

Justification and Sanctification #2

Romans 5:3

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

During this year here in the theater, we've been talking about justification. You know the way you do something wrong; you lose your temper at home or you cut somebody out of a lane of traffic on the freeway and immediately you begin to say to yourself, "Well, he provoked me. I had the right to do it. He was just asking for it. People can't walk all over me." And you begin to justify yourself and satisfy your conscience that you were fully justified in doing what you did.

This is the very opposite of what God wants us to do. He wants us, immediately when we lose our temper or cut somebody out of a lane of traffic, to see that we did it because we don't trust that God is in charge of our lives. We feel we have to look out for ourselves and we're refusing to let the life of Jesus minister through us to other people. God has every right therefore to destroy us before we destroy him in his universe. Then God wants us to see that he has actually destroyed Jesus instead of us. For that reason, we are justified in coming to him and asking him for forgiveness. And he is justified in not destroying rebels like us but in accepting us as children.

That's real justification as opposed to self-justification. Now you remember that we saw that a remarkable miracle takes place whenever we begin to admit our sins before God and accept Jesus' justification. You'll see that in Galatians 4:6. Immediately we believe that God has justified us in Jesus because he has destroyed Jesus instead of us, so too he has no justification for destroying us.

Galatians 4:6: "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba Father!'" So the moment you experience God's justification, that moment also God sends the Spirit of his Son into your heart. The Spirit of his Son begins to work another miracle inside you. Because you believe that Jesus died for you, God treats you as holy even though you're not. He then sends the Spirit of his Son into you who begins to try to make you holy.

So there are two great miracles in the Christian life. Justification -- where God treats you as if you'd never sinned because Jesus has died for your sins and they're cast out of God's memory forever. And sanctification -- where God begins to make you like himself. He begins to make you holy. "Sanctus fio" in Latin is to make holy. It's that magnificent experience of sanctification that we're beginning to move into here in the study of Romans where God sends the Spirit of his Son into us and that spirit begins to make us more and more like God.

Now it is important to see that there are two differences. In justification, instead of enemies of God, you become friends -- but you're still sinners and not saints. In justification, you come into the favor of God but you have not yet come into the image of God. So it's really a half of the work that is done. God treats you as holy because of Jesus but inside you still are not holy yourself. And that's what Jesus begins to deal with. He begins to try to make you holy through his Spirit.

I think it's important to see brothers and sisters that there is a time lapse between the two experiences. God deals with us individually in regard to sanctification as he dealt with the Israelites. He gave the Israelites a promise at the beginning of his dealings with them but it was

many years afterwards that that promise was realized. Now you'll see that if you look at it in Exodus 6:8.

Our own individual experiences parallel this experience of the Israelites as a nation. Exodus 6:8: "And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD." Then they had 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and they still had that promise. Then they had hundreds of years of fighting in the land of Canaan itself and they still had that promise.

Now do you see there was a great gap? There was a great intervening time between God giving the promise that "I'll bring you in the land of Canaan", and him actually bringing them in. In all that time the relationship with God was maintained by faith, not by sight. Their tenuous contact with God was maintained by their faith in his word. Now it's the same with many of us who have experienced justification.

We're on the way to becoming like Jesus and all the while we're on the way to becoming, our contact with God is maintained by faith and not by sight. It's important to see that. Some of us don't really move in that realm. Some of us come under the law again like the Galatians. Here is what many of us do and we looked at it briefly last day.

Look at Galatians 3:1-5. Many of us come into, or fall into this salvation by works again at this point in our lives. Galatians 3:1-5: "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain? - If it really is in vain. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law or by hearing with faith?"

The Galatians had fallen back into salvation by works.

Many of us do the same thing over this whole miracle of sanctification. How do we do it? Well, turn to Galatians 5 and you'll see it there. We know that we are accepted by God only because of the blood of Jesus. Romans 5:9 says, "We're justified by the blood of Jesus." But then we come to a verse like Galatians 5:19. "Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like."

You can see that we have some anger still in our lives. We have some jealousy still in our lives. We have some envy still there. We have some impurity still there. And then we read the next verse, which just destroys us. Galatians 5:21: "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

And so we say, "Those things are in our lives. Therefore we're not sons of God, we have no relationship with God, and we won't enter the kingdom." Now dear ones do you see why we do that? It's because we ignore two words in that verse. We ignore the words "shall" and we ignore the word "inherit". Do you see that both of those words indicate that there is an intervening time between the moment we're justified and the moment we're sanctified wholly like Jesus?

It's an experience that begins the moment we first receive Jesus but it's an experience that goes on and probably will go on until we meet him face-to-face. Thought it's an experience with a great

crisis in it that is very real and that really does deliver us from the power of sin, yet there is a real sense in which it's a process that goes on until we meet Jesus face-to-face. Many of us come to this verse and we say, "We won't inherit the kingdom. That means we're not Christians. Okay, we better get rid of these things." And we begin to try to root out envy, jealousy and anger by sheer strong will power. We're not long in that way before we've developed our independent wills again. Of course, it's not long before we're out of any relationship with Jesus.

It's all because we forget that the only reason God accepts us is because of the blood of his Son. We've changed the ground of our justification. We change it to having a life without anger or jealousy or envy. Dear ones, it doesn't matter how saintly we ever get in this life, we'll never be more acceptable to God than we are today because of the blood of his Son. God wants us (as he requested from the Israelites) to walk this intervening time trusting his word, and trusting his promise that the good work he started in us, he will complete inside us.

In other words, there is an intervening time phase. Many of us go further. We go to Matthew 7:16 and we condemn ourselves. We don't give the Holy Spirit any chance to do it rightly. We condemn ourselves wrongly with false condemnation. Matthew 7:16 - Jesus says, "You will know them by their fruits." We look into our lives -- introspection again -- which is one of the greatest sins in the Christian life. We look into our life and we see there's no joy in my heart, there's no peace in my heart so I am not a Christian.

You will know Christians by their fruits. Jesus is saying that you will know false prophets by the fruits of their ministry. He is even saying that other people will know you as a Christian by your fruits. But he is not saying you will know yourself to be a Christian by your fruit. Many of us look inside and we say, "Oh, there are no fruits so we aren't converted, we aren't justified, we aren't accepted by God." Loved ones, our justification depends on the blood of Jesus.

God looks at the blood of Jesus and sees that blood outpoured for your sins and mine and he says, "I am willing to accept you because of the blood of my Son." Now, that's why Paul gives this presentation of sanctification in Romans. It's the verse we studied last day. Romans 5:1-2: "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God."

Now that's the attitude of a Christian who is walking as God wants him to walk. You're justified by the blood of Jesus and you're rejoicing in the hope of sharing the glory of God. You're not beating yourself over the head trying to make yourself a saint. You're not exercising your will power trying to get rid of the anger and the jealousy and the envy. Do you see that the love, joy, and peace are fruits of the Spirit? They're things that the Spirit brings about in you if you let him. They aren't things that you can bring about yourself. The right attitude of a Christian walking on into sanctification is that stated in Romans 5:2, "We rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God." We thank God for every time he shows us something in us that has to change.

Now, that's what God begins to do. God begins to work upon us to do two things: to strengthen our faith in our justification and secondly to destroy our old independent selfish will. Now that's what the Holy Spirit begins to do in us after we've become Christians. He works to strengthen our justifying faith and he works to destroy that independent selfish will. All the experiences that we come into are planned with that purpose in mind.

All we can do today for a few minutes is to talk about how God strengthens justifying faith. The next day when we deal with the next verse, we'll try to deal with how he destroys our selfish, independent will. Do you see that the first thing God does before he begins to work on us to make us like himself is to strengthen our faith in his justification of us? In other words, he must make sure that we are in no doubt that he accepts us as his children because he is going to take us through some hard things and we'll often want to look up and say, "Father, you don't really love me because of this hard thing."

So the first thing God has to do is to really assure us that we are his children. Now to do that loved ones, the first thing he deals with is our weak faith in the effectual nature of Jesus' blood. It is weak and you'll see that in a moment. That's the first thing God begins to work on and that's the explanation of this next verse. Maybe we should read the verse and then I'll show you how it applies.

Romans 5:3: "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance." So the reason God allows us to come into affliction is to strengthen our justifying faith so that he can begin to work on those independent wills without making us doubt our salvation. Now do you see that?

Now, what is he to do first of all? Well, first of all he has to deal with the perversion of faith that Satan works in us immediately after we become converted. We believe that God accepts us for Jesus' sake and Satan gets in and begins to pervert that faith. How does he do it? Well, you know when you turn your whole life over to Jesus, one of the great changes that comes about is that your life begins to take on order and pattern at last. Your life was chaotic before. You didn't know where it was going. It was meaningless and purposeless. Now it seems as you surrender everything to the Father, your life begins to take on pattern and order.

You begin to know where your future is going. You begin to see order in your home life. You begin to see some kind of plan in your career and somehow things begin to fall into place. Now that change comes of course because we've at last taken our hands off the wheel of our lives and we've really given God the chance to direct them. But do you see it isn't long before we change the ground of our justification? We change it from our belief in the blood of Jesus to the way things are working out in our life. It's not long before in testimonies and in prayer meetings and in fellowships, we're busy sharing about -- the preciousness of Jesus? And about the beauty of the death of Jesus? No. We're sharing about the great things the Lord has done in my life this week. We're sharing the great way the Lord turned that out just beautifully. We share how God does things in our lives.

At the beginning it's good, but do you see that if you go on sharing that kind of thing, you're going to more and more take part in an infantile kind of fellowship. Because it's not long before you and your friends become preoccupied with the way things are turning out right in your life. This becomes the mark of a child of God.

It's not long before you've declined into an Old Testament faith where you begin to say you're right with God because things are going right with you. You know the kind of joke many people make whether they're Christians or not. They say, "Oh, why does it go so well with you?" "Oh it's because I live right." And that creeps into our Christian life. We begin to sense, "Yes, we're right with the Father. All right, it's because things are turning out beautifully."

Then do you see what God does? He knows that that is weak faith. He knows that is virtually no faith

at all. It brings little glory to Jesus and it doesn't draw us closer into Jesus. It draws us more and more into ourselves and more and more into preoccupation with the way our own lives are going. So God allows afflictions to come into our experience. You see what many of us do? Like the little kid we cry out, "Aaaah". We don't rejoice in the suffering. We don't see what the Father is trying to do. We start shaking. We start saying, "Oh, what's wrong? Things aren't going right. They were going right before." We do exactly what Satan wants us to do. We begin to doubt if we're in a right relationship with God.

If you're a farmer the crops fail. If you're an insurance man, you stop selling insurance. If you're a teacher, the class starts swinging on the lights. If you're a housewife, the children start being impossible and the house begins to bear down upon you. Now, loved ones do you see that that's why God allows us to come into affliction -- so that at last he'll break us from that dependence on things going right being the mark of a Christian. That's why the Apostle Paul says, "We rejoice in our suffering." Why? "Knowing that this will produce endurance."

Endurance is a Greek word "upomene"; it means a strong brave courage that goes on and on even if the roof falls in. Do you see that God's desire is to strengthen our faith in Jesus' blood and in the fact that God has accepted us as his children because of Jesus' death whatever it looks like to other people. That's why he allows afflictions to come upon us. So loved ones, unless you're very young in the Christian life and God therefore has to treat you very gently, you're bound to come into some afflictions and sufferings.

Now, what you need to do is to look up to the Father and say, "Father, why has this come? Why are you allowing this to come? What is it in my attitude to you that is not right?" Really examine yourself and ask, "Do I really believe that I am accepted by God because of Jesus' death or am I beginning to believe I am accepted by God because of the way things are going?" Do you see the danger? Satan can make things go right too because he is the prince of this world. That's why God wants to take us out from under that perversion of faith – i.e. walking by sight instead of by faith.

Now that's one of the ways God strengthens justifying faith -- by taking away the walking by sight instead of by faith and allowing us to come into affliction. That's what Paul means when he says, "You see we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces 'upomene', which produces that brave courage that keeps going whatever things look like." It strengthens justifying faith. Isn't it true in every difficulty that you've been closer to Jesus than ever before? Isn't that right? It's prosperity that is difficult, isn't it?

You need to be mature to take prosperity. You remember John Wesley who was used by God in the 18th century – they used to drive cattle among his congregations and they stoned and imprisoned him. He said, "At the beginning of my life they stoned me, they imprisoned me, they insulted me, they ignored me and my time with God was safe. Now they laud me, they praise me, they talk about me, they write books about me and my soul has never been in such great danger from Satan." Do you see that the afflictions are the good times, brothers and sisters.

God uses the sufferings to bring us into that place where we believe we're accepted by him because of Jesus alone and his blood. What is the other kind of affliction he uses? Well, many of us experience a great relief when we receive Jesus into our own life. There is just a tremendous deliverance when the guilt lifts off your conscience and you begin to sense acceptance by God. All the worry goes and all the concern about what your future is going to be and how you're going to be

after death comes. You just have great peace and great joy.

Now the tragedy is that many of us begin to lean on that joy and that peace and so you can tell infant fellowship by their attitude to joy and peace. Many infant prayer meetings will be all concerned with how we all feel. "Oh, I didn't feel good in that prayer meeting." That means they didn't feel joy or they didn't feel peace. Or, if the meeting was full of singing, was uplifting and joyful, they'll say, "Boy, that was a really a good service." And so bit-by-bit people begin to depend on the peace of God's presents rather than God's presence.

They begin to depend more on the feeling of joy than they do on the absolute assurance that God really loves us. They begin to want to feel God's love more than believe in God's love. Now brothers and sisters, do you see that that is a perilous situation; that is a weak faith in Jesus' death for your sins. It isn't long before Satan can begin to produce the same kind of joy. In fact, you can get it with drugs; you can get it with alcohol. So it isn't long before Satan begins to make your circumstances right and you seem to still have that joy and yet underneath your faith has crumbled.

Now this is why God allows us to come into affliction in our emotional life. What does he do? After we've been walking a while with him, he withdraws the peace. He withdraws joy. And so many of us are like the little kid who is hurt and wants it back. So many of us say, "We're not right with God, that's why we haven't got joy and peace. We're not right with God."

Loved ones, do you see that we're right with God because we believe that he has accepted us through the blood of Jesus that has been presented to the Father. It's naked faith and that's why the Apostle Paul says, "We rejoice in our sufferings" – when God withdraws the peace and joy and love from our hearts, when we begin to have to exercise our wills to show these in our lives, then that is God bringing us into sufferings because we know that suffering will produce endurance. And that endurance is that word "upomene". It means something that stays under the load. It means an attitude that stays under the load, remaining under the load of affliction without faltering and complaint. It's going right on no matter what the load may become. Now that's the meaning of that word.

You see that's the kind of faith that God produces in us as we learn to do without the feelings of joy and of peace. Now brothers and sisters, that's one of the reasons why Paul says we rejoice in our sufferings, we rejoice when God allows our circumstances to become really hairy. We rejoice when God withdraws those great feelings of joy and peace because what happens inside is we sink back into the beginning of the whole miracle, our faith in Jesus' blood presented before the Father.

I remember John Bunyan who wrote "The Pilgrim's Progress", was being hounded from town-to-town. They were at last determining to imprison him for life and he said, "Whatever comes, I will leap into eternity by blind faith, come heaven, come hell." Now that's it. I will leap into eternity by blind faith in Jesus whether heaven comes after that or hell comes after that. I will believe Jesus whatever.

Now loved ones, God is out to strengthen that faith. Why? Because you'll see next Sunday he's going to bring us into some hard things to deal with in that old independent selfish will of ours. As we come into those hard things there will be a great temptation to wonder, "Am I still justified?" That's why God strengthens that faith in Jesus in Romans 5:9, "We are justified by the blood of his Son."

I pray that if any of you today are teetering like that that you will see what God is doing in you

and will allow him to strengthen that faith so you will be prepared to go by naked faith, not by sight. It is not by circumstances and not by feeling but by naked faith in Jesus. That's the place of peace and rest and it's a place where God can begin to work on us and begin to sanctify us by his Spirit.

Question and Answer

Q: How really do you distinguish between the spirit and the soul and how can you be sure that you're walking right if you've heard nothing recently from your spirit?

A: It seems brothers and sisters that the basic verse for assurance in the Bible is Romans 8:16, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Our spirit's witness is the witness of our own human spirit that we have experience of those fruit spoken of in Galatians 5:22, "The fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace." We don't look in and say, "Do I really feel love?" Probably you'll never feel that you feel enough love. But it's that other people see Jesus in our life and that lets us know that our own spirit is witnessing.

The witness of God's Spirit with a capital "S" is that we have assurance, trust and confidence that Jesus has died for us. It's a trust and confidence within. And it's that witness of our spirit that assures us that we're children of God. It's not the witness of our feelings -- that we feel joy or we feel peace. But it's the witness that other people are seeing Jesus in us because they see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. It's the witness within of a sure trust and confidence that we have that Jesus has died for us. It's a belief in him.

So that's really how we walk in regard to our own assurance. The only one that we should allow to spoil that assurance is the Holy Spirit himself. The only way he will spoil it is when he convicts us of a definite sin, a definite, particular sin. Then we can deal with that definite, particular sin. The Holy Spirit never brings a vague sense of guilt upon us. He always says, "That is wrong," and we deal with that.

So if you have not the Holy Spirit dealing with you in a particular way and you're feeling or sensing a definite hold back in a certain part of your life, then you walk according to that. Now you know how to discern between your soul and your spirit. The vital thing is you don't try to do it yourself. That's because it's your soul or your mind looking in and trying to distinguish what is your spirit and what is your mind. All your mind can see when it looks in is your mind. And so you're walking by your mind.

You can't distinguish between your soul and your spirit by looking in with your mind. It's in Hebrews 4:12 that you have the two answers: breaking experiences, (Paul talks about "crushed but not perplexed"), and revelation. You remember the Holy Spirit says that the Bible divides between the soul and the spirit revealing the intentions of the heart. It's the Holy Spirit that distinguishes between your spirit and your soul.

The way it really works is that you're doing something and suddenly the Holy Spirit says, "Now there's a little emotionalism in there, isn't there?" And you look up to him and say, "Holy Spirit, yes, I can't get rid of it. I give it over to you. Will you discipline me in this regard?" And he'll bring more breaking experiences until gradually he brings your emotions under his control.

Let us pray:

Holy Spirit, we remember what you taught us when we first began our studies in the evenings. You taught us that we could not bring these things about by ourselves. Holy Spirit, we would not try to do that. We would receive from you the warning that you have given us about the emotions and we would trust you Holy Spirit in your own unique way to bring our emotions under your control. When we clap, it is because you are clapping. When we sing it is because you are singing. When we pray it is because you are praying. When the body does something it is because you, Holy Spirit, have prompted us to do it because Jesus has told you.

O Holy Spirit, we would give ourselves to you now tonight, telling you that whatever it costs you to bring our emotions and our minds and our wills under your control, we want you to bring that about in our lives. However breaking it may seem, however abandoned we may seem at times, we give you the right to bring us into a daily bearing of the Cross so that our souls become submissive and efficient servants of our spirits and so that the Holy Spirit of Jesus flows out freely from us to others and the world sees Jesus and not our personality. We ask this for his glory and in his name.

Now, the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.