

This morning, we are going to move to our ninth Article of Faith, which is:

IX. Justification, Regeneration, and Adoption

Here is the description of this 9th tenet of our faith:

We believe that justification is the gracious and judicial act of God by which He grants full pardon of all guilt and complete release from the penalty of sins committed, and acceptance as righteous, to all who believe on Jesus Christ and receive Him as Lord and Savior.

We believe that regeneration, or the new birth, is that gracious work of God whereby the moral nature of the repentant believer is spiritually quickened and given a distinctively spiritual life, capable of faith, love, and obedience.

We believe that adoption is that gracious act of God by which the justified and regenerated believer is constituted a son of God.

We believe that justification, regeneration, and adoption are simultaneous in the experience of seekers after God and are obtained upon the condition of faith, preceded by repentance; and that to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.

The first thing that you need to understand is mentioned in the final portion of the explanation. That is that all of this (and more) occurs as a simultaneous event that we call Salvation.

The second thing that I should tell you is that this article is one of those that is more theological in terminology than most of the other articles of faith.

This article attempts to explain what happens during the conversion experience.

For most of us that have accepted Christ as their Savior, we'll think "wow, all that happened when I invited Him in?"

This morning, we will talk about the things that are actually happening to the new believer when they decide to ask Jesus Christ to be their Savior.

We begin with that word justification.

The Apostle Paul explains it in **Romans 3:21-26**

Righteousness Through Faith

21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in[a] Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement,[b] through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Paul reminds us that everyone has fallen short and has sinned, but we are now justified by His gift of grace because He atoned for us through the shedding of His blood.

You'll also notice that Paul used terminology that the Jews would immediately understand and relate to: he said that God had passed over the sins previously committed. They celebrate Passover every year and intimately understood what that entailed.

Paul also makes it perfectly plain (**Romans 4:5**) that it is only through faith in Christ Jesus that we are saved and not through any works of our own:

5 However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

It is also important that we underscore that word credited. We are not turned into righteous people.

Our faith in Christ causes God to count us as righteous, or credits us as righteous.

Just because you have a backstage pass doesn't mean that you're in the band. You are counted as being able to get in because they gifted you that pass.

God reckons us as righteous because of our faith in Christ.

The act of justification is essentially a declaration from the Creator Himself. It does not signify any particular change in the believer. God simply declares that we are righteous because of our faith in Christ Jesus.

It is not something that God sees in us. We are simply covered by the blood of Christ and are therefore pronounced justified, just as Abraham was pronounced as justified, simply because of his faith in God.

You could interchange the word credited with either pronounced or declared. They are one and the same.

When you got married, the pastor pronounced you husband and wife.

Nothing had actually changed within you, but you were declared to be unified. That actual unification process takes years of love and perseverance (probably more of the latter than the former).

However, the declaration was the announcement upon which the process would begin.

In essence, justification is the pronouncement by the Judge of all life that you have been innocent by reason of association.

Next, we want to look at regeneration.

The term born-again Christian became very popular in the early 20th century and, when I was young, was used to differentiate evangelical Christianity from other denominations and sects.

Although Catholics believe in regeneration, the term was essentially used to separate evangelicals from Catholics and they didn't seem to make an effort to curb that differentiation either.

However, regeneration was never meant to be a divisive term, other than dividing believers from non-believers.

The first place we should start is with the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisee Nicodemus (**John 3:1-8**):

1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit[b] gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound,

but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

So, Jesus explains that we are to be reborn in Spirit. I am going to speak about this event in greater detail at another time, but regeneration is the process of rebirth in the Spirit.

Although your body was alive before, your spirit was dead because it was directly in conflict with God.

During the conversion experience, the spirit is brought to life.

Paul tells us in **2 Corinthians 5:17**

*17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:[a]
The old has gone, the new is here!*

When we become “in Christ,” we become a new creation. We are reborn. Life cannot be the same if you have the Lord. **Titus 3:4-5** may say it best:

*4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5
he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but
because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth
and renewal by the Holy Spirit,*

That is what the theological term regeneration means.

Are we seeing how all of these concepts and how God's purpose ties together.

God is a holy God. He cannot be with sin.

Since the fall of Adam... his choice to sin separated him and us from God, because of God's holiness

But because of God's great love for us and his prevenient grace he sought to mend a relationship which was broken.

So, he sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice, a covering for our sins.

A payment which we could never pay ourselves. And through his prevenient grace our hearts can actually turn to him and have the desire to receive this gracious gift of salvation.

And when we repent and accept this gift of salvation we are justified.

We take on the righteousness of Christ. We are not righteous for we are still sinful in our nature, but we are able to stand before a holy God because of Christ's righteousness.

And at the same time we are justified, and that Christ's righteousness is imparted upon us... our spirits are awakened and we are reborn through the Holy Spirit, giving us the ability to start to change and be molded into the image of Christ himself.

These concepts are so beautiful because they lead us to our last... adoption

This happens to be my personal favorite of the three theological terms because, being a foster parent, I know what it means to take in children and love them with all my heart, as if they are my own, for I see them as my own. I closely identify with this part of the salvation experience.

Remember that we are dealing with a Holy God and he cannot be in the presence of sin.

Why are these concepts so beautiful? Because it shows his heart and his desire to be our father and to be in relationship with us.

If it wasn't for the atoning blood of Christ, for justification, and regeneration... adoption would not be possible.

To show you the scriptural basis for this term, let's first look at one of my favorite books (**Galatians 4:4-5**):

4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

We have been redeemed by Christ and are now His adopted children.

What a great promise!

You see, the Jews are His Chosen People. But because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, His followers have become adopted into that family.

We were chosen!

Paul says it just earlier in **Galatians 3:29**

29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

All of the great things that God promised His people are now bestowed upon us as believers.

The final verse I want to show you is **Romans 8:14-17**

14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

We have already seen that our spirits are made alive through regeneration. When that occurred, we were made heirs by adoption. That is a beautiful thing!

Justification, regeneration, and adoption.

Far too often we concentrate on the gift of eternal life in heaven. A way out of Hell.

However, Christ offers us far more than that. He offers us a relationship with our Creator—and it is an intimate one, which is why Paul says “we cry Abba,” which means Dad.

We were always intended to have a close relationship with God and it is through this conversion experience that we are enabled to truly begin this relationship...

If you're here this morning and you haven't accepted God's gracious gift of salvation, understand that he wants to be in relationship with you.

You can be forgiven, we know this...But you can be justified made new and accepted into the family of God.

What a profound message for so many who may have grown up without a father, without a close family unit.

Your heavenly father wants to have a relationship with you and he gave up everything to have it.

If you're sitting here and you're saying I give my life to Christ 20, 30, 40 years ago, but I'm just not feeling the intimacy of that relationship with God right now; just remember that God wants that relationship with you. He's calling you into it.

The moment you accepted Jesus into your heart you were not only forgiven but you were justified, your spirit was awakened and reborn and you were accepted into the family of God.

But just like any family and any relationship without communication it breaks down.

How do you talk with God? In prayer!

How do you spend time with God? You read his word!

How do you honor your heavenly father? You serve his will!

Salvation is the beginning of a beautiful journey, justification, regeneration, and adoption brings us forward on that journey.

(Invitation)

(Prayer)