

## **“HOW SINNERS ARE MADE RIGHT WITH GOD.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Sermon Texts: Romans 5:6-9, 17-19**

**Belgic Confession: Article 23**

### **Introduction.**

How are sinners made right with God? How can man be justified before a holy and righteous God? That's the central question, that's the heart of the Gospel. Everything we have talked about so far has been building to this question. All doctrinal truths converge on this point.

Our Belgic Confession is right to devote two long articles to this one central topic, a topic that should be a major concern of every human heart.

### **Belgic Confession, Article 23.**

Article 22 is how we are justified, by faith alone in Christ alone.

Article 23 is what justification is and what are the benefits of this doctrine.

There are two aspects of Justification:

The forgiveness of sins.

The imputation of Christ's righteousness (what He gives to us in place of our sins).

These are called the negative aspect of justification and the positive aspect of justification.

The negative is the forgiveness of our sins, the taking away of our sins.

The positive is the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the giving to us of His righteousness.

God in Christ takes away our filthy clothes of sin and unrighteousness and gives us the white robes of Christ's righteousness.

Salvation is the free gift of God, the faith to receive it is gift, the good works that flow from it are gift. It's all grace.

All we bring to the transaction is our sin, our rebellion, our debts, our iniquities, our immorality and depravity.

### **Justification as Forgiveness.**

“Our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins because of Jesus Christ.”

When we confess with our mouths and believe in our hearts for the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus Christ alone, God in His infinite grace and mercy forgives our all sins, He absolves us of all our crimes, He blots them out completely and wipes them all away. This includes all our sins of

commission and omission, past, present and future. Our guilt and shame are atoned for and are no more.

This is the truth taught in Scripture whether we feel it or not.

***But what about when Satan attacks*** us and brings our sins and our guilt and shame to mind again and again. What about those really bad sins, those really big ones? What about when he throws our hypocrisy in our face and all those times we stumble and miss the mark and fall short of God's glory?

What about when instead of resisting a temptation, you fall. You feel the guilt and shame, you are filled with regret. You feel like a hypocrite and you start thinking of how you can make it up to God, what you can do to get right again. Maybe if you can go a day without any bad sins.

What can you say in answer to Satan's accusations and charges? Preach the Gospel to yourself. It doesn't matter what your sin is or how big it is, God's grace is greater still. Do what Article 23 does and preach from David and Paul.

David was an adulterer and a murderer, how did he pray:

**Psalm 51:1-2, 7-10** Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

**Psalm 103:12-13** as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

13 As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

**Psalm 130:3-4** If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

4 But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

Then answer Satan and your own heart with Paul in Romans 8:

**Romans 8:1-2** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

**Romans 8:31-35** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was

raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

We can answer Satan saying that we know that we are sinners and not just sinners but the chief of sinners. We know that like David our sins are great, they go over our heads (Psalm 38:4) and are more than the hairs of our heads. We know that there's no goodness in us that God should have any mercy on us. We know that our depravity is total in all our thoughts, words, and deeds.

But our faith, hope and confidence are not in us but only in Jesus Christ whose blood more than covers all our sins. Our forgiveness rests not in us or our righteousness but in our Savior.

I am not saying that as Christians our sin is no big deal. It is a big deal. But Satan can't rub our noses in it. Satan's condemnation is like a man holding his finger under his coat pretending it's a gun. It's nothing. Our condemnation has been removed by Christ. When we sin, the Gospel answer is to quickly repent. Don't delay. Run to the Father in the name of Jesus, tell Him what you have done and have your conscience washed clean by the blood of Jesus.

“Our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins because of Jesus Christ.”

### **Justification as Imputed Righteousness.**

The Sunday School definition of justification is “just-as-if-I-never-sinned.” That's OK as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough.

That's just half the story. Jesus doesn't just remove all our filthy rags and leave us naked. He doesn't just clean out all the junk from our house and leave it clean but empty. He doesn't just bulldoze the rotten structure and leave the lot bare.

He doesn't just take away. He also gives us something new, He replaces the old with something new.

As glorious and good as God's forgiveness of our sins is, there is still something more that He does for us in our justification. Justification is not just forgiveness.

Let me put it like this. If God had only taken away all our sins and left us “as-if-we-had-never-sinned,” meaning if He had made us back to be like the original, like Adam and Eve in the garden, then while we would have been sinless like them, we would still also have to show our righteousness by our obedience to God's will.

Remember the garden was a time of testing and proving for Adam and Eve. If they had not sinned then at some point God would have confirmed their righteousness and accepted it. Then they would have moved beyond being able to sin.

So if God just restored in us the original, we would still have to pass the test and show our righteousness. And doesn't it seem likely that if Adam and Eve fell, that we would also?

But glory to God, that isn't what He did. He went far above and beyond. After taking away our sins, He gave to us the righteousness of Jesus. He imputed to us His perfect obedience.

God did the biggest debt and asset transfer in the history of the universe. He transferred all our debts, all our sins and transgressions over to Christ's account. And then He credited to our account all the assets that were in Christ's account, all His obedience became our obedience.

**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. 19 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.

Belgic Confession Article 23 says it this way:

“We believe that our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins because of Jesus Christ, and that in it our righteousness before God is *contained [implied]*, as David and Paul teach us when they declare those people blessed to whom God *grants [imputes]* righteousness apart from works.”

Christ perfectly keeps and obeys all the righteous laws and commandments of God and His perfect obedience, His perfect good works are credited to us as if we had done them. This grace and mercy earn us God's favor and acceptance.

“Just-as-if-I-had-never-sinned” becomes also “just-as-if-I-had-always-obeyed.”

But again, what about when Satan attacks us?

What about when Satan shows us more of our unrighteousness? What about when he reminds me of my unrighteous thoughts, words, and deeds done just today? What about the fact that we all sin continually all the time? What about all that pride, greed, lust, covetousness, anger, bitterness, selfishness and gossip?

What about that bad day when you mess up over and over again? You don't have a quiet time, you grumble at work, you are short with your spouse, you lose your temper with your kids, you waste time watching the TV or internet.

Do you find yourself thinking at the end of such a day that you aren't very acceptable to God? Do you fall easily into a performance mentality and forget that your standing with God doesn't depend on what kind of day you have, it depends entirely on the merits of Christ? What kind of day did Jesus have?

Think about it. Every thought Jesus has ever had is holy, every word Jesus has ever spoken is good, every deed Jesus has ever done is perfect. This doesn't just mean for His three years of ministry on earth or even for His thirty three years of life on earth, but forever. Every single moment of Christ's existence is one of perfect obedience. He loves the Father perfectly with all His heart, soul, mind and strength and every neighbor as Himself. He has always hated every sin.

All of Christ's perfect obedience is imputed to us. Christ's merit is infinite so before God we are infinitely holy, obedient, righteous and good. God accepts us based only on Jesus' performance.

This is why Paul can say:

**Romans 8:1-2** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**II Corinthians 5:21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Not only are we not guilty, but we are also righteous. Jesus lived the life for us that we cannot live for ourselves. He is our righteousness and obedience.

**Titus 3:5-7** he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Other religions have a bookkeeping system where a ledger is kept of works and rewards, of merits and demerits, do's and don'ts. Jesus obliterates such bookkeeping, His blood covers every page and wipes it out. Because of another's righteousness we are made righteous.

### **Justification, Our Benefits.**

Article 23 briefly highlights the benefits of our doctrine of justification.

### ***Adoration***

The end of justification is that God receives all the glory. Every justified sinner is a trophy of God's glory and grace, of God's love and mercy. Because we contribute nothing, we give all the glory and honor and praise to God.

We boast in nothing except Christ and His righteousness.

**Psalms 115:1** Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!

**Revelation 7:10** "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

### ***Humility***

We know that we have no merit, no standing. We know we have nothing to boast in or to call our own. We know that we are weak and foolish, poor and need and that apart from Christ we have nothing and are nothing.

We know we are sinners but also justified sinners, forgiven and declared righteous

### ***Confidence***

In some Reformed churches in the world there is a kind of false humility that deprives people from taking the Lord's Supper because of a perceived unworthiness. This kind of piety makes it impossible for any weak soul to partake.

Our confidence in coming to the table is not in ourselves but in Christ alone. This is the meaning of Article 23: “That is enough to cover all our sins ...”

We have confidence that the blood of Jesus is sufficient to atone for and forgive every sin committed by every believer.

Confidence to come to the Lord’s Table is one of the great benefits of the new covenant in Christ’s blood. Boldness to approach the almighty God in prayer is a rich blessing purchased for us by Christ’s sacrifice.

We are told to draw near in confidence.

**Hebrews 4:14, 16** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ... 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**Hebrews 10:19, 21-22** Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ... 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

We know we have sinned grievously against all God’s commandments and we know we have never kept any of them and we know that we are prone to wander, prone to more sin (Heidelberg Catechism, Q60).

Our hope and confidence is that our heavenly Father first loved us and first ran out to meet us and rescue us and remove our filthy rags and put on us the robe of Christ’s perfect righteousness

We are not justified because we are worthy, we are worthy because we are justified.

No guilt. No condemnation. No performance mindset.

**My hope is built on nothing less**

Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.

I dare not trust the sweetest frame,

But wholly trust in Jesus’ Name.

**Prayer:** Father, this is too much for us to fully understand. You take the bankruptcy of our sin and pay it off with Christ’s death on the cross, and then you credit to our account His righteousness, His perfect obedience. How can we respond but to ask you to receive our wonder, awe and adoration; receive our poor love; and receive the offering of our lives to you to do with as you please for your glory. You have bought us, we are yours, no more will we live for ourselves. Make us to be sin-hating and Christ-loving, and may His righteousness be reflected in all we say and do.