

## *"When Winter Comes"*

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©  
 Title: When Winter Comes and the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ  
 Text: Romans 3:21-26  
 Theme: The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ sustains us during the winter seasons of life.

### ILLUSTRATION:

Paul Tergat surged one last time, breaking the tape a heartbeat before defending champion Hendrick Ramaala fell across the finish line. After more than two hours of running Sunday, the New York City Marathon came down to a final sprint and a third of a second - the closest finish in race history. Tergat and Ramaala were among 37,516 competitors, a record for any marathon. They ran side by side all morning, trading the lead for 26.2 grueling miles through New York's five boroughs. Tergat, a Kenyan who holds the world marathon record, and South Africa's Ramaala jockeyed for the lead in Central Park. Tergat surged, then Ramaala, then Tergat again. Tergat's time was 2:09:29.90. Ramaala's time was 2:09:30.22.

### **Why am I teaching this?**

Because we live in a performance based acceptance culture and everything is conditional we have allowed this same mindset to mold our thinking and it has mutated into something that is frightening.

The Devil wants us to believe that our winter seasons are the result of failure on our part. A failure to measure up to what we perceive to be God's ideals. A failure to 'win victory over persistent sins' which the Devil delights to jam our faces into.

### **What is the biblical idea?**

Who I am before the Father is based solely on who Christ is, what He has done, and who I now am in Him. Nothing I do can undo what He has done. What I receive by grace is not maintained by works.

I find it tragic that on top of all we encounter in life, we pile on top of the already unbearable load the maintaining of our relationship with God.

Because we fail to embrace the finished work of Christ on the cross, we have made is man-centered and thus our vertical relationship is deemed fragile, brittle, and breakable. Nothing is further from the truth.

### **How will they best hear it?**

When I find myself struggling spiritually, how am I to find comfort and rest? The issue for me is making sure I lay hold of what I know to be true and not how I feel. Dealing with your feelings is one thing, having to deal with a skewed view of God is another thing

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altogether different. We have made our relationship with God something that is tentative and iffy. We live as if we are capable of undoing what God has done.

Do we really believe the cross-work and are we willing to see it as deficient? I can embrace my winter season only as I see God's sovereignty and His Son's sacrifice.

Today, I would like to address the issue of Jesus' sacrifice and the winter seasons of life.

## **I. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ assures me that I am right with the Father during my winter seasons (Rom. 3:21-26).**

21 But now God has shown us a different way of being right in his sight-not by obeying the law but by the way promised in the Scriptures long ago. 22 We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done. 23 For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. 24 Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. 25 For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us. God was being entirely fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former times. 26 And he is entirely fair and just in this present time when he declares sinners to be right in his sight because they believe in Jesus.

### A. Defining the Word

The word itself means, "to declare righteous." The Reformation was fought over whether or not it meant "to declare" or "to make." Protestants believe it means, "to declare."

Consider the following explanations of justification by several printed theologians.

"The doctrine of justification means then that in God's sight the ungodly man, now 'in Christ,' has perfectly kept the moral law of God, which also means in turn that 'in Christ' he has perfectly loved God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength and his neighbor as himself." "The moment the sinner, through faith in Jesus Christ, turns away from every human resource and rests in Christ alone, the Father imputes his well-beloved Son's perceptive (active) obedience to him and accepts him as righteous in his sight." (Reymond, Christian Faith, 742, 747)

"To be justified means more than to be declared 'not guilty.' It actually means to be declared *righteous* before God. It means God has *imputed* or charged the guilt of our sin to His Son, Jesus Christ, and has *imputed* or credited Christ's righteousness to us." (Jerry Bridges, Transforming Grace, c1991, 36).

Romans 1:18-3:20 declares me to be wrong whereas now (3:22) I am declared to be right. How or why can such a transaction be true, only because of my standing in Him by grace

alone through faith alone. What changed? My position changed. Being declared right before the Father was based on no personal merit. It was freely done by His grace.

#### B. Looking at it Biblically

In a positional sense, I am what Christ is. The practical outworking of this is the putting on of the new and the putting off the old by the renewing of one's mind (Ephesians 4:22-24). In so doing our Lord will be seen in our earthen vessels. It is, in this sense, that *we* are righteous. In truth, it is His righteousness being seen in and through us. This is what Ephesians 5:9 and Philippians 1:11 are referring. Our righteousness is actually the outworking of His righteousness in us. It is as I become aware of what He is that I am desirous of putting on those qualities that will reveal Christ to others through me (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; 3:16).

#### C. What are the implications of such a thought?

“Justification is the sovereign act of God whereby He declares righteous the believing sinner – **while he is still in a sinning state**” (Swindoll, Grace Awakening, 24).

In my practice, I am still as wrong as I was in Romans 1:18-3:20. Now even though my practice has not changed, my standing before God has. I am right with God. Whereas before (1:18-3:20) I was wrong, now (3:21-26) I am right. Nothing can affect this “rightness with God.” Nothing I did caused it and nothing I can do will cancel it. I can never through my actions undo what Christ alone has done.

If justification is seen in light of the context within Romans, then to be right with God is to be justified. To become non-right is to undermine the truth of justification by faith. To call Christians to get right with God is theologically inaccurate. Your “rightness” with God is not based on your ability to perform or obey but on your position in Christ.

It is impossible not to be right with God. You did nothing to merit it and you can do nothing to maintain it. To think your sin makes you not right is to fail to see the scope of your sinful condition. To think your obedience makes you right is to fail to see the scope of your justification. How can God declare me righteous and treat me as such and now treat me as unrighteous?

“It's no wonder so many believers walk around seeing themselves as ‘sinners.’ They are double-minded about their standing before God – especially when they visit church on Sunday and are reminded to **‘get right with God.’** As James 1:8 says, ‘A double-minded man [is] unstable in all he does,’ and this lack of understanding about the finality of the cross is spiritual instability” (George, Faith That Pleases God, 178).

The question concerning sinful acts by the Christian will be addressed later. Yet such actions on your part cannot change your “rightness” with God. In the doctrine of justification by faith your rightness with God has been forever settled. It is as certain as His Son.

Justification or being right with God is not based on how you feel. Too many believers live  
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their daily lives based on their feelings. As such, they experience little of the joy of being justified. You might feel like a failure because of your inability to measure up to all the imperatives in the New Testament. You might feel distant and alienated from God because of your sin nature, but the FACT of the matter is, “You are right with God because you have been justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.” Nothing can alter this glorious truth.

When I find myself spiritually exhausted and incapable of lifting a finger for Him, God is still declaring me righteous. My right standing before the Father is not based on who I am, but on who He is and what He has done in my behalf.

#### ILLUSTRATION:

How many times have you felt righteous before the Father and on what basis did you feel righteous? Chances are you felt righteous because you believed you did something that made God happy. How many times have you felt unrighteous before the Father and on what basis did you feel unrighteous? Chances are you felt unrighteous because you believed you did something that made God mad.

#### POEM:

Under the law with its ten-fold lash, learning, alas, how true, that the more I tried the  
sooner I died, wile the law cried, You! You!! You!!!

Hopelessly still did the battle rage, ‘O wretched man’ my cry, and deliverance I sought by  
some penance bought, while my soul cried, I! I!! I!!!

Then came a day when my struggling ceased, and trembling in every limb, at the foot of the  
tree where one died for me, I sobbed out, HIM! HIM!! HIM!!!

Roy Hession, We Would See Jesus, 102.

God’s attitude toward you is not like that of a person having a mid-life crisis. Where you have no idea as to what is going on and everything is tentative and everyone is walking on eggshells.

What you have with the Father because of the Son is bedrock. The sacrifice of His Son is the solid rock that underlies all the soil, sand, clay, gravel and loose material that is on the surface of your life.

## **II. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ assures me that I have access before the Father during my winter seasons (Heb. 4:14-16).**

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Romans 5:1, 2

1Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. 2 Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ results in me having peace with God, access to God, and boldness before God. (Romans 5:1, 2, 5, 9; 8:30, 33, 34)

Because of Justification, I have peace with God and an unconditional access into His presence. Such peace and access are the result of Christ's work in my behalf. Tied into this great truth is that of our reconciliation. Whereas once I was alienated from God, I now have access to God. Because the gulf has been spanned and I am now reconciled to God, I have fellowship with Him.

There was nothing I could do to merit it and there is nothing I can do to maintain it.

To have peace and access is a result of grace. I could never have gained it through self-effort. Why do I believe that my actions will bar my access and rob my peace? Do you ever believe you have been barred from finding favor with God? Do you believe your access before the Father is maintained by what you do or fail to do? Friend, it is time for us to once more embrace the theology of Romans.

My justification results in me having peace with God. I am no longer in a state of fear. I no longer tremble at my inability to measure up to God's unattainable standard. As a Christian, my depravity might want to control you and "lord" it over you. I might wish for you to feel guilty and inadequate, but God who stands in my corner as my advocate (1 John 2:1, 2) asks those who would, "who shall lay anything to the charge of my elect whom I have declared righteous? Who is there among you that can condemn those whom I have freed?" The answer? NO ONE! I am free! Gloriously free! Jesus paid it all and now all to HIM I owe!

Do we realize that right now at this very moment you and I can enter into the Father's presence without having to jump through various hoops or clear multiple hurdles?

During my winter seasons I can come with full confidence and complete freedom into the Father's presence.

### **III. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ assures me that I am the object of His unconditional love during my winter seasons (Romans 8:35-39).**

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all

these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What does unconditional love look like? Let us read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,  
 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,  
 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;  
 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

What is this a picture of? It is a picture of Jesus Christ. Can you not hear Romans 5:6-10?

6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.  
 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.  
 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.  
 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.  
 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

It is a tragedy of immeasurable proportions that some people have lived their entire lives and have never known unconditional love. In the absence of unconditional love all relationships will fail whether they are between a husband and wife, parents and children, or in the context of a local church family.

During your winter season know this, God loves you unconditionally. There is nothing I have to do or have done that will make Him love me any less or more than what He already does. Wow!

#### **IV. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ assures me that I am not the object of His wrath, I will not face condemnation, and I will never be scorned by Him during my winter seasons (i.e. propitiation and identification).**

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ frees me from sin and the wrath of God against it. (Romans 5:9; 6:7 ["freed" = "justified"])

##### A. Defining the Word

The word “propitiation” has to do with anger and wrath. Only God is propitiated. He is wrathful against the sinner’s sin. To propitiate means, “to placate, satisfy, or appease.”

God is angry with the sinner. The sinner is the object of God’s wrath (John 3:36). The death of Jesus Christ placates the wrath of God against the sinner. The sufficiency of His death satisfies the justice of God against sin.

#### B. Looking at the word Biblically

The root word has three expressions (hilaskomai, hilasmos, hilasterion).

1Jo 2:2 And he is the **propitiation** for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1Jo 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the **propitiation** for our sins.

Ro 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a **propitiation** through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;  
 Heb 9:5 And over it the cherubim of glory shadowing the **mercy-seat**; of which we cannot now speak particularly.

Lu 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be **merciful** to me a sinner.

Heb 2:17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make **propitiation** (KJV – reconciliation) for the sins of the people.

#### C. What are the implications of such truth?

If the death of Christ sufficiently and effectually removes the object of God’s wrath thus placating His anger and satisfying His justice, then God can never be angry with me again.

“Where did we pick up the idea that God is mad or irritated? Knowing that *all* of God’s wrath was poured out on His Son at His death on the cross, how can we think like that? As a matter of fact, the reason He brought Jesus back from the grave is that He was satisfied with His Son. Ponder this: If the Father is satisfied with His Son’s full payment for sin, and we are in His Son, by grace through faith, then *He is satisfied with you and me*. How long must Christians lie before we finally believe that?” (Swindoll, Grace Awakening, 61, 62).

I will never face God’s anger. God will never be angry with those who participate in the propitiating work of Christ before the Father.

“It isn’t possible for a Christian to cause God to become angry. ‘There is nothing you can do that will make Him mad – nothing!’” (McVey, Grace Rules, c1998, 148).

“The truth was that she was pleasing to God already, and she was to work not for His favor, but because she already had it.” (Wells, Sidetracked, 82).

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We have lived so long in bondage that we have to learn how to live as free men. We sin so naturally that we must learn how to live in righteousness just as we have lived in sin.

My winter season is not His sentence against me. I am not being judged by the Father. His judgment against me has been fully met in the cross. I do not wish to try and explain at this point how I believe the Church of Jesus Christ has mishandled the idea of divine chastisement as supported by Hebrews 12:1-following. I personally believe that there is now nor will ever be any condemnation from God upon His people no matter how poorly they perform or how miserably they fail. Can you imagine the tremendous release this can bring to those who are downtrodden and lost in their winter season?

Application: (Where do we go from here?)

Do we really know what it is like to rest in the finished work of Christ and then to relate to God based on this work?

#### ILLUSTRATION:

In 1826, two men, last names Porter and Wilson, were sentenced to be hanged by the state of Pennsylvania for mail robbery and murder. Porter was hanged first in July 1830. Three weeks later, President Andrew Jackson pardoned Wilson, the second perpetrator. The death sentenced was lifted.

The presidential pardon was sent to the governor of Pennsylvania and then to the warden of the penitentiary where George Wilson was incarcerated. There the message was given to the condemned man.

But Wilson stunned everyone by refusing the pardon, even though he knew it meant the death penalty would be carried out. The officials didn't know what to do. The case took three years to resolve.

The case ended up in the U. S. Supreme Court. In rendering the court's decision, Chief Justice John Marshall said, "A pardon is an act of grace which exempts the individual on whom it is bestowed from the punishment of the law. "A pardon is a slip of paper, the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon." It has NO VALUE apart from that which the receiver gives to it. George Wilson has refused to accept the pardon. We cannot conceive why he would do so, but he has. Therefore, George Wilson must die." As a result, George Wilson was hanged even though a pardon had been offered. He had made his choice.

#### ILLUSTRATION:

Mowing God's Lawn (by Bruce Foggerty)

I pushed my little plastic mower around the yard of my universe trying to help God mow. God didn't need my help, but he let me tag along anyway and let me feel important. Back

and forth I labored in neat little rows wasting the years, oblivious to the absence of any real motor or cutting blade in my toy machine.

I made rumbling sounds to heighten the sense of my importance and occasionally emptied my press clippings bag of imaginary accomplishments.

Lawn finished, I attacked the hard edges of my life with my imaginary toy weed eater, hacking at perceived problems that had sprouted on my landscape. And, the Great I AM, softly chuckled, when I finally ceased struggling, as at last I realized he had long ago installed astro-turf.