

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

Romans 3:23-31

Our one source of authority for any doctrine is the Word of God. The doctrine of justification through faith is clearly taught in the Bible. You will recall that thousands of years ago Bildad asked the Poet of Patience, "How then can a man be justified with God?" Down through the centuries, peoples of every clime and country, every culture and condition, have yearned to know how a just God can justify an unjust man.

I. The Meaning of Justification.

"Justification is a judicial act of God in which He declares the sinner free from condemnation, and restores him to divine favor. It takes place when the sinner trusts in Christ and His merits for salvation." E. Y. Mullins.

"Justification is the act of God in which the sinner, hitherto condemned on account of his sin, upon condition of faith in Christ, is forgiven and received into the divine favor." W. T. Comner.

"Justification is God's judicial act in which He declares the repentant sinner free from condemnation and guilt and restores him to divine favor. It takes place when the sinner trusts in Christ and His merits for salvation." H. W. Tribble.

Justification is not making man righteous in character, but it is the declaration that the man, before God, is righteous because of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

According to Bible usage, justification is the act of declaring or pronouncing one righteous, or free from guilt and exposure to punishment. The sinner is declared righteous before God on account of the finished substitutionary work of Christ. This declaration that the sinner is free from guilt and exposure to punishment is made in heaven, and is available to the sinner the moment he receives Christ as his personal Substitute. The sinner is looked upon by the Lord as though he had never sinned.

"Justification is that instantaneous, everlasting, gracious, free, judicial act of God, whereby, on account of the merit of Christ's blood and righteousness, a repentant, believing sinner is freed from the penalty of the law, restored to God's favor, and considered as possessing the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ." T. P. Simmons.

1. Justification is instantaneous.

It is an act, and not a process. It occurs and is complete the moment the individual believes on Christ.

Let the vilest sinner in all the world come to Christ, and in that very moment his sins will be blotted out. He will become justified, and the perfect righteousness of Christ will be his.

2. Justification is irreversible.

The law does not hold a man in jeopardy the second time for the same crime. When God declares us justified, no one can change that verdict.

3. Justification is unpurchasable.

You can never buy it. The sinner deserves nothing at the hands of God except condemnation. Therefore, justification is wholly of grace. God is the author of justification. Man has nothing to do with his justification, except to receive it through the faith that the Holy Spirit enables him to exercise.

4. Justification is everlasting.

When one is justified, he is justified for all eternity. His justification can never be revoked nor reversed. It is once for all time and eternity.

II. The Method of Justification.

Paul wrote, "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The eminent apostle teaches us that justification is a gift. We do not deserve it. We are not entitled to it. We are justified freely by His grace.

Once the renowned preacher, Rowland Hill, went to a county fair. He heard the auctioneers selling their wares, and he said to the people: "I am going to hold an auction, too, to sell wine and milk without money and without price. The auctioneers, over there, find it a great difficulty to get you up to their prices. My difficulty is to bring you down to mine." That has always been the difficulty of the preachers—to get poor lost sinners to understand God's method of justification—to understand that justification is a free gift.

1. Justification is not by works.

Men are not justified by living a moral life, nor by keeping the law, nor by following the Golden Rule, nor by performing charitable deeds. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Galatians 2:16. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Ephesians 2:8-9. "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." Romans 3:20.

One may live the best life possible, do unto others as he would have them do unto him, and observe the law very carefully, but he will not be justified in God's sight. A man is not justified by offering prayers, by joining the church, by church attendance, by baptism or by the Lord's Supper. Our works do not save us, but we are saved by the works of Another.

2. Justification is by grace through faith in Christ.

"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Romans 3:24. When we believe on Christ as our personal Saviour, our faith brings justification down to us. When we repent of our sins and accept Christ by faith, we are justified forever. "A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Romans 3:28. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Romans 4:5.

We are counted righteous through His blood that was shed upon Calvary. We were under the curse, but He redeemed us by His blood. We deserved to die, but He took our place before God, took upon Himself all the penalty of a broken law, and now we are counted righteous because of Him and what He did for us. The one and only ground for our justification is the blood of Jesus Christ. We are justified, not by our works, but by His. "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Romans 8:30. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Romans 8:33. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1.

III. The Miracle of Justification.

Think of it! A sinner is guilty, but Jesus Christ paid the penalty for his sin upon Calvary, and rose again from the grave in order that redemption might be completed. Christ's righteousness is credited to the believer and he stands before God as if he had never sinned. "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." Romans 5:18-19. "Ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." I Corinthians 6:11.

When a man is justified, he is so completely restored to the favor of God that it is as though the man had never sinned in his life. Without man paying anything for it, God in His grace, through Christ, declares the man justified and so, wonder of wonders, the man though by nature a sinner is dismissed from the bar of God without a charge against him. That is a miracle. I never cease to wonder at it. It does sound surprising that it should be possible for a holy God to justify an unholy man. Isn't it wonderful that we can now come into the presence of God as though we had never sinned at all? We are justified because of our union with Christ through faith.

A man commits a crime against the state. The governor pardons him, but he is still guilty of his crime. In justification God not only pardons the sinner, but declares him innocent and justified. In one state a certain man refused a pardon which the governor offered him. He stated that he was innocent of any crime and told the governor that he wanted more than a pardon--he wanted the governor to declare him to be entirely innocent. That is what God does in justification. He not only delivers the soul from the penalty of sin, and save him from hell, but he makes him as if he had never sinned. He frees him completely and entirely from the guilt of his sin.

This justification is obtained through faith in Christ. When we repent of our sins and trust Christ as our Saviour, we are justified forever. When we are justified, we confess Christ as our Saviour and our lives bear Christian fruit. If your faith does not produce confession and good works, you may know that it is not a genuine and justifying faith.