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WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION?

Criminals collected together tend to corrupt each other, they are worse than ever when at the end of their incarceration they are released on an unsuspecting public. Napoleon

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (II Pet. 1:4).

In the final analysis there are only two ways by which man can be controlled. First of all, by external pressure, and secondly, by internal pressure.

The principle of law endeavors to control man by external pressure and threat of punishment. We have already shown the futility of this system. The Scriptures teach that when you command someone, "Touch not; taste not; handle not" it has an appearance of wisdom, but is of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

Probably no country on earth has more stringent moral laws than South Africa. Casino gambling is illegal. Movies and organized sports on Sundays are considered as disrespectful. Interracial coupling is

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forbidden. Puritanical blue laws reflect the Calvinistic ethics of the government. I have heard that it is against the law to read a copy of *Playboy Magazine* in South Africa.

Do these laws make the South African people righteous? Absolutely not! But it does make them hypocritical. It has done for them exactly what law did for the Pharisees.

If all of these things are against the law "in South Africa," then all you have to do to sin legally is get out of South Africa. The legal mind has no trouble doing this at all. Therefore, independent countries are now springing up within South Africa.

Sun City, for example, is a mere two and one-half hour drive northwest of Johannesburg. Here you can gamble to your heart's content; here all races can casually mix with absolutely no restrictions; here bare breasted chorus girls entertain goggle-eyed spectators and mirrored hallways lead to roulette wheels and blackjack tables.

Against the law? Of course not! For Sun City is in the independent country of Bophuthatswana. There are no passports needed, no customs to go through, but Bophuthatswana is a sovereign state just the same. The paved highway leads right through a dusty wilderness and every weekend multiplied thousands are bumper to bumper on their way to Sun City. The moment the wheels of their bus or car cross over the line, they can revel in an orgy with no holds barred and no fear of law.

Susan Goodman in the March 1983 *Friends Magazine* has written a humorous article called "Laws of the Bungle." Here are a few examples of laws which some communities have passed.

In Quitman, Georgia, it is against the law for a chicken to cross the road.

In Kirkland, Illinois, it is against the law for bees to fly over the town.

In Baltimore it is a crime to mistreat an oyster.

In Topeka it is against the law to worry squirrels.

A Colorado law upholds a dog's right to one bite.

In Paulding, Ohio, a police officer has the legal right to bite a dog back.

In Kentucky it is against the law to shoot clay pigeons during the breeding season.

California has a law forbidding a motorist to shoot any animal from his car but a whale.

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In Gary, Indiana, it is illegal to attend a theater within four hours of eating garlic.

For the first four months of the year it is illegal to take pictures of rabbits in Wyoming.

The Pine Island District of Minnesota requires that a man tip his hat to cows passing by.

In Washington, D.C., it is illegal to punch a bull in the nose.

Please do not feel that these examples are given to make fun of the law of God. The law of God was perfectly designed to do exactly what He intended for it to do. It was not intended to make men righteous (Gal. 3:21); it was not intended to make men obedient (Rom. 3:19). It was intended to be a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.

Escape From Lust

Hebrews 7:19 states unequivocally that the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did.

What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God has now accomplished through Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:3).

This change does not occur because of external laws pressuring us to "conform" but by His Holy Spirit operating from within. We are not "conformed," we are "transformed."

Putting a caterpillar in a rigid mould and trying to make him into a butterfly is not only a messy experience, but a fatal one to the caterpillar.

For many years I tried to coerce people to conform to the image of Jesus by threats of punishment. If the brethren did not behave like Jesus, I felt that dangling them over the flames of hell would purge away their lust. I was wrong!

This first began to dawn upon my mind while I was teaching a class in South Bend, Indiana. I quoted II Peter 1:4 from memory, emphasizing that each of us is to be a partaker of the "divine nature."

A quizzical look must have come upon my face as I apologized to the audience and asked leave of them that I might quote that Scripture again for myself. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (II Pet. 1:4).

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It is not the threats that help us to escape from lust and to be partakers of the divine nature . . . it is His exceeding great and precious PROMISES.

Why hadn't I seen that before?

Suppose I command you not to think about lemon pie. Then I wax eloquent in my denunciation of it by describing its flaky crust and homemade filling. Then I threaten you with punishment, even if the pie just came out of the oven and has a meringue topping that is two inches tall.

Such an approach is self-defeating. You were probably not even thinking about lemon pie until I mentioned it, and the more I mention it, the more you have a tendency to think about it.

Paul wrote,

. . . I had not known sin but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law has said, Thou shalt not covet . . . (Rom. 7:7).

Again let us suppose that you are going to fast for forty days like Jesus did. Anticipating a difficult time you send off to the local seminary for help. The student minister arrives and the first day his sermon is against junk foods. The second day he lectures on the evils of rich desserts. The third day he belabors bacon from an unclean animal and eggs that create excessive levels of cholesterol.

Could you survive forty days without lust by following such a program?

The divine prescription involves the promises. This is not to say that there is no place for warnings as our next chapter will point out, but it is only to reaffirm what the Holy Spirit said through Peter. He has given unto us exceeding great and precious promises that by them we might be partakers of the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Justification

In the New Testament Scriptures the word "justified" and a whole family of related words come from the root "dike." For example:

"dikaisune" - righteousness

"dikaios" - upright

"dikaioo" - justify

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“dikaioma” - righteous deed

“dikaios” - justly

“dikaiosis” - justification

etc.

The original root noun is felt to have meant “instructress” or “instruction.” In Greek mythology, “Dike” was the daughter of Zeus and the implacable enemy of violence. Through her “instruction” mankind is permitted to survive by learning to live without violence.

In post-Homeric times, Dike was considered as the goddess of punishment who pursued wrongdoers. Dike and its derivatives were at this time battle cries which became concepts basic to the establishment of a community. Without “justice” anarchy would prevail. When Paul was bitten by a deadly viper, the islanders felt that he must have been a murderer when “Dike” or “justice” was about to kill (Acts 28:4).

Thus the Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Vol. III, p. 253) sums up:

Hence, the righteous man (dikaios) was originally one whose behaviour fitted into the framework of his society and who fulfilled his rightful obligations towards the gods and his fellow-men.

I think most everyone can appreciate the fact that this concept from the Greeks is remarkably similar to what Jesus described as the basic message of Scripture.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37-39).

The problem is that there is none righteous, no not one.

The Hebrew word for “evil” is “ra.” It comes from the root “ra a” which literally means to “break in pieces.”

Since man ate of that tree which gave him the knowledge of evil, we have lived in a fragmented world. Man did not have a right relationship with God, and neither did he have a right relationship with his fellowmen.

After four thousand frustrating years man was no closer to harmonious living than he was when he first set foot out of Eden.

Imputed Righteousness

The Greek word translated as "imputed" is "logizomai." It means to "reckon" or to "take into account."

Abraham was not righteous. His conduct toward his wife in turning her over to Pharaoh, for example, was cowardly and sick. Abraham was not righteous, but God "counted" him as righteous because of what he believed (Rom. 4:3).

Abraham was the recipient of three great promises from God.

1. "I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 12:2).

His children were to be as numerous as the dust (Gen. 13:16).
and as the stars (Gen. 15:5).

2. He was to inherit Palestine - "And the Lord said unto Abram . . . Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art . . . for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever . . ." (Gen. 13:14-15).

3. The family of Abraham was ultimately to bless all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3).

It is significant to note that Abraham died before any of these promises became reality. At the time of his death he had only a handful of direct descendants. He did not receive an inheritance of land, "no, not so much as to set his foot on" (Acts 7:5), and he had been unable to bless even the country where he dwelt, to say nothing of "all the families of the earth." Illustrative of this fact is the journey of Isaac to Padan Aram for a wife, undoubtedly to avoid the corrupting influence of the Canaanites.

Though Abraham did not receive the promises, he saw them afar off (Heb. 11:13). He shared the ability of God to call things that are not as though they were (Rom. 4:17). He was "fully persuaded that what God had promised, he was able to perform, AND THEREFORE IT WAS IMPUTED UNTO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Rom. 4:21-22). The promises of God were counted as solid evidence for things which were not yet seen (Heb. 11:1). Spiritual perception was considered as valid a proof of reality as physical perception and thus Jesus testified: ". . . Abraham rejoiced to see my day: AND HE SAW IT, and was glad" (John 8:56).

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History has vindicated this father of the faithful. It was some 500 years before the family of Abraham inherited the land that God had promised . . . but they did receive it. It was many generations before the family of this believing nomad multiplied into a great nation . . . but the promise did come true. Almost two millennia of time transpired before the "seed" appeared to bless all the families of the earth . . . but Jesus was born . . . and Abraham with eyes of faith saw that day almost 2,000 years before it came to pass.

It is therefore highly appropriate that Abraham be presented to mankind as a proper example for all believers. The faithful remnant need never be discouraged by statistics of gloom and prophets of catastrophe. The Christian views the panorama of history from the mountaintop of faith. Our vision transcends the storm clouds of turmoil and despair, and over the horizon we discern that city whose builder and maker is God. Beyond the veil of suffering and death we see the jubilant throng. Above the roll of the drums and the rumble of war we hear the happy voices of the redeemed of earth.

Abraham saw the day of Jesus and rejoiced . . . and if you belong to Jesus you are thereby Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

David

David was not righteous. We devoted an entire chapter to him and pointed out at least a few of his sins. But David described the blessedness of the man unto whom God "imputed" righteousness. . . .

The 32nd Psalm uses four different words to describe the fragmentation of our relationship with God and man. They are: sin, iniquity, transgression, and guile. A part of this Psalm is quoted by Paul in Romans 4:7-8,

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

In spite of our sin, iniquity, transgression, and guile, we can still be blessed if we understand what it means to have our sins "covered" . . . and to not have them "imputed" unto us.

These concepts are so basic to Christianity that God has been trying to prepare us for them since the beginning. When Adam and Eve sinned they realized that they were naked and tried to "cover"

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themselves. Any covering fashioned by man is inadequate, therefore God made coats of skins to clothe or cover sinful man. The first animal sacrifices were apparently performed by God.

This concept of "covering" was woven into the Hebrew language to such an extent that the Hebrew word for "atonement" is "kaphar" which means "to cover."

The law which condemned us, and which was preserved as a witness against us, was placed beneath the outstretched wings of the cherubim within the ark of the covenant. The cherubim, you will recall, were stationed East of Eden with flaming sword turning every way, to keep man away from the precincts of the tree of life.

It is important for us to experience the impact of these cherubim gazing intently down upon the law. They were keen eyed and efficient. Man would surely never have a chance to again eat of the tree of life and live forever.

But the cherubim did not see the law! On top of the law was a golden slab called the "mercy seat." It was a "covering" which prevented the sinfulness of man from being presented in the presence of God.

Jesus Is Our Covering

When John the Apostle described the resurrection it is significant to remember that there were angels in the garden tomb. One was at the head and the other was at the feet of the place where Jesus had lain.

These angels, like the cherubim, looked down on Jesus. Later John would write,

. . . and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2).

God had promised to commune with Moses "from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim" (Ex. 25:22). Jesus is the "propitiation," or "mercy seat" for our sins. He is the "Word" or vehicle by which God communicates to man. He is the covering which makes it possible for sinful creatures such as we are to appear "justified" in the presence of a perfect God.

All of our righteousness is like "filthy rags," it is only when covered by Christ that we dare to stand at the Wedding Feast of God.

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The Psalm of David did not promise blessedness to those who never sinned, for in such a case no one would ever be blessed. He promised that those would be blessed to whom the Lord would not "impute" their sins.

We commit the sins, we make the mistakes, but God sees only Jesus. Somehow this absence of fear and this blessed assurance from God enables us to become partakers of the divine nature and to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Here is a poem for little children which has also a profound message for everyone. I absorbed it by osmosis from a Christian record which we purchased for our children many years ago . . . I do not know the author.

MARY HAD A LITTLE PIG

Mary had a little pig,
and it was white as snow.
That is when it had had a bath,
as you of course might know.
But Mary had an awful time
to keep that piggy clean
For he was just the dirtiest pig
that one had ever seen.
She'd wash him, and she'd scrub him,
till he'd squirm and squeal,
As if he wanted her to know
it was an unfair deal.
And then in the green backyard,
he'd play from morning until night,
Unless he'd happen to slip right out
and lose himself from sight.
Poor Mary thought and wondered much
what she could ever do.
And then she figured out a plan,
and this she carried through
She took him to a doctor,
who put the pig to sleep
And then he took his heart right out . . .
But not, of course, to keep.

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And then he took a little lamb,
and took his heart out too.
And put it in the little pig,
before the piggy knew.
And when the piggy did awake
he had no more desire
To wallow in the mud again,
or ever in the mire.
And so you see boys and girls,
we need a new heart, too!
Just like the little piggy did,
The old one will never do!

—author unknown

Once while quoting that poem for a group of young people one little boy raised his hand and said, “Mister, what happened to the little lamb?”

This question too, has profound spiritual significance. for the Little Lamb was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, but the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.

The law was indeed our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. When we believe these promises, a miracle takes place within us and we are on our way to deliverance from debilitating lust.

Almost everyone has heard of couples who couldn't have children until they adopted one. Somehow all of their efforts to produce a new life failed, until they quit worrying about it. In the absence of worry their systems relaxed to such an extent that a new life resulted.

The same blessed surprise is in store for those who concentrate upon the exceeding great and precious promises of God. They can so fill our lives that we can actually be transformed into the likeness of the divine nature of Jesus.

The law was an essential ingredient in the recipe of God to bring us to the beautiful promise of justification by faith.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. In what way are the commandments “touch not; taste not; handle not” of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:21-23)?

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2. Is it possible for law to change a person's heart?
3. How do things from the heart defile (Matt. 15:18)?
4. What is the difference between "conformation" and "transformation" (Rom. 12:2)?
5. How do commandments stir up lust (Rom. 7:7)?
6. How do promises help us escape from lust (II Pet. 1:4)?
7. What is the difference between "righteousness" and "imputed righteousness"?
8. Is any sin too hard for God to forgive (Ps. 103:3)?
9. How does Jesus become a "covering" for our sins?
10. How much condemnation is there in Christ (Rom. 8:1)?

