

It Is God Who Justifies

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the importance of relying on God's mercy and not judging others, as self-justification leads to a lack of mercy and a loss of God's peace.

Scripture: Psalm 130:3, Luke 18:13, Romans 8:1, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Gods Mercy"

Description

Richard E. Bieber delivers a powerful sermon on the dangers of cheap grace and the temptation to judge others' commitment to God. He emphasizes the importance of relying solely on God's mercy for justification, rather than trying to justify ourselves through comparison or self-righteousness. Bieber reminds the congregation that God's forgiveness and grace are essential for every believer, regardless of their years of following the Lord or knowledge of scripture. He urges humility, mercy, and a focus on God's mercy as the foundation for living a life of obedience and love.

Transcript

There was once a man who considered it his vocation in life to stand up on top of a hill, dressed in a clean white suit, with a shiny stainless steel shovel tossing muddy slime on the people who walked down below. One day an old lady cried out, "Why are you doing this?" as she wiped the mud out of her eyes and shook it off her tattered dress. The man above said, "It's my duty to show you hypocrites how filthy you are."

One day when our hero came home from an especially strenuous day, dressed in his white suit, of shoveling mud on the people down below he had a strange surprise. Barely had he turned the key in the lock of his door when it burst open and out rushed a veritable mountain of muddy slime which quickly engulfed him up to the neck. Through the open door he could see into his house and discovered that every stick of furniture was covered with slime. Slime was running down the stairs and oozing underneath the windows.

Just then he spotted a man who was dressed not in a clean white garment but in burning light and whose face shone like the sun and he demanded "Where did this slime come from?" and the answer was, "From you. Every drop of slime in this house came from your shovel. It took a while but it found its way home."

Some of us have had quite a bit to say about the danger of cheap grace. The danger of giving people the idea that if they come to church, sing a few hymns, sit through a sermon once a week they are okay with God. The danger of giving the impression that as long as you believe it doesn't matter how you live.

Baptism without repentance, communion without commitment as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said. The emphasis that, while the door of the kingdom of God is open, it is also narrow and that in order to pass through the door you have to leave your own life behind. We stress that God does not play games and that whoever puts his hand to the plough and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God.

But, creeping up on us, we have another danger. The danger that we begin to make ourselves the judges of other people's commitment. We draw our line down through the church to decide who are the true disciples, and who are not; who are the sheep and who are the goats; who are the wheat and who are the tares. Before we know it, our minds are engulfed in a huge mountain of condemnation.

The minute I take the step of measuring other people's lives, judging them, condemning them in my heart things which my Lord expressly calls me not to do, that minute, I lose all sense of what God has done for me. I can no longer see the meaning of the blood of Jesus, and how desperately I need it for cleansing. I am no longer standing on the ground that I am justified before God by His sheer mercy.

By making myself judge over other people I immediately forfeit my own justification before God, I lose God's peace and I can no longer include myself in the scriptural promise "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," because I have moved out of Jesus, out of His mercy, out of his love, and put myself on the treadmill of trying to justify myself in comparison with other people's lives.

Of course I feel uneasy. And I try to make myself feel better by telling myself that I am at least sincere.

I am not like those slobs over there, I'm committed.

I'm not undisciplined like those chain smokers, I'm disciplined.

I'm not like those spiritual morons over there, I know my scripture.

I sacrifice, I am a true disciple.

But even that doesn't quite do it for me. So I go looking for friends who will make me think that these things I'm thinking about myself are true. They will assure me and of course in exchange, I assure them, that they also are true disciples. And yet, in my heart for all the wonderful things I tell myself, and all the wonderful assurances and smiles that come from these select friends, in my heart I am condemned.

All the condemnation that I have been shoveling so freely on these hypocrites, these publicans and sinners and all those half-baked saints around me, just slid right down and collected in my heart.

And now that sludge with me begins to exude an odor that announces my coming afar off. You like scriptural principles, try this one: When you justify yourself, you always end up condemning others. On the other hand when you are justified by God alone, you condemn no one.

What then shall we say to this, if God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect, it is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died and is raised from the dead who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Romans 8

What a relief to come back to that mercy without which not one of us could stand before God!

If thou Lord should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

Psalm 130

What claim do you have on God right now? When you stand before God do you expect him to answer your prayer because you've been disciplined? You've been getting into the word, and you've been loving and you've been diligent and you've been faithful? The only claim you have on God right now is his mercy, nothing else, the shed blood of His son, who went up on that cross and died as if he were dying only for your sin, and rose for your justification as if you were the only one who needed to be justified. He now intercedes for you by name, prays for you by name before the Father's throne and He loves everyone who has ever been born just like that.

I don't care if you have been following the Lord for 50 years, and I don't care if you know your New Testament by heart in the Greek, you need God's mercy today. Without that mercy you are lost.

You can't justify yourself. It is God who justifies; and how does he do it? He does it by forgiving. He sends his son to you with the scars of the nails still in His hands and then Jesus says to you "Take heart my child, your sins are forgiven." You don't just need to hear that on the day that you are reborn, you need to hear it now.

Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. 'Twas grace that brought me safe thus far, not anything in me, and grace will bring me home.

Of course I have to be obedient and I have to be disciplined and I have to love my neighbor and I have to get into the Word and I have to go out and follow in the footsteps of my Lord, but I will never do any of those things from my heart apart from the working of God's grace within me. And by the power of His grace I walk in the footsteps of my Lord, day by day. What can I say, but, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"? "We are unprofitable servants and we have only done our duty." God help us!

Then God pours out his spirit afresh and lifts us up and strengthens our wobbly legs and says "Come on my child, a fresh start. I'll take care of it, let's go." And as long as we are walking in God's mercy with all our hearts who can condemn us? There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

If God didn't even spare His own son, but offered Him up for us all, will He not give us all things? Moreover when I walk in God's mercy I begin to view the people around me with eyes of mercy. Knowing what the Lord has done for me I know that he can do it for them. I don't judge them. When I see brothers and sisters floundering and in confusion, I don't judge them, and before I go rushing in there with my heavy advice I need to be sure that I have God's permission. Before their own master that they stand or fall; and they will be upheld, for he is able to make them stand.

I get down where I belong and join them in crying out for God's mercy and hanging on to God's promises, for I know that He is able to correct the erring, lift up the fallen, strengthen the weak and save the lost. He is able.

God help us to admit that all too much of the time we have not been living in mercy. Nor have we been pouring out our lives in joy and praise and thanksgiving to the Lord who justified us. God help us to admit

that much of the time our eyes are off of the Lamb who justifies us with his blood, and on all those struggling sinners all around us, who aren't making the grade. We have been shoveling mud on them.

God help us to admit that we have been busy justifying ourselves and not letting God justify us. "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." And this is why we have so little peace.

No wonder people run away as we approach, because instead of the sweet aroma of the Christ, they can smell afar off the stench of condemnation. And this is why we haven't been able to come down from the temple justified. We have made it impossible for God to justify us because we have been too busy justifying ourselves.

With a simple turning of the heart, this can all change. All we have to do is stop measuring how short our brothers and sisters have been falling and confess before God the sin which is in our own hearts. "Lord, I don't come here to justify myself in your sight today. I come for help, I come to be forgiven. God be merciful to me a sinner! Lord, save me from my sin! God help me!"

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8

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