



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 3:21-26

"The Imputation of God's Righteousness to Believers"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Now will you turn with me this morning too Romans chapter 3 verse 21 through verse 26 for our Scripture reading, Romans 3:21-26. Well while you are finding the Epistle to the Romans let me remind you of one little thing that we should bear in mind, and that is that up to this point in the Epistle to the Romans the apostle has largely been concerned with the presentation human sin. He has discussed the guilt that arises as a result of sin on the part of Gentiles and Jews. And so now we come to a very crucial change in his argument, expressed by that little word "but" and the following adverb, "now." And so it is in that context that we read in verse 21,

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all them that believe: (Now you will notice I have omitted "upon all." They are, those words, that little prepositional phrase is not in our better manuscripts, "unto all that believed.") for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

righteousness for the remission of sins that are past (or for the passing over of sins done
aforetime), through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his
righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Now may God bless the reading of his word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] We are grateful, our Father, for this wonderful portion from holy Scripture
which so beautifully sets forth the justification which Thou dost offer to men, upon the
one basis of faith in Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for the way in which the Holy Spirit
has brought home to our hearts the revelation of Thy righteousness. We are thankful for
the great number of the elect of God from the beginning of time, who have by the Holy
Spirit been brought to know this Savior who died for us, not only in our New Testament
but also in Old Testament times. We are thankful men like Luther and Calvin, Wesley,
and Whitefield, and Augustine. And most of all we are thankful for the word of God and
for the revelation contained within it. May in the preaching and teaching of it, Thy truth
be lifted up and Jesus Christ be exalted.

We also, Lord, pray that Thou wilt meet the needs that exist in this audience. We
have, Lord, referred to those who may be without Christ. Will Thou minister to them?
And for those of us who know Thee who still have the ordinary problems of our daily
lives as Christians and who so constantly need to lean upon Thee. Will Thou minister to
us and the faith that we have exhibited, that we have by Thy grace been able to come to,
in the saving work of Jesus Christ, Lord, we pray that that faith may be strengthened and
may grow in our Christian life so that our trust in Thee may bring peace and happiness
and assurance. And we pray for many in this congregation, Lord, who we know are
concerned and troubled, and distressed, and perplexed, and do face a dark future. We
pray, oh God, that Thou wilt Minister to them, that Thou will give the assurance of Thy

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

presence and of Thy ministry. We know, Lord, that in all of the deep things of human experience, Thou art adequate and sufficient. And so help us Lord to learn how to lean upon Thee.

We commit to Thee our country, our local community, the problems that exist. Most of all we commit to Thee today, the Lord's Day, the preaching of the word, not only here but wherever Jesus Christ's name is lifted up, will Thou, Lord, bring blessing and victory. Enlarge the body of Christ and edify it through Thy word. We want to express to Thee our gratitude, our love, and our devotion, because Thou art a great God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior through him. We pray in his name. Amen.

[Message] We have a rather urgent announcement to make, and I think I've been left with it. We have from time to time mentioned that the people across the street are a little sensitive about people from Believers Chapel parking on their side of the street, in their yards. And we have from time to time made this announcement. I'm sure there are probably some here who have parked over there who have not been acquainted with the fact that they're a little sensitive about that. And we're trying to do everything we can to keep from offending them unnecessarily. Now, I don't know that anything can be done right now. But if in the future you will make every effort not to park across the street in front of the people and particularly on their grass. I think all who their yards can understand if you run too far into part of their grass, which they've been nursing along, it would upset them. So please make every effort to park on this side of the street or in the parking lot. Now, if you want to get up and move, I didn't get enough information to know, they may be out there demonstrating at the present time. [Laughter] So if you want to get up and move your car, I understand that there are four of them over there, and so if you know you're parked over there and you'd like to get up and move it, that will be perfectly all right. It might be a nice thing to do.

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Now, today we are turning to the last of our series of three messages on "Three Great Imputations" of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, the imputation of human sin to Jesus Christ, and the imputation of God's righteousness to believers. Now, I think it should be evident to us, and I want to make this very plain, that these three great theological imputation are of the greatest significance. I dare say that the words I mentioned in the first message to you, that they are as true as they can be, that the three great doctrines are at the heart of the Christian faith. The imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, or the doctrine of sin; the imputation of human sin to Jesus Christ the mediator, which in essence is the doctrine of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; and the third, the imputation of God's righteousness to believers. Well, this is the heart of what we call the Christian faith, and it would be impossible for us to understand Christianity if we do not understand these three great theological imputations.

Now I don't want to give you the impression that we have exhausted this. As a matter of fact we have only lightly touched this great subject, for we should have devoted five or six messages to the relationship of every human being to Adam's sin and the resultant sin nature, the corruption of our human nature, its results in our human acts of sins. This is such a great subject it's worth of a number of messages. And we have surely not exhausted the question of the imputation of Adam's or the human sin to our mediator Jesus Christ. We have not even, for example, considered the question of the moral defense of the doctrine of substitution which is involved in this. We have not considered at all the question of just how many sins, whose sins were imputed to Jesus Christ. Were the sins of the entire human race without exception imputed to him? Or is it the sins of those who are to believe, without distinction, are they imputed to Jesus Christ? That question would require a number of messages in order to fully develop the implications of it. So what we're doing is trying to hit the high points of these three great doctrines of

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

the imputation of sin to the human race, the imputation of sin to Jesus Christ, and the imputation of righteousness to believers.

Now we're turning this morning to Romans chapter 3, verses 21 through 26, because this is probably the normative passage on the subject of the imputation of God's righteousness to believers. In Romans, as you know, Paul challenges human pride with its peacock feathers, and he shows that man's fatal disease is sin. Original sin, because sin originated, so far as we are concerned, with the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Imputed sin by which the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed, remember, directly, immediately to the descendants of Adam who was our federal head. He was our representative head. And when he sinned the race was plunged into sin. Now that means we are totally in and under sin. Men do not like this. They do not like the idea that something someone else has done should affect them, if it is bad; if of course it is good, then that's all right. If one of our ancestors should manifest unusual thrift and manage to accumulate quite a fortune and he were to die and leave us a substantial inheritance that is good, that's very good. That is the beautiful example of thrift. And as I said the other day thrift is an excellent virtue, especially in our ancestors. Now we like that. And the things which are good that are passed on to us we do not object to, but the things that are bad, that of course is something we might be inclined to question. And so the doctrine of Adam as our representative head and the fact that his great act has influenced and affected all of us, we do not like that naturally.

Now I say, as I mentioned the time before, I think this arrangement by God is imminently beautiful and acceptable. And I think if you had an opportunity to study this philosophically you would come to the conclusion that you like this doctrine better than the one that you think you like; because as a matter of fact, Adam had the best opportunity to be successful under temptation, because he knew himself undoubtedly to be the federal head of the race. He knew that what would happen would influence the

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

race. Further, I think all of us who know ourselves, know what we really are, we would not like to have our faith depend upon us, because we are quite sure that we would fail. In fact, I feel myself, I am happy that Adam was my representative, because if I had been my own representative I know that I should have failed. And if God did not have this representative arrangement, then would we have a representative Redeemer to come? So I like God's arrangement. I'm perfectly happy with it. In fact, I rejoice in it. I'm glad the Bible speaks of Christ as the last Adam. For you see, it reminds me of the fact that God has in wonderful grace given me a Redeemer to act for me. And he was infinitely sin and perfect, impeccable, could not sin because he is the divine Son of God. And he came and accomplished a Redemption which God offers to men who recognize their need. So I like it. In fact, I rejoice in it.

Now Paul, I say, spoke of original sin, imputed sin, and total sin, and he attacked human pride where it should be attacked and how it should be attacked, right at its heart directly. D.R. Davies was an Anglican ministry, and he has in one of his books told of an incident that happened in his life, which illustrates our failure to really measure up to a consideration of the doctrine of original sin. He said that he was once with a lady friend surveying the ruins of her house in a badly blitzed town in the west of Southern England. And as they were looking at the house he commented upon the fact that "Here we have original sin in operation." And she turned to Mr. Davies and with a look of pained surprise and said, "But surely Mr. Davies you don't believe in that dreadful doctrine of original sin." To which he said he replied, "Such dreadful happenings as these," pointing to the ruins, "demand some sort of dreadful doctrine in illustration." And I think this is beautifully illustrative of all of us. For here is a woman, one of the best representatives of modern life and way of thinking, according to Mr. Davies, staring at death and devastation wrought by deliberate human will, who could only see something dreadful in the Christian doctrine of original sin. And nothing in hard, concrete fact could be more

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

terrible than the destruction and mutilation and terror that we have seen practiced in the human race, and yet it is strangely true that we must in the 20th century utter the lie of "original sin" whereas it is the only real explanation for what has happened in the history of the human race.

Now history fortunately is rewriting the doctrine of original sin into the uneasy conscience of the human race. We are finding in the 20th century that some who in the earlier part of the century did not like the doctrine of original sin, that some are saying that there is evidence now that such a doctrine may be true. Our self-confidence that we had a few generations ago has been shaken by the facts, and there are some people who are asking with Zedekiah, is there any word from the Lord? Now, as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ I think I can say and purely out of that relationship, I have such a word. It is the word of Habakkuk. It is the word of Paul. It is the word of Augustine. It is the word of Luther. It is the word of Calvin. It is the word of Wesley. Because you see, it is really in essence the gospel, for God has in the gospel a word for sin.

Job had a problem. You remember that he said, "I know it is so of a truth, but how should a man be just with God." He had wrestled with that question. He did not know the answer, or at least his question suggests that. And so we have the doctrine of justification as the answer to God's problem of human sin. Martin Luther said on justification that it is "articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae" which translated "It is the article of a standing or a falling church." In other words, if we proclaim the doctrine of justification as it is the Bible, we have a church that stands. If we deny it, if we move away from it, then we have a falling church. It is in a sense the heart of the Christian church, this great doctrine of justification by faith. I'm not saying it's the most important or it's the doctrine that is most often taught in the New Testament, but I think we can say if we did not have this doctrine we could not have a Christian church in the sense of the word of God.

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Now, this is the great passage. Romans chapter 3, verse 21 through 26, on the subject of justification or the imputation of God's righteousness to men who know that they are sinner and believe. Now Godet, the French Commentator, when he came to Romans 3 in his commentary he called this section the Marrow of Theology. In other words, it's the heart. It's the essence of all theology. And others have said it's the acropolis of Scripture. It stands supreme among the passages of the word of God, and you will notice it begins with a "But now." Because Paul is moving in the tenor of his thinking to something contrary to that which he has just said. And he has just said, you will note, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." And so we are guilty before God because our representative has sinned, and we have inherited his guilt immediately. He is our federal head. We have his guilt. We also have a nature derived from him which is corrupt and the proof of it is in our thoughts, our actions, or our deeds. We are under condemnation. "But now," in other words, "I'm going to move to the other side of the question."

You know, I would like to say this, I think that in a sense I agree with Martin Lloyd Jones who has said that this is a real test of a man's Christianity, that is his response to these two little words, "But now." If you read those two words, and you do not feel within your heart some leap of joy, then you might reasonably say, "Well I'm not really sure I'm a Christian," if you've been following along. Because you see, the apostle has taught us plainly and clearly that we are guilty before God. But now in contrast to that, "But now," now I confess I know I'm a Christian because I believed in Jesus Christ who died for me. Well he is my hope and my trust, and I am trusting only in the righteousness of God conferred upon me by faith. But one of the confirmations I have is that when I read something like this I do feel that leap of joy and gratitude. "But now," ah, this is going to be something good. And so if you don't feel it, well you should know why.

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Perhaps you've never really had the sense of the burden of condemnation under sin and the sense of deliverance that comes when we believe in Jesus Christ. "But now," I love that. I think I could preach an entire sermon on "But now."

Now he says, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested." He has said in the first chapter it was revealed, now he says it's manifested. And so he's going to talk about the manifestation of justification, or the manifestation of a righteousness of God. And he speaks first of its relationships. He says it was "witnessed by the law and the prophets." In other words, it's not something new. It's something I've given you. It's not something even that originated with Jesus. It's not something just apostolic. It's something that you find in the whole of the Bible, from the Old Testament, the law and the prophets, you have witnesses to the fact that God confers a righteousness upon men on the basis of faith.

Now, that's amazing because men do not think that naturally. They think that they must gain merit before God, because they think they have a little merit. And when they're told they have no merit before God, they rebel. They don't like the pure grace gospel of the word of God, because it's counter to everything within our human nature which we've inherited from Adam. And so if you react against the idea of the gift of righteousness from God it's the proof that you really were in Adam when he died, because you've got the common nature of men. They want to say, "No, God will award me my salvation on the basis of my religion, my good works, or the fact that I come from an outstanding family." I've never known a family tree yet that didn't need some spraying down the line. [Laughter] I've heard of people who've spent hundreds of dollars to get their genealogy, and when they get their genealogy and take a look at it they spend thousands to have it suppressed. [Laughter] Because you see, we all come from one common family tree, and it is a family tree of sinful and guilty men.

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Now this is witnessed to in the Old Testament, and God went out of his way in wonderful grace to make it known to us. He not only tells us that Jesus Christ is our righteousness. He speaks of the Lord our Righteousness in the Old Testament. He not only gives us great promises of the Redeemer who would come and die, but he in effect gave us an entire system of ritualistic worship, which was designed to express the great truths of substitution and the conferring of righteousness by imputation. It's all in the Old Testament, and it was done in such a way that you might sense just that when you read the Bible.

We all have heard of Pavlov, the Russian scientist. And we know a little bit about his experiments. We know that he took a little puppy just after it had been born, and he always fed that puppy at the sound of a bell. He sounded the bell, he gave the puppy the food. And you know that a puppy's mouth salivates when it sees food. Some humans do too. [Laughter] And so this went on constantly, every time it was time for food the bell rang and the puppy was fed. The puppy grew to a dog and one day he decided it was time to try his experiment. And so he brought the little puppy out by the side of the bell and he rang the bell, but there was no food there. And immediately the mouth of the little puppy began to salivate, because with him bell means food, bell means food, bell means food.

Now I heard of a psychiatrist who had occasion to counsel with a woman who fainted every time she heard a siren sound. And as he delves into her past history he discovered the cause for it. For when the telephone call came announcing that her son had been very critically injured, as she hung up the telephone and sat by the telephone shaken by the news a fire engine came by and its siren sounded. And after that whenever the sirens sounded she fainted, because you see with her siren meant my son's in danger, siren my son's in danger. When the psychiatrist discovered this he pointed out to her that her son had recovered, and she was delivered from this conditioned reflex.

"Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God's Righteousness to Believers" by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Well God tried to do something like this in the Old Testament. What he did was to set up the sacrificial system. And he set up the sacrificial system in such a way that whenever an Israelite sinned he was required to bring an offering to maintain his relationship with the Lord. And so if he sinned, sacrifice resulted. There may be trespass offerings, sin offerings, peace offerings, burnt offerings, meal offerings, drink offerings, and other types of offerings. But sin, sacrifice; sin meant sacrifice; sin meant sacrifice; sin meant sacrifice. It was God's way of conditioning the theological thinking of Old Testament saints to remind them and teach them that there is no way of approach to God except through sacrifice. And so just as bell mean food, bell means food to Pavlov's dog, and just as siren may mean danger to some or some other type of conditioned reflex, so sin means sacrifice, sin means sacrifice, sin means substitutionary atonement. That was God's gracious way of trying to teach men so that when Jesus Christ came they would not be surprised when it was said that he was the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

So it is witnessed by the law and the prophets, this righteousness of God. Even the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all them that believe. Now it is a righteousness that is conferred on the basis of faith, not joining the church, not praying through, not becoming religious, not sitting at the Lord's Table, not being baptized, not being a good citizen, not being philanthropic, not doing good deeds which the community may praise. They are good, but it is not by these things that a man comes to have this righteousness, it is through faith, through trust.

And finally Paul says in verse 23 the reason for this manifestation is "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Now, I want to stop here for a just moment, because you see, it is obvious that what Paul has said is that sin is universal. "All have sinned," aorist tense, an action in the past. The result of which continue, "And are coming short of the glory of God." He uses the present tense in the verb "come short." So all

"Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God's Righteousness to Believers" by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

sinned and have sinned and are constantly coming short of the glory of God. It is God's way of saying that sin is universal. Now men do not realize what God's standard is. They tend to look around and because of their human standards, which are only proportionate, they are inclined to see themselves at the top of the ladder or the list. But God's standard is absolute perfection. He will not receive anyone into his presence who does not have one hundred percent righteousness. As principal Cunningham said, "Remember the righteousness of God is that righteousness, which his righteousness requires him to require." That's what we must present God with if we are to enter heaven.

In the common way of looking at heaven we would say that Saint Peter stands at the gates asking the question of every one who enters, "Now do you have a one hundred percent righteousness to present to God?" Now that is all false of course. Saint Peter doesn't stand at any gates. And the whole idea is false. But in the Bible it is true to say that God demands one hundred percent righteousness. My dear friend, do you have it? Put in the words of our Lord is it this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." Have you done that? Have you done that in the past? Are you doing that in the present? Are you reasonably sure you shall do that in the future? If so you may have some assurance of salvation. But if you have failed once you have lost, for God's standard is perfection.

Now we see difference, but God doesn't see any differences. It's just as if we were to enter into a prison and begin to converse with its inmates. And I shall go by the first cell and I should say to him, "Sir, why are you in prison?" "Well, I was caught stealing." And I may think well it's good that you're here. I go to the next cell, and I say, "Why are you here sir?" And he might say, "Well I have been caught in the act of murder. I am guilty of murder." I'd say, "I certainly am happy you're here." Now there's a great deal of difference between stealing and murder. And I might come to the third cell and knock on the cell and speak to the man and I would say, "Now why are you here sir?"

"Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God's Righteousness to Believers" by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

And he would say, "Well I am here because I am accused of beating my wife." I might say, "Now, why is that a crime?" [Laughter] But the point is that it is a crime, but it's not nearly so serious as murder regardless of how serious our wives may think it is, it's not as serious as murder. But you see, all are criminals if convicted, and all are in prison. There are human distinctions in righteousness, but you see, God's demands are one hundred percent righteousness.

It's as if I should stand at the top of one of our giant Texas skyscrapers and be looking at the sidewalk below and seeing little dots walking on the sidewalk. And I might not know that one of these dots is Dick Cabot, who's about five feet six or seven, and another dot is George Andry who's about six feet seven. Why from the top of the skyscraper they look on the same. On the ground floor level there's quite a difference. But you see, God's look from above and he sees all as having come short of the glory of God. It was the law of God and the keeping of the law that was designed to reflect their glory of God. And unless you could honestly say, and no man can, unless you could honestly say, "My life is such that the law of God does not condemn my life but one sees the glory of God through my perfect keeping of the law," we are lost my dear friend. We are lost and under the judgment of God.

Now perhaps you're thinking is this really the teaching of the Bible? Well let's take a few men and ask them a few questions. Now I don't want to take too long. I think we could do this for the rest of the morning. But let's just take a few Old Testament worthies, men that we know are outstanding men. Let's take Job first. Let's just imagine for the sake of illustration that I have Job up on the platform with me. And I have Job, and I have Isaiah, and I have Jeremiah, and I have Peter and I have Paul. And I'm going to ask all of them a question, and so I say, "Job, I want to ask you a question first. You're Job of the land of Uz." "Yes, Lewis, I am." "Were you an upright man?" "Oh yes, I was." "Is it true, Job, that you 'Delivered the poor that cried and the fatherless and him that had

"Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God's Righteousness to Believers" by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

none to help him?" "Yes, I did." "Is it true that you caused a widow's heart to sing for joy and that you were eyes to the blind and feet to the lame and a father to the poor?"

"Yes, Lewis, all of these things are true of me. They're found in the book that I wrote."

"Did you one day Job realize your true condition when you stood in the presence of

God?" "Yes, I did." "What did you say then?" "Well, Lewis, I found myself in the presence of God, and I said, I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." "Job, you mean

to tell me that you abhorred yourself who did all of these good works?" "Yes, I did. And further Lewis, if you'll read further in my book you'll discover that I said I am vile." "All right Job sit down. I want to ask Isaiah a question."

"Now Isaiah it's true that you saw the vision of the glory of the Lord, didn't you?"

"Yes, I was in the temple when King Asaiah died, and I saw the glory of the Lord and I saw the cherubim and I heard them say "holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts. All the earth is full of his glory." "What effect did this vision have on you Isaiah?" "Well I felt my own unfitness for the divine presence and I exclaimed Woe is me for I am undone."

"You mean Isaiah you the prophet, the great prophet of the righteousness of God, you said you were undone?" "Yes." "Well sit down Isaiah."

"Jeremiah I have a word for you. You were called the weeping prophet of Israel."

He said, "Yes, I was." "In fact the matter is Jeremiah, when people looked at Jesus they said, 'Some say that he is Jeremiah.' Now Jeremiah, nothing better could ever be said about anyone, that he should be mistaken by some for the Lord. What kind of person were you." "Well Lewis, if you'll read my book you will discover that I said I am black."

And so I say all right, you Old Testament worthies sit down. We're going to turn to the New Testament now where we have some real saints. "Peter let me have a word with you." Peter stands up, "I'm just waiting for you to speak to me Lewis." "Now Peter, now you stood in the presence of the Lord for a number of years." "Yes." "You were the

"Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God's Righteousness to Believers" by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

leader of the apostles." "Well some say that I was the leader of the apostles." "Now how did you feel in the presence of the Lord?" He said, "Well one day the Lord performed a miracle on the Sea of Galilee and I was so impressed with the holiness of the Lord Jehovah in the Lord Jesus that I fell down at his knees and said Depart from me for I am a sinful man oh Lord." "Peter you mean you said you are sinful?" "Yes." "Well sit down."

Paul's my favorite because he's a good Calvinist. [Laughter] "Now Paul, I have a word for you. Now what about you Paul what was your condition before God?" "Well Lewis," he said, "if you've read my book and I know you're a great student of me [Laughter] why you'll know that I said in one of my epistles that this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief."

Now, here is an amazing thing my dear friend, here is Job who has said I am vile. Isaiah, I am undone. Jeremiah, I am black. Three great men of the Old Testament and the two of the greatest men of the New Testament, one says I am sinful the other says I am the chief of sinners. Now we're going to declare a two minute intermission. How many of you would like to come up on the platform today and would like to say, "I am not as these men are. I have never committed a sin. I am not under the judgment of God. I am not vile. I am not black. I am not sinful. I am not the chief of sinners. I am not undone. I am righteous." Because we'd like to know your secret. Thousands and millions of others would too. But you wouldn't dare do that, because you know deep down in your heart it's not true. You see, the truth of the matter is Paul was right, the whole world's mouth has been stopped, stopped. And we are speechless before God.

Now if we are speechless, if it is true that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, my dear friend we are lost. We are lost. Now what remedy do we have? Well of course if we are lost, we are going to die. We have already spoken of that. By the way, Horace had a rule of dramatic art, he said that you should never introduce a god

"Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God's Righteousness to Believers" by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

into the action of a play until the plot had got into such a tangle that only a god could unravel it. Now that's the way we are. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Now that's where we are. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." We are in such a tangle that only a God can unravel this plot. But that is what the Bible says has happened. For we read in verse 24, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Justified, and then he says, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation," justified through propitiatory sacrifice. This is God's great message of good news.

Now, I know it's theological and in the 20th century it's very unpopular to use any theological word that has more than about one syllable. Because there are people who say, "Oh don't use your jargon. Don't use your jargon with us." But now jargon is perfectly all right in any other sphere. The government may use its jargon. I was reading the morning paper and the lead editorial was about Tedtac. Now that term is not designed to create a great deal of understanding in my opinion. [Laughter] But I guarantee you it won't be but about one day until everybody in Dallas knows something about Tedtac. Now in doctor's language they are not careful about how they use their technical terminology. I have some doctor's friends that I'm a little embarrassed to ask what a thing is, because they frequently launch out into a very technical discussion that if I had not had eight years of Latin I would be completely at sea. And that's perfectly all right among medical doctors. I'm not objecting. I think it's the only way you can express certain things. You see there are certain technical words that say things precisely and properly. And I'm sure that the wives in this audience would agree that in professional football there are terms that only a zealot could understand. [Laughter] But we love them.

You see, the truth of the matter is this desire to simplify things has never been really very successful, because, well the truth of the matter is no one understands

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

theology apart from the Holy Spirit's illumination. We can translate the Bible into five hundred basic English words. There is a basic English Bible. It's never been popular. You know why? Because putting the truths of the Bible in basic English, using only two syllable words does not really communicate anything more than the other. Oh, it may deliver a few people from some of the jargon. But the understanding of the truths of Scripture is the word of the Holy Spirit in illumination.

Now I read once of a man who wrote one of our governmental agencies for advice about a certain chemical in his business. They wrote back such a technical explanation that he thought it was all right to use it. So he wrote them a letter thanking them for the information they had given them and that he would proceed to use it in his business. And they realized what had happened. They had concealed the truth of their answer in their jargon, so they telegraphed back rapidly, "Don't use this chemical. It will rust the hell out of your pipes." [Laughter] Now there is a point in getting right to the point at times, but in biblical language we still need the words of the Bible.

And so what does it mean to be justified? It does not mean to be made righteous. It means to be declared righteous legally at the bar of God's judgment. What does propitiation mean? Well it means propitiation, but it also may be effectively rendered satisfaction. And so when we say being justified freely, we mean being declared righteous freely. Now the manner of it is freely. Notice, it does not cost us anything. It is not being declared righteous by joining the church, by being religious, by praying through, by doing good works. It's being declared righteous before God's throne, his bar of judgment freely, freely at no cost to ourselves. "For nothing" this word is rendered in the New Testament. "Without a cause" it is also rendered, being justified freely.

Linsky, the Lutheran commentator says, "This is pure abounding, astounding grace." "Awake my soul in joyful leis and sing thy great redeemer's praise. He justly claims a song from thee. His loving kindness oh how free," free, justified freely. Well

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

now, wait a minute, it isn't cheap though. Through the redemption, it's "By his grace through the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood."

Now the method, while it is free, the method is costly to the Godhead for the Father has provided a satisfaction of his own justice in the death of the Son. And the death of the Son has secured redemption from sin. And so it is God who has set forth his Son as a propitiatory sacrifice that through the redemption the purchase price, the release from the payment of a purchase, the redemption may be ours. "Justified freely by his grace through the redemption," God has made propitiation. There is no Cain way of approach to God, it is only through sacrifice.

By the way, did you notice that the real problem in the relationship of men to God is not from the manward standpoint. We like to think that it is, but actually the big problem is not how to get men to God, but how to get God to men. You'll notice that finally he concludes the section by saying God may be just and the justifier of them which are of the faith of Jesus. How is it appropriated? It is by faith he says. Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God has set forth to be a satisfaction through faith.

What is faith? Why faith is simply to rest in what God has done. Let me illustrate this. When God gave Jesus Christ to die for us upon the cross at Calvary, he was infinitely satisfied with what he had done, because it was perfect in every way, perfect in the wisdom of its conception, perfect in the execution of the wonderful eternal plan, perfect in our Lord's work of laying the foundation for the covenant in his blood, perfect in his resurrection. Everything was perfect and God rested in what Christ had died. And you know what faith is? Faith is to recognize that we have come short of the glory of God, that we are guilty, and that we are then turn and rest in what God has done through Jesus Christ. It's that we rest in that in which God finds his rest. It's really in a sense

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

thinking God's thoughts after him. That's faith. That's all it is. It's simply, "Thank you Lord."

Now we do read that this has three intentions. I'll just mention them briefly. You see we could give a series, we really could study this I should say. We could study this for weeks. But there are three intentions in this justification. He says in the middle of verse 25, "To declare his righteousness for the remission of sin that are past." Or for the passing over of sins that are past. You see in the Old Testament they had the problem of evil, as well as in the New Testament times. People said to Israelites, "You say your God is the true God, then answer a question. You say your God punishes sin and he rewards righteousness? Yes. Well then tell me this, if that's true why do the righteous suffer and the unrighteous prosper. And the believers of the Old Testament economy, they puzzled, and they got together and said, "We don't really have the answers to the problems of life. Isaiah's not giving us the truth of things and so on, like we do. Our preachers are not telling us the real issues. So they wrestled with those things and for hundreds and thousands of years God didn't settle the sin question. Men said God punished sin with death but men lived to a happy old age and prospered in rebellion against God. Where were the wages of sin? Actually life was an open scandal so far as the word of God was concerned. But finally Jesus Christ came and when he died upon the cross of Calvary and cried out, "My God, my God why hast Thou forsaken me," bearing the judgment of sin. And then cried out, "It is finished." God had his final word in which he said, "I do punish sin. I do demand that the broken law be punished to the final and uttermost degree. My righteousness, my holiness, my justice must be satisfied in the execution of a penalty." And that penalty was enacted in our Lord's sacrifice. That's the only explanation of the cross of Jesus Christ that satisfied.

Now he says also, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness." In other words, the death of Jesus Christ not only covers the sins that were passed over in the Old

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Testament times, but it covers the sins of the present. As a matter of fact it looks at the righteousness of the believer as its ultimate goal. For we read, "That he might be just," for God must be just. He cannot pass by the sins of men. If he could pass by the sins of men then we could live as we please. But in this moral government in which God has instituted and which he carries out, and which we have seen, as we pointed out last time, is evident in the affairs of life. Righteousness is rewarded, evil is punished. God's justice must be satisfied. The broken law must be paid for. And there Jesus Christ bore it and God was just. For you see, someone came from heaven who was God and man. Job said I don't see how someone could come who can lay his hand on God and can lay his hand on man. I don't see how someone who can do that could come. He spoke about an umpire, well Job's umpire has come. Jesus Christ who was God and was also man, and because he was God when he came to this earth God was with men. When he died upon the cross of Calvary as our representative, the last Adam, and we believe in him, we who are men are him in and us with God.

And the great problem of the ages is solved in the coming of the God-man who can lay his hand on God and can lay his hand on us and can bring us together by virtue of his representative sacrifice. And so Job's problem is solved. God is light and God is love. His justice demands satisfaction, but his love requires an object. So out of his love he offers us the salvation which he has planned, his justice having been satisfied in the death of Christ. Isn't that a wonderful message? You see, Jesus Christ has taken the penalty. And because he has taken the penalty and satisfied the justice of God he was a propitiation in his blood. The love of God is free to offer universally the salvation of God, righteousness. We stand before God, if we believe, declared righteous in his sight. It's no longer necessary then to beg God for mercy. It's no longer necessary to implore God to be merciful. It's no longer necessary to wheedle, plead, coax mercy out of him. God is propitious and the death of his Son is the evidence of it.

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

May I close with a story which is a true story? I was in the insurance business in Alabama for some years before I came to Dallas Seminary. And when I was converted I became so interested in spiritual things that had I not been working for my father I'm not sure I would not have been fired. Because I began to take pamphlets to my work, I studied the Bible and theology during my lunch hour. And at night I went home, I had been passing some insurance courses, but I put my insurance courses aside. I just became so taken up with the study of the theological truths of the word of God that I became intensely. And God was working, of course, leading toward the future.

But when I was in business Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer came to Birmingham to give a series of meetings, and I went out to hear him every time I could. And one night I remember he was preaching in the [indistinct] Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, a church way out at the end of nowhere in Birmingham, about twenty-five miles from where I lived. But since he was there I traveled out every night to hear him preach. I also heard William Elliot of Dallas preach out there one time, because his brother, Dr. Elliot's brother, was pastor of the church. And Dr. Chafer spoke on Psalm 22 and I'll never forget the way he ended the message. He was trying to get over the fact that faith is simply the acceptance of what God has done through Jesus Christ. And so he said, "Let's suppose that you were walking down the street and you should drop your handkerchief upon the street. And someone should come to you of some of your friends and reach over and pick it up, take your handkerchief and hand it to you." He said, "What would you say? Would you say now I'd like to pay you for that? No you wouldn't say that would you? I'd like to work for what you've done? No. What would you do? Why you would say, wouldn't you, thank you."

Now you see, that is really the response of the human being touched by the Holy Spirit to the word of God. He is told in the word of God all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. He is told that Jesus Christ has come and he has become a

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Believers” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

propitiation, a satisfaction. And he is told that the satisfaction may be received on the basis of trust. Thank you Lord. And the moment that happens we are declared righteous, declared just. We possess a righteousness that is approved by God. Do you have it? Is it yours? Do you know that when you get to heaven you have that which will be infinitely satisfying to God, the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ? It's available when you simply stop trusting in the things that you've been trusting in and say, "Thank you" to the saving work of Jesus Christ and rest in that which infinitely pleases God, Jesus Christ's sacrifice. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the righteousness of God. And we thank Thee that it is imputed to us, this third great imputation, on the basis of faith. Because of the redeeming work of our representative Jesus Christ...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]