

# the gospel[L]ived

We habitually and instinctively look to other things besides God and his grace as our **justification, hope, significance, and security**. We believe the gospel at one level, but at deeper levels we do not. Human approval, professional success, power and influence, family and clan identity—all of these serve as our heart's "**functional trust**" rather than what Christ has done, and as a result we continue to be driven to great degree by fear, anger, and a lack of self-control. . . . We can only change permanently as we take the gospel more deeply into our understanding and into our hearts. We must feed on the gospel, as it were, digesting it and making it part of ourselves, that is how we grow.

—Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God* (115)

**Only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives.** Many have so light an apprehension of God's holiness and of the extent of the guilt of their sin that consciously they see little need for justification, although below the surface of their lives they are deeply guilt-ridden and insecure. Many others have a theoretical commitment to this doctrine, but in their day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification for justification . . . drawing their assurance of acceptance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance or the relative infrequency of their conscious, willful disobedience. Few know enough to start each day with a thoroughgoing stand upon [the] platform: you *are accepted*, **looking outward in faith and claiming the wholly alien righteousness of Christ as the only ground for acceptance**, relaxing in that quality of trust which will produce increasing sanctification as faith is active in love and gratitude.

—Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (101-102)

## The Gospel and Your Righteousness: Justification by Faith

1. When you hear the words "justification" and "righteousness" what images or concepts most naturally come to mind?
2. In the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*, the Olympic sprinter Harold Abrahams tells his teammate: "You, Aubrey, are my most complete man. You're brave, compassionate, kind: a content man. That is your secret: contentment. I am 24 and I've never know it. I'm forever in pursuit and I don't even know what I am chasing. . . . And now in one hour's time I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor, four feet wide, with ten lonely seconds to justify my whole existence. But will I?" How

does this scene portray the basic human need to be justified? Can you think of other examples—whether in your own life or in popular culture—that likewise reveal this need?

What standards of righteousness do we pursue to “justify our existence”?

3. Last week we examined the doctrine of union with Christ. In light of that study, how does a person’s identity and justification relate to one another?
  
4. Where does this relentless need to “justify our existence” come from?
  
5. Read Romans 4:4-7. What two “principles” of justification does Paul contrast? In other words, what are the two ways we can go about pursuing justification? Which of these ways is most natural to us?

If God is holy and “will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex. 34:7), how can he “justify the ungodly” and still be just himself? Doesn’t this create a problem for God (cf. Rom. 3:23-26)?

6. Reread the Tim Keller quote from the beginning of this study. What is one “functional trust” are you relying on to justify yourself?

In response to that “functional trust,” how can you instead “feed on, digest and make” God’s justifying work in Christ a part of your life?

