



EVERYDAY JUSTIFICATION



BY KELSEY JURKOVICH

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The Christian doctrine of justification by faith alone states that sinners can be declared “Not guilty!”— “Justified!” before the Judge of the universe, based, not on their works, but on their faith in Jesus Christ alone. Practically speaking, this means that God’s love and acceptance of those who believe is not based on what they do, but on what Christ has done. This doctrine is the heartbeat of Christianity and ought to be the heartbeat of the Christian life.

I believe that our theology (what we believe about God, ourselves, and the world) is not meant to be something that stays in our heads, but something that transforms the way we relate to God, each other, and the world. With that in mind, I would like to pose this question: how does what I believe about my justification affect the way I deal with ongoing sin in my life? If we allowed what we believe in our heads to take root in our hearts, how would that change how we deal with our sin?


God doesn’t love you because you don’t sin; he loves you because he loves Jesus, and that will never change.

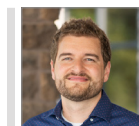
When I think about my own experience with sin, it often looks like a carbon copy of the scene in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they immediately experienced guilt, shame, and fear. This was so overwhelming it led them to cover themselves with fig leaves and hide among the trees from the presence of God. In the moment Adam and Eve sinned, they believed God viewed them as criminals who needed punished. They viewed God as an avenger coming to execute justice. At the core of their response was the nagging fear that God didn’t love them anymore.

Even as Christians, we typically experience sin in the same way. We blow up at our children and are immediately overcome

with guilt. We fall into pornography and are filled with disgust and shame. We mistreat our spouse and are struck by fear that God is coming for us. When we sin, our natural response is to believe that God is no longer for us, that he does not accept us, and that his love for us has dimmed or has been completely extinguished (depending on how bad we think our sin is). This all leads us to run and hide from God when we sin, rather than running to him with our sin. These moments prove how easy it is for us to forget our doctrine of justification and slip back into viewing God’s love and acceptance of us based on what we do.

You see, this is what is so transformative about the unique truth of justification by faith alone—it tells us that we are loved and accepted by God, not on the basis of what we have done, but based on what Christ has done. In other words, God doesn’t love you because you don’t sin; he loves you because he loves Jesus, and that will never change. If we put this doctrine to work in our lives, it would dispel the false thoughts and emotions that lead us to run and hide from God. It would free us to take our sin to God knowing that he will not receive us as a judge receives a criminal, but as a father receives a son or daughter.

If we are going to believe that there are no good works we can do to earn the love and acceptance of God, then we must also believe that there is no sin that will cause us to lose his love and acceptance. Breathe in this truth as often as you breathe in air. Allow it to give you the assurance God intends it to. 



Kelsey is associate pastor of Fairlawn Mennonite Church in Apple Creek, Ohio. He and his wife, Abbie, have three sons.



Strength and Peace

BY DELANEY YUTZY

*To this I hold, my Shepherd will defend me
Through the deepest valley He will lead
Oh the night has been won, and I shall overcome
Yet not I, but through Christ in me* (CityAlight)

Everyone who gathered in McHenry, Maryland, for CMC’s annual conference resembled a big family coming together for a reunion. A team uniting together after a huge loss. A community relying on the Lord in the midst of devastating heartbreak.

For those of you who don’t know, Ericka Byler, director of enrollment services at Rosedale Bible College, passed away unexpectedly during RBC’s Choral Camp, the week before Multiply 2022. She was an inspiring young woman who served God with her life, and many people were greatly impacted by her time on earth.

I met Ericka once, not long before she passed from this life to the next. She was someone I was very excited to form a friendship with, someone I felt drawn to from just one conversation. I can’t pretend to relate to the devastation that her family, friends, and co-workers are experiencing. I didn’t know her like they did. I can’t tell you how hard it is to lose your daughter, sister, or best friend.

But I can tell you about the strength and peace I witnessed from those who were grieving the loss of Ericka.

“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope” (1 Thes. 4:13 NIV).

We can all agree that death is hard. Really hard. We weren’t created to experience death. Losing someone is heart-wrenching and painful.

Both of my grandfathers passed away last year—my dad’s father on October 6, and my mom’s father on November 14. Two major deaths in our family in just over a month. One of them was a sudden and unexpected death. The other was a slow, gradual dying.

Even though their deaths were different in many ways, the result was the same. I no longer had a grandfather. My parent no longer had a father. My grandmother no longer had a husband. Death is difficult. And for the rest of our time on

earth, it will be difficult. It’s important to acknowledge that. But we can’t stop there.

I know that my grandfathers, along with Ericka, are experiencing the greatest peace and joy, rejoicing with the One they love. And while we grieve and wish their time with us had been extended, God knew when their earthly lives would end. Death came as no surprise to him.

David says that “all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:16). We must trust the loving Father’s plan for his children, even those he calls home before “their time.” It was always their time to depart, and they are much better off than they were on earth. We grieve, yes. Absolutely. That’s healthy, expected, and needed. But we don’t grieve like those who have no hope. We must keep our eyes on Jesus and his triumph over death!

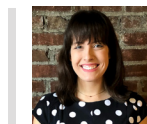
And that is exactly what happened at Multiply 2022. We sang a song called “Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me,” by CityAlight, which is all about relying on Christ’s strength rather than our own. What an appropriate song to sing in the midst of deep sadness. It’s incredibly difficult to praise the Lord during hardships in our lives, but that is where our strength and peace comes from.

“The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace” (Psalm 29:11).

This verse was my prayer during our time in Maryland. When I returned to Plain City and had my Monday morning cup of tea, I realized that Psalm 29:11 was imprinted on the mug, given to me months ago. The meaning is deeper for me now. Each day, I want to rely on the Lord for his strength and his peace, not my own.

God sees. He hears. And he wants to bless us with the strength and peace to continue in the work he has for us. 🙏

To view photos of Multiply 2022, click on the Media tab on our website at www.cmcrosedale.org.



Delaney, a graduate of Cedarville University, lives in Plain City, Ohio and recently took on the administrative assistant position at CMC. She loves the Psalms, music, reading, and writing.



“Mistakes Were Made ...”

(Part 7)

BY ANTHONY RIVERS

Have We Described Community Wrongly?

On Tuesday, May 24, 2022, a gunman walked into Robb Elementary School in the small city of Uvalde, Texas, and killed 21 people, including 19 children. Like most people, my heart was troubled by this tragedy. Murder of any life should grieve us all.

News stations everywhere reported on the event, and everyone seemed bothered by this disaster. But as the days passed, attention faded, and we all resumed our individual lives.

I wondered, was my concern simply an emotional response to murder, or did I have a heartfelt response to this community of people? Galatians 6:2 states, “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ” (NASB).

Is the command to bear another’s burden limited to those within my own personally defined community? Have I defined community the same way God does? If we are to bear one another’s burdens, who does that include? Could it be that we have defined community wrongly?

Merriam-Webster defines community as *a unified body of individuals. Less commonly, a community is a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society.*

Community is looking beyond the people who are in our physical proximity, looking beyond the people who look, live, and believe as we do

According to this definition, community is defined as people who achieve unity or have common features. This kind of community is very limited. By this definition I have family members that are not a part of my community—individuals I love immensely, but with whom I have yet to achieve unity. According to this definition, we wouldn’t be considered a community.

Churches, families, and neighborhoods aren't always unified, but does that suggest they aren't communities? Does this limited definition truly reflect the biblical community?

I’m not suggesting that unity is not important. In fact, Psalm 133:1 states, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” (NIV)

While I believe unity is key to accomplishing Christ’s mission for believers, I also believe we need a greater understanding of community. I love Helen Keller’s quote, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Today, many people live quite individualistic lives. We live in our own houses. We rely on our own modes of transportation. We have groceries delivered to our homes. We even order dinner that comes to our front door!

Throughout history, humans have lived in small, tight-knit communities and relied on those communities for survival. If we don’t pay attention to the disintegration of our communities, the effects of our isolating choices may be more far-reaching than we can imagine.

Isolation, loneliness, and separation all contribute to growing negative mental health outcomes, poor interpersonal relationships, and dysfunctional communities. These consequences are just another reminder that God never intended for us to live life alone.

Consider this broader view of a community, defined by Bible.org: *A Christian community shares a common life in Christ. It moves us beyond the self-interested isolation of private lives and the superficial social contacts that pass for ‘Christian fellowship.’ The biblical ideal of community challenges us to commit ourselves to life together as the people of God.*

A biblical view of community is much greater than a collection of homes in a preferred school district. It is more than our cultural connections. It supersedes the shared interests of professional colleagues. **Community is a way to see Christ in others.**

When we receive love and acceptance from others, we are reminded of how Christ loves and accepts us. It is also a source of accountability and guidance. A community is where we can receive knowledge for growth and correction when needed. It is a place to pray and worship.

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Anthony is a clinical psychologist and ordained CMC minister. He has served on the Rosedale Bible College board since 2016. He also teaches Intro. to Psychology at RBC. Anthony and his wife, Colleen, have three daughters.



Beyond What Would Be Possible

BY TOM

Recently, members of a Rosedale International (RI) team in Asia received an unusual invitation from a group of Hindu villagers: *come to our region and explain more about your faith!* The team followed up on this opportunity and spent time talking about Jesus with the interested group. They left with an invitation to return and continue the conversation.

This exciting and unexpected request is the direct result of the hostels that were recently opened by RI's local partners in two Asian countries. They invited students, ranging in age from 13 to 20, to leave their homes in remote villages and come to larger towns to study. These students live together, share meals and household chores, and continue their education beyond what is possible in their home areas. But as believers who desire for Christ to be known, RI's local partners look to do more than meet the immediate need of education for disadvantaged groups. Their long-term goal is to open up entire communities for the gospel.

Although hostel life can be difficult at times, it is easy to see changes happening—often quickly—in the lives of students.

A key component of this ministry is the hostel leaders themselves. For these leaders, building relationships with the students has been crucial. In some cases, this is not easy; the girls' hostel in southern Asia has proved especially trying. When it opened in January, seven students enrolled—all young girls who had never lived or studied outside their home areas. None of them had attended school in the previous two years due to COVID-19, making their adjustment even more difficult. Hiya, the hostel leader, has had to exercise tremendous patience as she tries to help them become more disciplined in their studies, and more loving in their inter-personal relationships.

In the southeast, Lan and his wife opened their home in a large city as a hostel. They treat their students as a large family—something that works well in that cultural context. Their students call them *mom* and *dad*, and everyone helps with

chores. Lan laughingly reported that becoming a father to ten young adults has meant much less free time and many more daily repairs around the house.

Although hostel life can be difficult at times, it is easy to see changes happening—often quickly—in the lives of students who are exposed to this kind of mentoring and discipleship. In fact, several months after inviting ten students into their home, Lan and his wife baptized two of them. And all of their students—new believers and seekers alike—are learning to participate in and lead corporate worship. Additionally, they worship and study the Bible together twice a week, and gather with a local church on Sunday.

By beginning with these young students, RI's local partners believe they will be able to build relationships in many villages. They have begun to plan regular trips to accompany several students at a time back to their homes, where they can spend a weekend talking with others about their new experiences. In the future, they hope to send the students home as evangelists to their own families and friends.

"The kinship system [in our culture] is very strong," Hiralal shared. When families realize that their children are being cared for, they are interested in learning more about the faith that motivates RI's team. As the students begin sharing what they've learned on visits home, their families, friends, and neighbors want to learn more. It's a long-term strategy and requires much patience and hard work, but Hiralal is sure that results will come. Indeed, with an unexpected invitation to share about the gospel, it seems that this strategy is beginning to bear fruit.

Pray for these students as they study—especially as they learn what it means to follow Jesus. Pray for the team's long-term vision to become a reality as the yeast of the gospel slowly spreads throughout their entire relationship network! 🙏



Tom serves as Asia Regional Director for RI in Thailand. He is a Bible teacher and chaplain in a local international school, and has worked with RI in various positions for over 20 years.

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Mistakes Were Made

James 5:16 states, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness” (NET).

Christian community is a place to serve. Here, we put the interests and needs of others ahead of our own. It is a place to showcase the light of God. As Matthew 5:16 states, “Let your light shine before people so that they can see your good deeds and give honor to your Father in heaven.”

Community is living life on earth the way God intended. Community is looking beyond the people who are in our physical proximity, looking beyond the people who look, live, and believe as we do, and looking beyond the simple construct of unity to define who we call our community.

Community calls us to look beyond our individualized, emotional reactions to tragedy and choose to mourn and act with people—like the citizens in the small city of Uvalde, Texas—as if it were our own. 🙏