

Justification By Faith

What Is Justification?

As we study the doctrine of justification, we must first of all determine the meaning of the word. To justify is “to prove or show to be just, or conformable to law, right, justice, propriety or duty; to defend or maintain; to vindicate as right.” (Webster's 1828 Dictionary) In other words, to justify is to issue a legal declaration of justness, or righteousness. Let us search the Scriptures to see if this is verified therein.

The LORD used Moses to say, “*Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.*” (Ex 23:7) KJV Again we read, “*If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked.*” (Deut 25:1) KJV These statements show that justification is a legal declaration of righteousness. God expects judgment to be just so that the righteousness of the righteous will be declared and rewarded while the wickedness of the wicked will be punished. In fact, He used Solomon to say, “*He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.*” (Prov 17:15) KJV Again, the LORD used Isaiah to say, “*Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!*” (Isa 5:22,23) KJV So far we have seen that justification is a legal declaration, or recognition, of righteousness.

While we acknowledge justification to be a legal declaration of righteousness, we must also understand what it is *not*. Justification is not *making* someone righteous; it is the simple declaration of righteousness. Justification does not make one righteous, but is the equivalent of a sentence of acquittal. This truth is seen in verses which speak of God being justified. David said, “*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*” (Ps 51:4) KJV David was not seeking to make God righteous, but he was simply declaring the fact that, while he was wrong, God was right. As Jesus spoke to the Jews concerning John the Baptist, it is stated that “*all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.*” (Luke 7:29) KJV In other words, the people acknowledged the justness of God and gave Him glory for that righteousness.

Finally, we find that justification is a legal declaration of righteousness as opposed to the legal declaration of sinfulness, or condemnation. “*Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*” (Rom 8:34) KJV

The Ground of Our Justification

By what means are we justified? Is it on the basis of our own goodness? No. If we were justified because of our own goodness there would be no further need of our being justified. Unfortunately, we are sinners who have come short of glorifying God (Rom 3:23) and have nothing within ourselves that is good (Rom 7:18) whereby we can justify ourselves. What then, is the ground of our justification? We are justified by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

There are three specific things that Christ did that together form the perfect work of Jesus that is sufficient for our justification. First of all, Jesus obeyed God completely and without failure. This is seen in the following statements made concerning Jesus: “*We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*” (Heb 4:15) KJV “*Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.*” (1 Peter 2:22) KJV “*Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*”

(Rom 5:18,19) KJV By Jesus' obedience we shall be made righteous.

Next we find that Jesus died that we might be justified. *“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 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; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”* (Rom 3:24-26) KJV While it is an abomination for wicked people to be justified, the cross of Christ declares how God does so righteously. It also declares that the one thing that is sufficient for the forgiveness of our sins is the righteousness of Jesus. Jesus' death satisfied the righteous demands of God and His law on our behalf. That is why Paul said, *“He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”* (2 Cor 5:21) KJV Jesus' death for our sins declares that God's righteousness is what is necessary for the remission of our sins, as well. The death of Jesus for our sins declares that man's righteousness under the law is insufficient, and that man needs a Divine righteousness imputed to him if He is to be justified. *“The righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”* (Rom 3:21-23) KJV

Finally, the resurrection of Jesus was for our justification. *“Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”* (Rom 4:25) KJV Jesus' resurrection signified and accomplished the victory over death and the sin that caused it. *“Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.”* (Rom 6:9,10) KJV Jesus' resurrection shows that, though He died for our sins, He would/could not be held by death because death had no authority or power over Him, because He had no sin. Thus, Jesus conquered sin and is able to justify us.

The grounds of our justification is the perfect work of Christ who lived a sinless life, died as a sin offering for us, and rose from the dead to break the power of sin.

Why Faith?

Why is justification by faith? Why are we not justified some other way? There are two very important reasons why we are justified by faith. Those reasons are: one, because we are sinners who are unable to be justified by any other means; two, because God is due the glory and not ourselves.

The doctrine of the total depravity of man means that man is a sinner from birth. This, of course, means that man cannot justify himself. Paul stated the fact of our sinfulness very plainly saying, *“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”* (Eph 2:1-3) KJV Again, we find that, *“as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”* (Rom 5:12) KJV Having sinned in our federal head (Adam), and being born with a sinful nature, it is impossible for man to justify himself. Man must look outside of himself and trust another to justify him. Why? Because one with a sinful nature will never produce righteous fruit. *“Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”* (Matt 7:17,18) KJV This being so, man has no capability to justify himself.

On the same token, the law cannot do man any good in his attempt to be justified. The law, though holy, just, and good (Rom 7:12), but it had a fundamental weakness: human nature. The scriptures tell us that the law is weak through the flesh (Rom 8:1-4). This simply means that human nature, when confronted with the law, rises up in rebellion against it. Paul said that *“sin, taking*

occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.” (Rom 7:11) KJV Again, he said that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Rom 8:7,8) KJV Human nature simply will not abide by the law of God, and thus man cannot justify himself. “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Rom 3:19,20) KJV

God ordained that man be justified by faith due to the fact that all glory belongs to God. If man were able to do some good deed by which he would be justified he would have reason to boast. *“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” (Rom 4:1-3) KJV* As great a man as Abraham was could not be justified by his works. If Abraham could have been justified by his works he would have had something of which to boast, but before God he has nothing. Why? Because Abraham was justified by faith. Paul told the Romans that there is no room at all for boasting. *“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.” (Rom 3:27) KJV* In fact, Jesus came to become our righteousness that we might boast in Him alone. *“Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” (1 Cor 1:30,31) KJV* This being true, there is only one in whom we can boast: Jesus. *“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” (Gal 6:14) KJV*

Results of Justification

In what does justification result? What benefit is there to the one justified? There are several things that result from justification, but the first is the simple fact that man is right with God. What else is there?

Justification causes man to stand before God with no condemnation and no guilt. While we are guilty before God, justification removes that guilt. *“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 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; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” (Rom 3:19-28) KJV* The guilt that we carried is removed, our sins are remitted, and we are declared righteous when we are justified. What a blessing this is! Not only so, but we are no longer under condemnation. *“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:18) KJV* *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” KJV* For everyone who is justified by faith in Christ there is presently no condemnation. What a wonderful gift from God this is. We are not left in the balance wondering whether we shall or shall not be justified in the day of judgment, but are assured that there is now no

condemnation. Not only so, but there never shall be any condemnation to those who are justified. Paul said, *“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”* (Rom 8:33,34) KJV There shall be no more condemnation to those who belong to Jesus Christ. Justification is the work of God and His work is eternal and shall not be destroyed.

Another blessing of justification is the fact that we have peace with God. No longer are we at enmity with God; we are reconciled to Him. *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”* (Rom 5:1,2) KJV Not only are we at peace with God, but this standing is secure. Paul's statement tells us that we stand before God in grace. Just as we are justified by freely by the grace of God (Rom 3:24,25) we stand before God securely, because our standing is based upon grace and not works.

Finally we read, *“The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”* (Titus 3:4-7) KJV In this text Paul is telling us of two great benefits of justification: regeneration and inheritance. When one is justified, he also becomes a new creature; the old man passes away and he becomes new (2Cor 5:17), having new life because the Spirit of God dwells within him. Having been born into the family of God, the justified person becomes heir of God (Rom 8:16;Eph 1:12-14). Rich indeed are the blessings of being right with God through our Lord Jesus Christ!