

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW

Lesson 11 – Salvation: Justification & Grace

INTRODUCTION

What is war worth? What biblical issue would be so important to divide the church, countries, families and radically change culture and tradition? The Protestant Reformation sparked massive changes in every aspect of life and initiated multiple wars and divisions of political systems. At the foundation of this movement was the central concept of justification through faith alone.

Wayne Grudem writes:

A right understanding of justification is absolutely crucial to the whole Christian faith. Once Martin Luther realized the truth of justification by faith alone, he became a Christian and overflowed with the new-found joy of the gospel. The primary issue in the Protestant Reformation was a dispute with the Roman Catholic Church over justification. If we are to safeguard the truth of the gospel for future generations, we must understand the truth of justification. Even today, a true view of justification is the dividing line between the biblical gospel of salvation by faith alone and all false gospels of salvation based on good works. (*Systematic Theology*)

Outline:

- I. What is Justification
- II. How are we justified
- III. What are the biblical characteristics of justification?
- IV. Resolving tension

“The true understanding of the Bible consists in a true understanding of the meaning of its main words. No one can claim to know anything about the Bible if he is not thoroughly conversant with the meaning of such words as ‘sin,’ ‘salvation,’ ‘justification,’ ‘sanctification,’ ‘redemption,’ ‘imputation,’ ‘the new birth, and similar terms that are the links in the chain that holds the whole scripture together.” (From Donald Gray Barnhouse, Volume 2 of his 4 volume commentary on Romans)

I. What is justification? and other key terms

- a. Justification – to declare righteous. The key to this definition is that we are declared righteous by the judge. Some people today make a subtle change and claim that justification is the process of making us righteous. Although this difference seems small, in the world of theology it is huge. If justification makes us righteous, then a believer would be free of all sin. When a judge presents a verdict, he does not make the person righteous, he simply declares innocence.

JUSTIFICATION – “Process by which an individual is brought into an unmerited, right relationship with a person, whether that relationship is established between people or with God.” (Holman Bible Dictionary)

The opposite of justification is condemnation (Rom 8:1) – to be declared guilty. Again, the judge is not making us guilty (we do that ourselves) but declaring a judgment.

Roy Gingrich from *PreceptsAustin* defines three key terms of Christianity as:

- Justification – the imputation of God’s righteousness = God’s righteousness on me (Rom 3:21-5:21)
- Sanctification – the impartation of God’s righteousness = God’s righteousness in me (Rom 6:1-8:17)
- Glorification – the completion of God’s righteousness = God’s righteousness in all of me (Rom 8:18-39)

- b. Righteousness – “Being in a right relationship with God” (McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine*, p. 371)

Job 9:2 – “How can a man be righteous before God?”

- c. faith - Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God. This definition emphasizes that saving faith is not just a belief in facts but personal trust in Jesus to save me... The definition emphasizes personal trust in Christ, not just belief in facts about Christ. Because saving faith in Scripture involves this personal trust, the word “trust” is a better word to use in contemporary culture than the word “faith” or “belief.” The reason is that we can “believe” something to be true with no personal commitment or dependence involved in it. (Grudem, W. A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* Zondervan)

II. How am I Justified?

Justification is done in reaction to salvation. When the judge sees that Jesus has paid the price for a believer's sins, He immediately declares the Christian righteous. Jesus takes the punishment that we deserve, we receive His righteousness in return and God justifies believers based on what Jesus has done.

Ephesians 2:8-9 emphasizes that our salvation (and justification) is by GRACE (receiving something that we do not deserve) and is a gift (given without any cost or payment to the giver). The main purpose of this passage is to combat the fleshly desire to earn or work for a right relationship with God. It is easy for us to say that our salvation is a free gift, but the sinful nature tries to convince us otherwise. All other religions in the world include works and deeds as the method to approach God. Justification based on a free gift has never been accepted outside of the influence of the Holy Spirit. Even with the help of God's Spirit, Christians must battle the temptation to fall back to the worldly justification through human efforts. For a biblical example, refer to Peter's response to salvation through grace in Acts 15 (with the climax of Paul's message in v. 11) and then how Peter backslides in Galatians 2:11-16. Paul follows up his lesson in Galatians 2 with strong words – "if righteousness could be gained (justification) through the law, then Christ died for nothing!"

Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote,

"Because God is gracious, therefore sinful men are forgiven, converted, purified and saved. It is not because of anything in them, or that ever can be in them, that they are saved; but because of the boundless love, goodness, pity, compassion, mercy and grace of God."
(from *All of Grace*)

When we comprehend that nothing I can do will earn God's favor, nothing I accomplish will help me deserve righteousness and my best efforts are but filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) to God, we will truly celebrate and embrace the grace of God through Christ our Messiah.

III. Biblical Characteristics of Justification according to Romans 3:21-25

1. Justification is apart from the law – 3:21. The Old Testament Law was all about the achievement of man and his efforts to reach God. V. 20 states that no fleshly work will ever justify and v.23 states that ALL sin. The Greek phrase "apart from the Law" was placed first in the Greek text. Word order in the Greek determines importance or priority. Placing this phrase first reveals that Paul emphatically is stating that apart from the law, righteousness can be obtained.

Although this verse discounts the Law for justification, scripture does give a positive purpose for Law. The Law, along with the Prophets, gives testimony to the righteousness of God through faith. Through the Jewish judicial system, a valid account needed at least two

witnesses to legitimize the case. The case for Christ was supported by the Law and the Prophets.

2. Justification is through Christ – 3:22a. Faith means more than belief (cross reference James 2:19). Faith focuses on the object of the faith. The Law trusted a system. Religion trusts in man's efforts. Christianity trusts in God's grace and Christ's redemption.
3. Justification is for all men – 3:22b-23. The exclusivity of God had been eliminated with Christ. John 1:7; John 1:12; Romans 1:16; Colossians 3:11. Again the focus is on the grace of God and the redeeming act of the Messiah and not the righteousness or resume of the person being justified.
4. Justification is by Grace – 3:24. justification is a free gift by grace. God displays his mercy by not giving us what we deserve. God's grace is revealed by giving us what we do not deserve. The Greek word translated "freely" is also translated in John 15:25 as "without a cause." God justifies us without a cause. We do not deserve to be declared righteous but without a cause, God graciously justifies all who believe.
5. Justification is free but costs a great deal – 3:24-25
 - Public Disgrace – Jesus went from the throne of heaven to the courts of Pilate- from receiving praise and glory from the multitudes to false testimony, ridicule, verbal abuse and mockery- from a whole and complete physical state to receiving the most brutal beating and excruciating pain that someone can endure. (Phil 2:6-8)
 - Side note- the idea of Christ being publicly displayed contrasts the Ark of the Covenant which was hidden and for the eyes of the high priest alone. This made for a great exclamation point to Christ's ministry and sacrifice that was for all people.
 - Propitiation – Satisfying the righteous wrath of God
 - This means that by dying for us, He freed us from the guilt of our sins and restored us to God by **providing the needed satisfaction** and by removing every barrier to fellowship (**Ed note**: compare to "atonement" = "at-one-ment"). God can show mercy to us because Christ has **satisfied** the claims of justice. It is not often that an advocate (or lawyer) pays for his client's sins; yet that is what our Lord has done, and most remarkable of all, He paid for them by the sacrifice of Himself. (MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments. Nashville: Thomas Nelson)
 - By His blood – necessary for the forgiveness of sins (see Romans 5:1; 5:9; Hebrews 10:19-20; 7:27; 9:22)
 - The free gift of God did cost. The cost of sin to a holy God was high. The penalty for imperfection was the perfect Lamb and cost both the Father and the Son. Charles Spurgeon stated in a sermon delivered in 1865, "The death of Christ gloriously set forth divine justice, because it taught manifestly this truth,

that sin can never go without punishment. It is a law of God's moral universe that sin must be punished." Christ willingly took that punishment and it was costly.

V. Resolving Tension – Romans 3:28 and James 2:24

Romans 3:28: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law. (NASB)

James 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." (NASB)

What is going on here? Have we discovered a contradiction in the Bible? How are these 2 verses reconciled? Obviously, the Bible does not shy away from presenting both concepts and there is no contradiction here. Then, how is it reconciled?

1. In both verses, the same Greek word is used for "justified", which means "to put into a right relationship (with God), to acquit, to declare and treat as righteous". So, we cannot fall back on the Greek for a solution – the Greek doesn't solve everything!
2. We must look at the context of the 2 verses.
 - A. In Romans, Paul was writing to Jews and Gentiles. His theme was to answer the question: How can a holy & righteous God pardon the guilty sinner? Answer: by faith. We are justified *before God* by faith.

B. James is writing to a primarily Jewish audience. He is telling them to have fruit in keeping with their repentance. It is not the fact that they were religious Jews but how does their faith play out in everyday life? How are they to be justified *before men*? By works that people could see. They are to be "doers of the word and not merely hearers" (James 1:22). He describes "pure and undefiled religion" (1:27) in terms of what we do. James is a very practical book!

So, there is no contradiction here – both are correct. It is not a matter of faith vs. works but a faith that works!