

What Makes This Cross Unique?

On October 31, 1517, a young Augustinian monk walked up to the front door of Castle Church in Wittenberg Germany and there he nailed what we now know as The 95 Theses. The 95 Theses were critical observations and assertions regarding many of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church at that time. This young monk was named Martin Luther. Chief among the criticisms he raised was a concern over the matter of what was called indulgences. An indulgence was a certificate that a person could purchase, and it would remove a certain amount of years from a relative or friend that was believed to be in purgatory. In essence, it was the ability to purchase forgiveness of sins. Indulgences were instituted by Pope Leo X in an effort to raise money to build St. Peter's Cathedral.

When Luther saw a particular seller of indulgences, a man by the name of Johann Tetzel, he was infuriated. Tetzel had a little jingle that he would chant: "When a coin in the coffer rings, another soul from purgatory springs!" Luther saw this as, not simply a false teaching or avarice, but he recognized it for what it was: the destruction of the gospel. For if a man teaches that anything beyond faith in Christ is needed for salvation he has abandoned the gospel. Luther maintained that the article of "justification by faith alone" is the article upon which the church stands or falls. That is, if we lose this doctrine the whole of the church goes down with it. It's that important. It is the subject of justification that I want to talk about today.

Herod the Great:

- Had his brother in law killed—Aristobulus III
- Watched his wife Mariamne and had her uncle Joseph, and killed him because he broke confidence.
- Killed his wife Mariamne
- Killed his mother in law
- Marries another woman named Mariamne
- Kills 2 of his sons
- Then he accused a third son named Antipater of high treason and had him executed.
 - This prompted Caesar Augustus to say "I would rather be his (Herod's) hog than his son." A insulting remark to anyone with Jewish sensibilities.
- Set to kill Jewish leaders—"If they won't mourn *for* my death, then they'll mourn *at* my death."

- Herod died April 1, 4 BC. His order to kill the Jewish leaders was not carried out so his death became a time of rejoicing.
- Varus, who had just arrived in Syria, supported the accusation against Antipater.
- Three years later, Herod died.
- In his will, he divided his kingdom among his three sons
 - Herod Archelaus (Judea and Samaria),
 - Herod Antipas (Galilee and Perea), and
 - Philip (Gaulanitis).
- Immediately, there were riots in the areas ruled by Archelaus,
- Archelaus' troops were unable to cope with these men, and
- **General Varus** had to intervene. It was a major operation, which involved three legions.
 - A legion consisted of 3,000 to 6,000 infantry troops and 100 to 200 cavalry troops.
- **2,000 people crucified**¹
- Years later in 70 AD, **Titus III, crucified so many fugitives from the city of Jerusalem that neither “space...for the crosses, nor crosses for the bodies’ could be found.”**²
- **Jewish folk hero Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC) crucified 800,**
- **Emperor Hadrian (117-138), 500 a day**
- **Alexander the Great (4th century BC) crucified 2000 Tyrians.**
- **Augustus crucified 600 Sicilians.**
- **When we talk about the cross, what makes the cross of Christ so special?**
- It is the theological meaning that the biblical authors tell us.
- They are saying, in effect, this was not simply just another crucifixion. This crucifixion was altogether unique!
- ***Isaiah 53:3-12*—“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like**

¹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, xvii.10.10

² Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 5.451.

a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth...For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. 9He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. 10Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. 11After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will **justify** many, and he will bear their iniquities...because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

- ***So what did the cross accomplish?***
- 1. Forgiveness of sins.
- 2. Justification
- 3. Regeneration
- **Forgiveness of sins.**
- ***Romans 4: 25—He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.***
- *However*, John Piper is quite right when he says...
- *Piper*: “The demands of God for entrance into eternal life are not merely that our unrighteousness be canceled, but that our perfect righteousness be established.”³
- **Justification**
- ***Romans 4: 25—He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.***

Alfred Dryfus was a Jewish soldier in the army of France, serving on the general staff. In 1894, he was accused and arrested on the charge of selling secrets to the enemies of France. He was tried and condemned as a traitor, court-martialed and sentenced to the French penal colony on Devil's Island.

The friends of Dryfus were unsatisfied with the trial and, because of their protests, a second trial was granted in 1899. Dryfus was again found guilty.

This time, the public dissatisfaction with the trial caused such an outcry that the president of France granted Dryfus a pardon. He was released from Devil's Island and permitted to come home.

³ John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 41.

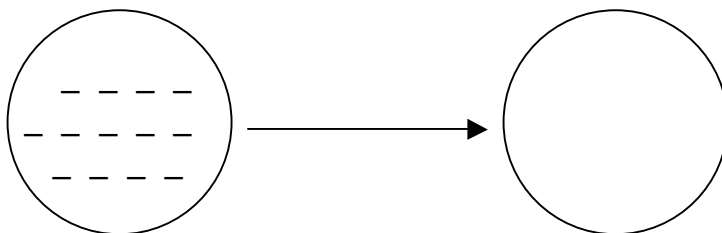
However, the stigma of being a traitor still rested upon Dryfus and in 1906 a third trial was held in which Dryfus was completely vindicated. He was declared to be righteous in the eyes of the law. He was reinstated in the French military, promoted to the rank of major, and awarded the French Legion of Honor. This illustrates the difference between a pardon and justification.

Pardon	Justification
Says that you are guilty but suspends the penalty of that guilt.	Declares you to be righteous and without guilt

- Easter is all about justification.
- **Grudem:** “Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight.”⁴
- **2 Corinthians 5:21**—“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

What do we learn from the Cross?

- **Substitution and Imputation:**
 - **The two goats on the Day of Atonement.** Christ is our substitute.
- **The Problem: Half a Gospel/Clean Slate Christianity**
 - **Piper:** “First, the death of Christ paid the debt of our unrighteousness. Second, the obedience of Christ provided the righteousness we needed to be justified in God’s court. The demands of God for entrance into eternal life are not merely that our unrighteousness be cancelled, but that our perfect righteousness established.”⁵



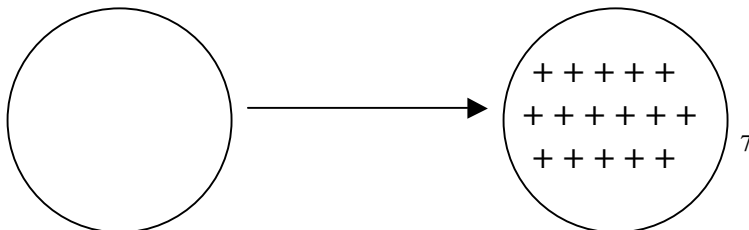
- **Grudem:** “But if God merely declared us to be *forgiven from our past sins* that would not solve our problem entirely, for it would only make us morally neutral before God. We would be in the state that Adam was in before he had done anything right or wrong in God’s sight—he was not

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 723.

⁵ John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 41.

guilty before God, but neither had he earned a record of righteousness before God.”⁶

- However, forgiveness is not enough. We also need positive righteousness.



1. The death of Christ paid the debt of our unrighteousness.
 2. The obedience of Christ provided the righteousness we needed to be justified in God’s court.
- The Final cry of Christ from the cross was: “It is finished!”
 - It was the cry of victory, not defeat.
 - **Illustration:** William Wallace from *Braveheart*. His final cry just before his death (as they were disemboweling him): “Freedom!!”
 - **Moo:** “Particularly striking...is the connection made between Christ’s resurrection and our justification...As Jesus’ death provides the necessary grounds on which God’s justifying action can proceed, so his resurrection... provides for the ongoing power over sins experienced by the believer in union with Christ.”⁸
 - **John Piper:** “In other words, the resurrection of Jesus is the proof that his death was sufficient to cover all our transgressions.”⁹
- **Ills.** In a grade book it would be more than simply removing the ‘F’s. It is adding the ‘A’s.

Test 1	Test 2	Test 3	Test 4	Test 5	Test 6	Test 7	Test 8	Test 9
F	F	F	D-	F				

Half a Gospel

Test 1	Test 2	Test 3	Test 4	Test 5	Test 6	Test 7	Test 8	Test 9

⁶ Grudem, 725.

⁷ Grudem, 725.

⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 289-90.

⁹ John Piper, <http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/01/101401.html>.

Justification

Test 1	Test 2	Test 3	Test 4	Test 5	Test 6	Test 7	Test 8	Test 9
A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+

- **Romans 5: 18-19**—“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to **justification** and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so **by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.**”
- **Ills.** Bank ledger: It's more than simply canceling the debt (forgiveness). It is a positive deposit (justification—positive righteousness)

Before Justification

Anderson	Anderson	Anderson	Anderson	Anderson
January	February	March	April	May
(\$100,000,000)	(\$100,000,000)	(\$100,000,000)	(\$100,000,000)	(\$100,000,000)

Half a Gospel

Anderson	Anderson	Anderson	Anderson	Anderson
January	February	March	April	May
\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

Justification

Anderson	Anderson	Anderson	Anderson	Anderson
January	February	March	April	May
\$100,000,000	\$100,000,000	\$100,000,000	\$100,000,000	\$100,000,000

What did the Cross and Resurrection Accomplish?

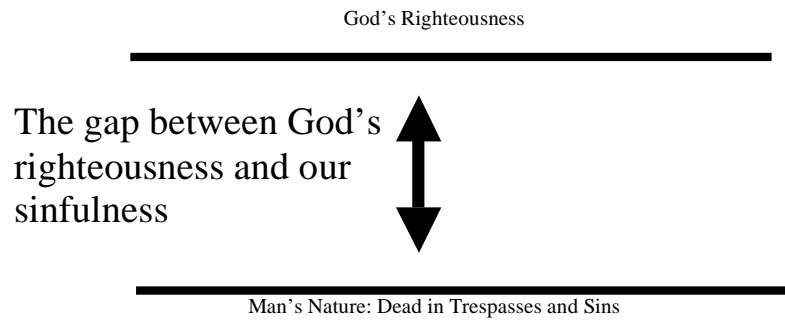
- **Regeneration:**
- Christ's resurrection **ensures our regeneration:**
- **1 Peter 1:3**—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has *caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*”
- **Regeneration:** “A secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us. This is sometimes called being ‘born again.’”¹⁰
- **Luther:** “He has indeed opened his heart to us in the cross.”¹¹

¹⁰ Grudem, 699.

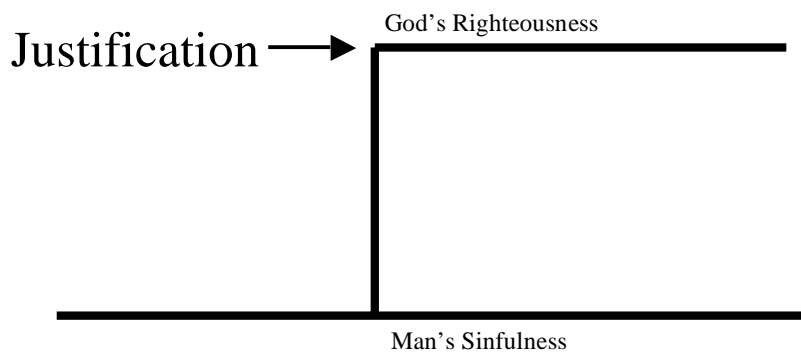
God's Righteousness

Man's Nature: Dead in Trespasses and Sins

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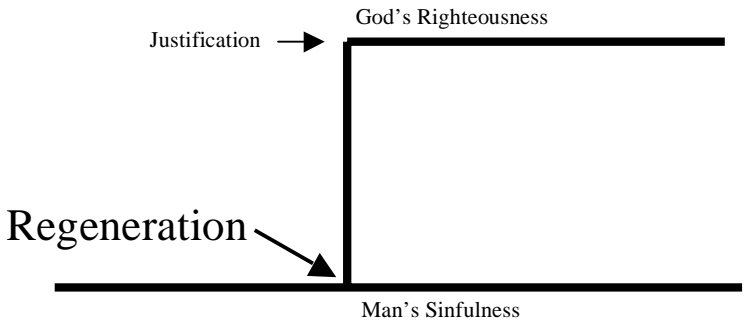


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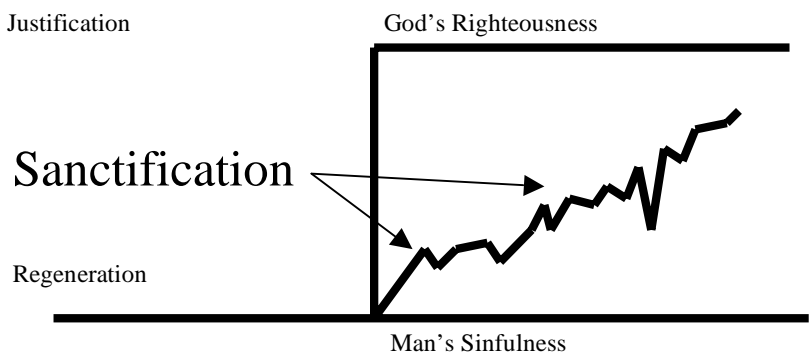


¹¹ Martin Luther, as quoted by Bruce Milne, *The Message of John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 283.

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What does the cross and resurrection accomplish?

- It purchased our redemption
- It propitiated God (wrath turned away)
- It purchased Forgiveness of sins
- It purchased our Justification (righteousness)
- It purchased Regeneration (new Spiritual life)
 - It means we have Christ!

Last week I quoted Sinclair Ferguson where he wrote, "The reason we lack assurance of his grace is because we fail to focus on that spot where he has revealed it." Ladies and gentlemen, the cross is where God has revealed his grace to us. It is in the cross alone that we can see God's justice and his mercy meet.

I started off this message with Luther's 95 Theses, and his insistence that the doctrine of justification is the article upon which the church stands or falls. I'd like to finish this message with a final quotation from him. Luther wrote, "This doctrine [i.e., the doctrine of justification by faith alone] is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour."¹²

The doctrine of justification is not some obscure theological oddity that we can simply decide to keep or throw out. We do not have the luxury of being able to push it aside so that we can get to "more important," "more practical things." It is *the* most important thing. It is at the very heart of the gospel. It is the way in which God is supremely glorified.

As we close this morning I would like to leave you with a couple of questions and a couple of applications.

1. Over and over in Scripture we are told that justification is "by faith." My first question is: **Have you placed your faith, all your faith, in Christ alone?** Have you abandoned all of your own attempts to secure a right relationship with God? There is nothing we can do to make God favorably disposed toward us; nothing! Either Christ has accomplished that by his death on the cross or it can't be done. Do you believe that?
2. My second question is for those of you who have already placed your faith in Christ: **Do you really believe that when God looks at you he sees absolute perfection? Do you really believe that the blood of Jesus Christ continues to purify you from all unrighteousness? Do you really believe that all of the positive righteousness that Christ earned has been given to you? In short, do you really believe the gospel?**
3. And finally, the first application: I remember a number of years ago looking at a catalogue on the Ph.D. program at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. I remember one of the things that struck me about the program was the emphasis on small interactive group discussions. They said something to the effect that **"An idea is not your own until you've had a chance to verbalize it for yourself."** So the small-group settings were designed to create an environment where people could try to understand new concepts and then put them into their own words.
 - o I think this is precisely what you should do this week. **Sometime over the course of the next few days (preferably today), sit down with someone**

¹² Martin Luther, quoted in Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: An Anthology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 703.

- and talk about the subject of justification. Think about it. Articulate it for yourself. Work through it. Make it your own. Study the Scriptures regarding it. Examine it.
- We will be posting the notes from today's message, along with the notes from last week, on the web site so you can look at them more closely. I know that I go through things quickly, so posting the notes is our way of trying to slow things down so you can go over them for yourself. If you can't find them email me and I'll send them to you.
4. And finally, a couple of weeks ago I cited a comment from Jonathan Edwards on the role of singing. He said, "... the duty of singing praises to God seems to be appointed wholly to excite and express religious affections. No other reason can be assigned why we should express ourselves to God in [song], rather than in prose, and do it with music but only, that such is our nature and frame, that these things have a tendency to move our affections."¹³
 5. One of the greatest ways we can praise God is not *simply* to talk about the work of Christ, but also to sing about Christ and his work. I'd like for us to begin to sing to God about the work of Christ on the cross. I'll teach you a song called "O the Cross." The song deals (at least in part) with Christ's propitiating work (last's weeks message), and his justifying work. Will you stand with me?

¹³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 volumes (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 1: 242, column 1; or Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), 44.