

He is less holy; by redefining sin so that it is less evil; by denying the existence of God and life after death; or simply by making reconciliation with God something attainable by man through works, rituals, mysticism, sacraments, moralism, philanthropy, etc. But according to Scripture, man cannot accomplish his own salvation. You cannot atone for your sins; you cannot make yourself righteous; in fact, you cannot do one thing or think one thought that is pleasing to God!

*So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God* (Rom. 8:8; cf. Is. 64:6,7; Jer. 13:23).

There is only one way to be righteous before God. He must declare you righteous as a gift that you receive through faith in the finished work of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is justification by faith. This is how God saves men.

Justification by faith is the central doctrine of the Bible. Martin Luther called it 'the summary of Christian doctrine' and 'the sun which illuminates God's holy church.' Luther further described this doctrine as

*[T]he doctrine that we are redeemed from sin, death and the devil, and made partakers of eternal life, not by ourselves (and certainly not by our works, which are less than ourselves), but by the help of another, the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ.*

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) defines justification by faith as:

*An act of God's free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.*

Let us then consider what the Bible teaches about this momentous truth.

## THE DEFINITION OF JUSTIFICATION

The definition of the Greek verb (δικαίωω) translated *justify*, is **to declare or pronounce righteous**. It is a legal term, referring to the action of a judge in declaring someone innocent of a crime. A defendant found not guilty is *justified*, i.e. declared righteous. It is the opposite of condemnation:

*If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment . . . they shall **justify** the righteous, and **condemn** the wicked* (Deut. 25:1; cf. Matt. 12:37; Lk. 10:29; 16:15; Rom. 2:13; 1 Cor. 4:4).

It is important to note that the word does not mean *to make righteous*.

## THE MEANS OF JUSTIFICATION

The difficulty is how can God declare the guilty to be innocent and still be just?

*He that justifies the wicked, and he that condemns the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD* (Prov. 17:15; cf. Rom. 4:5 – [God] *justifies the ungodly*).

The answer to this dilemma is found in one word: *imputation*. The Greek verb (λογίζομαι) translated *impute*, is an accounting term and means *to count*. Used metaphorically, it means *to reckon, take into account, to consider*.

[Christ] was **numbered** with the transgressors (Mk. 15:28).

God reckoned Christ to be a sinner. He imputed to Christ our sin. He punished

Christ on the cross, as if He committed our sin. He was our Substitute:

*. . . the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all* (Is. 53:6; cf. Jn. 1:29).

On the other hand, He imputes to us the righteousness of Christ. Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled the law, living a sinless life on our behalf. His perfect righteousness is imputed to us:

*[A]s by the offense 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* (Rom. 5:18).

So God blesses us, not on the basis of our good deeds, but on the basis of Christ's perfect life imputed to us.

## By Grace Alone

We receive this righteous standing with God, purchased by Christ, as a gift of God's grace:

*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus* (Rom. 3:24).

## Through Faith Alone

We receive this gift through faith:

*But to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness* (Rom. 4:5).

*We conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law* (Rom. 3:28).

## In Christ Alone

The object of our faith is *Jesus Christ*:

*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ . . . (Gal. 2:16; also Rom. 3:26; Phil. 3:9).*

We use the adjective *alone* to emphasize (1) the exclusivity of God's grace as the origin of our salvation; (2) the exclusivity of faith as the means of receiving salvation; and (3) the exclusivity of Christ and the gospel as the object of our faith.

## **THE NATURE OF JUSTIFICATION**

Let us now briefly consider some basic Biblical principles regarding justification.

### **Justification Is Immediate and Complete**

Justification is not a process. As Christians we are not being justified; we are justified. Our sins are not in the process of being forgiven; they are forgiven. We are not in the process of coming to have peace with God; we have peace with God.

*. . . but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11).*

*. . . being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).*

Our standing is perfect, because the righteousness of Christ is perfect and His sacrifice was perfect (Heb. 10:14).

For this reason, the one who is justified can never be lost. Our justification does not depend on our works, but on Christ.

*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies (Rom. 8:33).*

*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputes not iniquity (Ps 32:1).*

### **Justification Is External to the Sinner**

Some teach that Christ makes us righteous and then, on the basis of that infused righteousness, justifies us. This idea is not Biblical. If our righteous standing is dependent on inward righteousness, we can not say that we are fully justified until we are perfectly holy. Hence our state would be uncertain until we reach heaven.

Justification is a declaration made about the sinner, external to the sinner, not something done in the sinner. It is a change of standing, not a change of heart. It is a declaration made on the basis of an alien (outside of us) righteousness, not an internal righteousness.

### **Justification Coincides with Regeneration**

Finally, it is important to note that justification is always accompanied by regeneration (a changed heart). The change wrought by God in the Christian's heart is not the basis of justification, but the evidence of justification. Anyone who claims to have forgiveness of sins, but still lives in sin, is in a state of self-deception (1 Jn. 1:6). These two works of God are distinct, yet inseparable (cf. Ps. 32:1-2; Jer. 31:33-34; Ez. 36:25-27; Jn. 5:24; Rom. 6; Titus 3:5-7).

*He will subdue our iniquities; and thou shalt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19).*

# **JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH**

*By Dean Good*

The psalmist, David, asked the question:

*Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? (Ps. 15:1).*

He then answered his own question:

*He that walks uprightly, and works righteousness . . . (Ps. 15:2).*

The difficulty is that no such person exists. Scripture sums up our condition:

*There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God . . . There is none that does good, no not one (Rom. 3:10-12).*

Man's one great problem is sin. All of us stand condemned as lawbreakers and rebels before a holy God. All of us are by birth, by choice, by practice, in thought, in word, and in deed, transgressors of God's law. God gave us His law, summarized in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20), to show us our sinful condition:

*By the law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20).*

Because we are sinners, we are separated from God (Is. 59:2) and under His wrath (Jer. 10:10). Therefore, we face physical death, and ultimately eternal death in the lake of fire: the just punishment of our sins (Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:11-15; 21:8).

The religions and philosophies of man have sought to circumvent our plight in countless ways: by reinventing God so that