

The Cure for Spiritual Depression

Sermon Text: Psalm 42-43

Study Texts: Romans 3:21-28

Sermon Recap: The main idea of this week's sermon is: The cure for spiritual depression lies in trusting the LORD and proclaiming the gospel to yourself instead of listening to yourself. Take time before your growth group to review the key points you noted from today's sermon.

Sermon Connection: Last week we considered a number of causes of spiritual depression. At the core of each is unbelief; perhaps not expressed and outright, but unbelief or failure to fully believe the gospel lies behind all spiritual depression. We begin to look to things other than God to provide satisfaction, fulfillment, offer rescue, or to make sense of things. We often forget foundational theological truth when we fall into spiritual depression. It is important to make sure we have these foundational pieces in place for a number of reasons, but one in particular is that it guards us from spiritual depression. The doctrine of justification is one such foundational piece. Knowing that our standing in Christ has nothing to do with our own merit is an essential aspect of the Christian faith. My spiritual hope and joy are not found in my own efforts or merit but in Jesus' perfect obedience and His eternal merit. The doctrine of justification holds fast our spiritual hope and joy. In Romans 3, Paul helpfully teaches on this very doctrine and its importance in the life of the Church. When we misunderstand or misapply foundational doctrinal truths, we set ourselves up for unnecessary hardship.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Goal: To see how the doctrine of justification is the foundation for spiritual hope and joy

Lesson Points:

Point 1: Justification Comes Through Faith in Jesus Christ, Not Through Keeping the Law. (vv. 21-26)

Point 2: Justification Helps Us to Rightly Understand Ourselves. (vv. 27-28)

Defining the Doctrine of Justification: The definition of justification is this: The act of pronouncing righteous, justification, acquittal; it signifies the establishment of a person as just by acquittal from guilt.¹ The New Testament goes on to add a second dimension which is, “to consider or to declare *to be* righteous.”

The doctrine of Justification, then, is that act of God whereby He declares sinners as righteous on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that through justification we are made fully righteous in the moment of declaration. Rather, *God changes how He regards/treats us on the basis of Jesus’ atoning work* which is ours through faith. Through justification, God treats us on the basis of already having the full righteousness of Jesus even though we are still in the process of sanctification (Rm. 7:22). This reality led Martin Luther to this point: Justification “has nothing to do with my condition; It is my status! ...though I am black, and dark and still sinful, God *regards* me as righteous!”

Point 1- Justification Comes Through Faith in Jesus Christ, Not Through Keeping the Law. (vv. 21-26)

- In v. 21, Paul notes, “*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...*” What is he saying about how God’s people obtain right standing with God?
- He adds the phrase, “*...although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it...*” What does this mean? How does it highlight the importance of the biblical story as it concerns spiritual joy and hope?
- Verse 22 highlights Jesus’ place in salvation as the only One able to save sinners. Why is this important when understanding justification?
- Verse 23 highlights the sinfulness of mankind and his need for salvation. Why is having a right view of our own sin essential to having spiritual hope and joy?
- Verses 24-45 explain that salvation comes as a gift through Jesus Christ. What does *propitiation* mean and what role does it play in securing the eternal hope and joy of God’s people?
- Verse 26 shows that God is both just and the justifier of those who trust in Christ. What does this mean?

Point 2 - Justification Helps Us to Rightly Understand Ourselves. (vv. 27-28)

- As noted in last week’s study guide, when we depart from clear biblical teaching, we invite spiritual depression into our lives. How does v.27 help us to understand the doctrine of justification and its role in our spiritual joy?
- Why does spiritual boasting lead to spiritual depression?
- Why is treasuring a “boast-free gospel” the path to spiritual hope and joy?

¹ *The Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 338.

The Big Picture - A Boast-Free Gospel

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only hope for salvation for sinful man. The Bible is clear about this, and it is indeed, its central message. But, as we have seen, the gospel is also the only path to true hope and joy. Spiritual depression is a failure to rightly understand and live out the gospel promises of God in Jesus Christ. As pastor Martyn Lloyd-Jones stated, “spiritually depressed people are very poor representatives of the Christian faith.”²

Through the gospel, we come to see that God has acted on behalf through the sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection of His Son. And this has been done apart from the Law so that mankind might have the hope of salvation. When we neglect this truth (either willfully or ignorantly), we set ourselves against God and His Word, and it is when we are against God and His Word that spiritual depression enters our lives and shipwrecks our faith. It is only through rightly knowing God and His gospel that we come to find true and lasting spiritual joy. When we rightly know God, we become right representatives of the Christian faith for His glory.

Application Questions

- How does justification serve to give me hope and joy in Jesus Christ?
- How, specifically, does this doctrine apply to your areas of spiritual depression?
- In what things have you been trusting that are not Jesus?
- How might you share your struggles with spiritual depression with your growth group?
- Ask God to give you courage to confess and seek the discipleship of your growth group.

² Lloyd-Jones, 23.