

Simply Christ

Gospel Newsletter

Sharing the simplicity that is in Christ

January 30, 2020

A Thousand Year Rut

A rut is a long deep track made by the repeated passage of the wheels of vehicles. The deeper a rut is, the more difficult it is for a vehicle caught in the rut to steer out of it. As long as you are in the rut, it is impossible to go anywhere except where those who made the rut had gone. Sometimes you just need to back up, get out of the rut, and start over!

For much of the history of the church, “*justification*” and “*sanctification*” have been presented as “Step 1” and “Step 2” in our salvation. Justification is presented as our “standing” with God, and sanctification is viewed as a change which follows at some point in the future. There are various versions of this theology, but they all usually end up in the same place. Over the years, many have attempted to correct the errors they find in this scenario, but with little success. It is like trying to escape a rut that has been followed for a thousand years. Maybe it is time to go all the way back and start fresh based upon the word of God.

Paul’s epistle to the believers at Rome is one of the most complete presentations of the gospel given to us by any of the apostles of Christ. He wrote this epistle in the Koine Greek language, which was the dominant language in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. In this letter he presents the gospel in terms the common man

would understand and used the Greek understanding of “justice” to present the gospel as “*the righteousness,*” or “*justice,*” of God. Romans 1:16-17. Paul shows the work of Christ to be what God did to “*justify the ungodly.*” Romans 4:5. Hence, “*justification*” is at the heart of this presentation of the gospel.

The words “*made righteous*” Romans 5:19 are the defining words of the book of Romans. These words describe the complete work of justification we receive through believing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul reveals this complete justification was accomplished through the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross. In it we find forgiveness for past sins Romans 3:25, peace with God Romans 5:1, deliverance from sin through crucifixion with Christ Romans 6:6-7, and freedom from sin with holiness as the result. Romans 6:22. This vast and complete salvation is what Paul calls “*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*” Romans 3:24.

The epistle to the Hebrews presents the gospel in completely different terms than the epistle to the Romans. Its gospel presentation and writing style is so different chiefly because of who it was written to. The epistle to the Hebrews was not written to Gentiles as were the other epistles of Paul. To the Hebrews, Paul revealed the gospel of Christ in terms only a Jew would identify with.

Paul was born into the Jewish religious culture and mindset. He was trained in the Jewish religion and understood the importance of their sacrificial system. He reminds us “*...almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.*” Hebrews 9:22. In Hebrews, the gospel is not presented in terms of God’s

justice, or *"justification,"* as it is in Romans, but in terms of *"sanctification."* This *"sanctification"* is clearly shown to be God's provision to purge sin from the heart of the believer. Hebrews 9:14, 10:2, 10:22. The summarizing verse of this letter seems to be *"Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."* Hebrews 13:12.

The messages of Romans and Hebrews seem very different, but are actually very similar. Consider on one hand that the *"justification"* we receive through Jesus' sufferings upon the cross culminates in our deliverance from sin. When Paul tells us *"our old man is crucified with Christ,"* he gives the purpose as *"that the body of sin might be destroyed, **that henceforth we should not serve sin.**"* Romans 6:6. Paul sums this up, saying, *"For he that is dead is freed from sin"* Romans 6:7, which accurately translated from the Greek text says, *"For he that is dead is **justified** from sin."* This shows that the fullness of justification is our deliverance from the sin which was inherent in our heart and nature.

Now consider on the other hand that the epistle of Hebrews tells us the body of Jesus was offered upon the cross for our *"sanctification,"* which speaks of *"...having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience."* Hebrews 10:22. The apostle says, *"...we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* Hebrews 10:10. Both of these epistles present that Jesus died to take sin out of our heart and nature, but use different terminology to show it. To the Roman audience the gospel was presented in terms of God's justice. To the Hebrew audience the same

gospel was presented in terms of the Jewish sacrificial system.

Another similarity is revealed in that both of these epistles present the work of Christ as accomplishing something which could not be accomplished by the Law. To the Romans, Paul writes, ***“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.”*** Romans 8:3. The Law could judge and kill the sinner, but it could not do anything about the sin inside the person. This Christ did when he destroyed *“sin in the flesh”* upon the cross.” Romans 6:6. This is the “justice”, or *“justification,”* provided for us through Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews, the apostle writes, ***“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”*** Hebrews 10:4. The next verse gives God’s solution in the words of Christ: *“Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:”* Hebrews 10:5. Christ offered his body to take away sin, something the blood of animals could never accomplish. The apostle confirms this, saying, ***“...we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*** Hebrews 10:9-10. Again, Jesus is shown to have died upon the cross so he could sanctify us by taking away our sin, a work the Law could never accomplish.

If the traditional view of *“justification”* and *“sanctification”* is correct, then only half the gospel was presented in the epistle to the Romans, and the other half presented in the epistle to the Hebrews. (Romans does not present Christ as “sanctifying” the people, and Hebrews

does not present Christ as “justifying” the people.) The foolishness of such thought speaks for itself! Church theology has stripped “*justification*” of all its power and turned “*sanctification*” into a process involving religious works. In doing so, the message of both has been destroyed. In truth, both of these terms are simply describing the complete work of Christ to “*take away our sin.*” I John 3:5.

I know many will view this article as foolishness because it speaks contrary to so many centuries of “religious wisdom.” But if “religious wisdom” does not hold true to the word of God, then it is just another religious rut. It’s time we get out of the rut and speak the truth, contrary to all the “*wisdom of the wise.*” I Corinthians 1:18-19