself? LD 23 brings the subject of justification before us this morning. The doctrine of justification has to deal with the law; with our being on the right side of the law. Imagine for a moment that there is a person living in Lynwood that has warrant for their arrest. This particular person has done something wrong in the eyes of the law- and when the police catch this person they will be send to jail. This is an illustration of being on the wrong side of the law. But are you on the right side of God's Law? Although you may not have a warrant out for your arrest, that does not mean that you are on the right side of God's law! So today we come to what has bene called the heart of the Reformation- the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls. How are we made right with God? How can we sinners be made acceptable so that we can stand and remain in the presence of a Holy God? So today we find that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. LD 23 is the capstone of our consideration of the AC. So QA 59 starts with this question- what good does it do you to believe all this? In other words, what is the benefit of knowing and believing all the doctrines contained in the AC? And the answer is this- if I know and believe the truth contained in the AC, I will be righteous in Christ before God. So we consider this theme this morning: Jesus Christ secures our righteousness with God by the shedding of His blood.

### **I. The Need for Justification**

In our first point, we consider our shared need for justification. We are defining justification as our being made right with God- or to be acceptable to God and pleasing in His sight. So we start by considering man's ability. Can we make ourselves right with God? Knowing what we know about Genesis 3 and our human nature, it is clear that man is not currently right with God. We are born as sinners who are rebellious- fallen and dead in our trespasses. God is terribly angry with our sins and the

sinful nature we are born with. So then, can we make ourselves right with God? Can we fix what is broken- can we mend this torn relationship by our works or actions? Into this gaping hole the Law comes. If the Law is the standard- what God defines is right and good- perhaps we can by our obedience to the Law bring ourselves back into a good relationship with God. But as our text reveals, this source of escape will not work. No human can do this! As a convicted criminal with a warrant out for our arrest- there is no amount of good that we can do now that will cancel that warrant! Let's build on this illustration. Let's say that this career criminal starts to obey the law- he does not speed when driving. He even starts mowing his neighbor's lawn. Do these good works cancel the fact that he is a murderer and when caught will he escape prison? Surely not! But added to this fact, we do not and can not do the very good that God's Law sets before us a standard! As Rom. 3:20 says, by the works of the Law no human being will be justified, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin. Did you catch that- No Human Being! So not only is it impossible for humans to work their way into God's good graces by works of the Law- the opposite is true- the Law only serves to expose our sin and illuminate our need! So if the Law of God reveals what man should and must do, the way this law functions in our lives is to expose how far and how often we fall short. We stand condemned! All this is to say, the Law reveals our need for justification without providing the basis for our justification! The Law shows us that we are not right with God- but the Law remains unable to make us right with God due to our own sinful nature and actions. So as QA 60 opens, we find this truth about ourselves. My conscience accuses me. I have sinned grievously. I have never kept any of God commandments. And I am still included towards all evil. As we read in Rom. 3:23- all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And again in Rom. 7:23, I see this in my members, a law that wages war against my mind- a law that makes me captive to sin. It is from this conflict within that I come to know that I am captive to this body of death. So to summarize this first point, we need something that we cannot provide! We are on the outside and we cannot purchase the key that will lock the door! Mankind lives in hostility towards God- and He towards us

because of our sins. This is true even of Christians- we are still sinners who cannot perfectly obey the Law. There is no basis or grounds for our acceptance by God to be found in our works! We are estranged from God- we need to be justified- we need peace with our God. But the reason we are estranged remains the reason we cannot gain what is necessary!

## **II. The Basis of Justification**

So if we are by nature in the wrong- our relationship with God is not one of peace but of conflict; and if we cannot change this status ourselves by our works- how than can we be made right with God? That is the pressing question of QA 60! Since the convicted felon cannot change his status- he needs someone in authority- someone in power to pardon him! So who can secure this pardon for us? How can a sinner be made right with a holy God? The answer is found in the person and works of another. Unable to provide or purchase our own justification- this change must be secured by the righteous works of someone more powerful and righteous than man! The righteousness we receive is foreign to us- not from ourselves but from another. Justification is the application of Jesus' righteousness to us- His works credited to our account. It is a one-time event that changes our standing before God. Justification is an act of God where He declared that the requirements of the Law have been satisfied in all their parts in regards to the sinner. To be clear, there is a double imputation in our justification. A double crediting that takes place. My sins- or my guilty record- is placed on Jesus. This is the negative aspect. And His perfect righteousness- His record- is place on my account. This is the positive aspect. This double imputation is expanded upon in QA 60- just as if I had never sinner- and just as if I had been perfectly obedient! So when the Father looks at us- when the Just Judge looks at our account- what He sees is not my sins but my Savior's perfection. And this really is where the essence of the good news is found. In Christ- by Christ- we can have a change in status! The convicted convict becomes a pardoned child! We receive a new name, a new identity and a new family! There are two important aspects to this justification that we must consider. First of all, justification is gracious work of God. Justification is a gift

that God gives us. As we read in Rom. 3:24, we are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The gracious nature of this justification is emphasised- as a gift and not of our works. This pardon is something that we do not earn, but rather it is graciously bestowed. As our QA says- out of sheer grace! The second part of this justification that we have to consider is this- how do we have access to it? By what means do the works of Christ become mine and my sins become His? Does it just happen all by itself- like a gift that mysteriously shows up on your doorstep? Something that happens in heaven- entirely outside of us? No, the way in which we have access to the works of Jesus are through faith. Faith is the means- the instrument by which we are joined to Christ and partake of all His blessings. We receive this justification by faith or through faith- we do not earn it by faith but receive it through faith. The Holy Spirit produces this faith in our heart- giving us the trust that is necessary to embrace Jesus. Faith is when we know, acknowledge and embrace Him with all our heart. As we read in Phi. 3:9, we have a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness from God that depends on faith. As Rom. 3:22 echoes, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus for all who believe. As QA 60 concludes, I must accept this gift with a believing heart. So to put this point together- we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

### **III. Responding to our Justification**

As we come to our final point, we find again that this doctrine must be our own personal belief and conviction. It is not enough simply to know that way in which some person might be justified. No, how am I justified? How can I be made right with God? So it is critical that you be united to Christ by faith in order to enjoy these benefits. Your lasting comfort depends on knowing how you receive forgiveness! But now that we have received this righteousness by faith we come to the application. In other words, how are we to respond to our justification? How does this truth change us and really alter how we live? Our last point includes 3 since/ then statements. Number 1- Since justification is not earned- not a part of our works- then we will necessarily be humbled when it is received. As we read in Rom. 3:27, what

becomes of our boasting, it is excluded! There is no room for pride- for a self-congratulation when it comes to our salvation. We are not so much better than others- we have done nothing to deserve this kindness and grace of our God! Nothing in my hands I bring! Rather, the proper response is humility! When we acknowledge our need- how we are desperate outside of Christ- then our hearts will be properly humbled and our pride crushed by the weight of this grace! Next, we see that since justification is a work of Jesus Christ, then we must place our faith in this Christ to be saved! We will be moved to trust in Him- to rely on Him for this righteousness that so need! And the final one- since justification is a gift of God's grace, then those who receive it will be grateful and thankful for this gift! Having been justified by our God moves us to be filled with thanksgiving! We will want to praise and thank the judge who has expunged our record! Who has liberated us from death row! Who has pardoned us and who has given us a new status! The record of the perfect man on our account! That is why justification is such a blessing- it describes the way in which sinners can be made right with God!

As we close, a Christian is in this life both a sinner and a saint! We have been declared not guilty- pardoned and now welcomed in His sight. Are we on the right side of the Law? Does God view us as a law-breaker or as a law-keeper? If we are in Christ, we are a new creation! Our old status is gone- our new status has come! The truth of justification is on display as we come to the Lord's Table. We do not eat our own bread and wine- but rather the bread and wine of Christ! We come here because we have been called- invited and welcomed in Jesus! Not because we think that we are worthy- but because we have been pardoned! We accept this spiritual food and drink with a heart of faith- knowing that it is Jesus who feeds and nourish us and not we ourselves. As Rom. 5:9 states, we have been justified by His blood and saved from wrath. As our theme states: Jesus Christ secures our righteousness with God by the shedding of His blood. If God is for us- who can condemn?!