

## Justified in Christ

The Scriptures mention a number of matters as instrumental in the sinner's justification or acquittal. Man is expressly said to be justified by God, grace, faith, Christ's blood, the Holy Spirit, and by performing works that God has required (Romans 3:30; Romans 3:24; Romans 3:28; Romans 5:9; 1 Corinthians 6:11; James 2:24).

When a careful study is made of the instruments involved in justification, harmony is seen. For instance, God the Father provides the opportunity for man's release from the guilt of his sins. Grace or favor emanates from God and is the answer to the problem of man not being able to effect his own salvation. Faith is man's part and allows man to lay hold of God's mercy. Hence, salvation is **"by grace . . . through faith"** (Ephesians 2:8). Jesus' blood is the means of acquittal. Jesus said, **"For this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"** (Matthew 26:28).

The Holy Spirit is active in man's justification in that He has provided the word in which we learn of justification (John 14-16). As mentioned, faith on man's part is necessary (John 8:24). The required faith is an active and obedient faith (Galatians 5:6). The works expressed by saving faith are not meritorious, though. How can man glory in "belief," "repentance," "confession of Christ's deity," and "baptism"? (John 6:29; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 10:9-10; Acts 2:38). The Christian is created unto humbly doing the works that God has ordained (Ephesians 2: 10).

Because of the universal nature of the gospel which the Apostle Paul was commissioned to preach, he felt under an obligation to proclaim it in as many places and to as many different kinds of people as possible. Hence his desire to preach it at Rome, where all sorts and conditions of men were to be found in abundance, Greeks and barbarians, Jews and Gentiles, wise and foolish. It is while he is expressing this desire in the first chapter of the *Epistle to the Romans* that he makes in verses 16 and 17 a brief and concise, yet remarkably comprehensive, summary of the nature and content of the Christian gospel. In this summary we find the first allusion in the epistle to the basic doctrine of justification by faith.

This passage is translated in the RSV thusly: **16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."**

Paul here makes a series of positive statements about the gospel, the knowledge of which completely rids him of any sense of shame in preaching it. Every statement in this tense and emphatic definition is pregnant with meaning, and no

brief summary can do full justice to it. Its propositions may, however, for clearness be enumerated as follows:

1. The gospel is a word of **power**; a truth which the apostle was never tired of emphasizing, but which, we may conjecture, he feels compelled to underline in view of the opposition of those at Corinth, the provenance of this Epistle, and elsewhere, who saw in the crucified Carpenter of Galilee a manifestation of nothing but weakness (see 1 Corinthians 1:23).

2. The gospel is a word of power because it is concerned with an action, of which **God** is the agent. The meaning of this action it is Paul's main purpose in this Epistle to unfold; but the readers who are Christians know full well that it is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus to which he is referring. Both events were originated by **God**, and both were expressions of His **power**.

I remember watching a film in school about the evolution of flight, featuring a number of contraptions that people invented while trying to fly. One was a made from bicycle with a set of bird-like wings attached to it. Pedaling the bike caused the tires to roll while a series of gears, chains and levers moved the wings in a flapping motion.

The rider was shown heading full speed toward the edge of a cliff with his wings flapping. His momentum carried him off the edge and allowed him to "fly" about three feet through the air before he headed down to crash in a heap.

Now, it can be truly said that this man believed his machine would fly. His willingness to ride it off a cliff proves his faith in it and while we cannot doubt his sincerity, we must question the object of his faith. No amount of faith in that silly flying machine would make it fly. It was simply the wrong object of faith for flying.

Likewise, many people who think they have saving faith really have faith in the wrong object. They are sincerely convinced that they are good enough to earn Heaven, or that they will gain entrance because they took certain sacraments, they asked Jesus to come into their heart, they prayed a certain prayer, or they believe they spoke in tongues or joined a church.

As the man on the flying machine, these folks very sincerely believe. The problem is not their faith. The problem is their **object** of faith.

The Bible tells us in Galatians 3 that the works of the law are worthless objects of saving faith and Isaiah 64:6 says all of our righteousness is as filthy rags being waved before the Lord.

The only true object of saving faith is Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus said in John 14:6, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes unto the Father, but by Me."***

We hear the term “justification” talked about from the pulpit, and we hear about it from other Christians, and we read of it in the Bible. But, what exactly does this term mean? If you are like me, I like to keep things simple. Without minimizing the significance and the profoundness of the term by putting it in layman's terms, I find the answer to be quite simple.

Let us say that we committed every crime that is known to man, were arrested and imprisoned while awaiting the trial. Then, after the trial we were found guilty of all crimes and sentenced to death. However, just at the moment that our sentence was to be handed down someone in the courtroom stood up and willingly stepped forward and says: “Judge, I will pay the penalty on his behalf.” The judge accepts the offer, slams the gavel down, decrees that we are acquitted, and are now free to go home. Would that not just shock you? Bear in mind that we committed every crime known to man, and because of double jeopardy, we can never be charged for any of these crimes again. Furthermore, because we were acquitted, these crimes will never appear on our record. That is what it means to **“be justified in Christ.”** Notice that the term is past tense which means that Christ already paid the penalty so that you could never be charged, thrown into prison, or sentenced to death again.

Everything God did and accomplished through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ is available to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

The faith in Jesus Christ is available because we have been justified (legally acquitted of all sin) without any cost to us because of God's grace. The faith in Jesus Christ is only available through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Our legal justification was accomplished through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. That justification is then made available to us through God's grace free of charge.

Justification can be defined as either God declaring a person “not guilty” or God declaring a person to be “righteous.” Either way, God cancels the guilt of a person's sins and credits righteousness to him instead. This declaration of righteousness is perfectly legal due to Christ paying the penalty for sin and living a life of perfect righteousness.

Our justification is by grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus. Redemption is a word relating to the slave market. It refers to the release obtained by paying a ransom. Our redemption released us from guilt and its judgment. Our redemption is the deliverance from the slavery of sin because the ransom was paid in Christ's death.

3. The power of this divine action lies, it is inferred, in its ability to do something, which no effort on the part of any man could possibly accomplish, such as our own salvation. Once again, the apostle does not stay at this point to examine the

character of this salvation; but the readers know that what is meant is salvation from sin and its consequence, for herein lies the whole *raison d'être* of the gospel, which they have received.

4. This message of a **“power of God unto salvation”** must be preached to *everyone*, for all men need the salvation which it alone can effect.

5. But this salvation becomes a reality only to **“everyone that believes”**; only to those, in other words, who give no formal, or merely intellectual assent to the divine action by which it was procured, but who respond to it with the whole of their being and rely upon it, *and upon nothing else* for their salvation. Their belief is demonstrated by their obedience.

6. The reason why the gospel can and does bring about this salvation is that in it there is continually being revealed, every time it is preached, **“a righteousness of God.”** This does not mean that the main purpose of the gospel is to proclaim that God is Himself righteous, for that had been long ago revealed to Israel. The **“righteousness”** of which Paul here speaks concerns others as well as God, for it is described as **“a righteousness of God . . . by faith.”** In other words, it has to be **received** by men from God by *faith*.

But what is received is not righteousness as a moral attribute but righteousness as a status, in which God places every sinner who has faith in the divine act of power proclaimed in the gospel. It is a righteousness of **God**, because God, being alone entirely righteous, alone can bestow it: and it is a righteousness without which every human being stands under His condemnation. Apart from it, there is nothing for man to do except to pray the prayer of the Psalmist: **“Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord; for in Thy sight shall no men living be justified”** (Psalm 143:2). But with it, there is absolute security, as Paul implies, when he writes in Romans 8:1: **“There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”**

God set forth Christ Jesus to be propitiation by means of His blood. The word **“propitiation”** means a sacrifice of atonement which satisfies the righteous wrath of God. In other words, it indicates appeasement. Without appeasement, everyone would be destined to eternal punishment.

**“Propitiation”** also means **“Mercy Seat.”** In the Old Testament, the high priest once a year would sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial Passover lamb upon the Mercy Seat to temporarily cover the sins of the people. God has now set forth Christ Jesus to **BE** our Mercy Seat through His blood. In 1 John 2:1-2 it says:

**“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate (defense attorney) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”**

Jesus Christ is the Mercy Seat and payment for our sins. He is also our defense attorney to plead our cause before the Father after we sin. He can be the propitiation and the Advocate because He is righteous. In Hebrews 10:10 through 14 [ESV] we see:

***<sup>10</sup>And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. <sup>11</sup>And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup>But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup>waiting from that time until His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet. <sup>14</sup>For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.***

And the Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 1:17-19 [ESV], ***<sup>17</sup>And if you call on Him as Father Who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, <sup>18</sup>knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup>but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.***

Back in Romans, after those wonderful truths revealed in verses 22 through 26, the epistle sets off on a long journey showing how our justification was not the result of works but of faith. Look closely at what Paul had to say in verse 27 of chapter 3 [ESV]: ***“Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.”***

Let us also take a look at the next three verses in this same chapter [ESV]:

***<sup>28</sup>For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. <sup>29</sup>Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since God is one – Who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. <sup>31</sup>Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.***

***“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”*** Paul injected in Romans 5:1. Guilt and condemnation are adversely overwhelming, but acquittal results in ***“peace that passes all understanding”*** (Philippians 4:7).

As a result of justification, man can be saved from the impending wrath of God, be made an heir of God, and be freed from the guilt of all things (Romans 5:9; Titus 3:7; Acts 13:39).

The whole issue of justification through faith or works seems like it should not be a big issue, but it was and still is. The whole of Romans chapter four is devoted

to Abraham and how his faith was credited to him for righteousness. Certainly there would not be so much of Romans devoted to this subject if it were not vital and also misunderstood. For now, let us remain thankful for the understanding that our justification is by God's grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus and appropriated to us through our obedient, saving faith in Jesus Christ.

So what is saving faith? It is trust or reliance on the facts that Jesus Christ died in your place, to pay the penalty for your sins and then came back to life after three days.

Dwight L. Moody told the story of a young man who did not want to serve in Napoleon Bonaparte's army. When he was drafted, a friend volunteered to go in his place. The substitution was made, and some time later the surrogate was killed in battle.

The same young man was, through a clerical error, drafted again. "You can't take me" he told the startled officers. "I'm dead. I died on the battlefield." They argued that they could see him standing right in front of them, but he insisted they look on the roll to find the record of his death. Sure enough, there on the roll was the man's name, with another name written beside it.

The case finally went to the emperor himself. After examining the evidence, Napoleon said, "Through a surrogate, this man has not only fought, but has died in his country's service. No man can die more than once; therefore the law has no claim on him."

Some two thousand years ago, Jesus went to a cross to bear the penalty that rightly belonged to us. He died in our place and through Him, and now our names are written in the Lamb's *Book of Life* when we submit to Him in obedient, saving faith.

The gospel (or good news) of Christ is that He died for your sins and rose from the dead. To have saving faith in this you must turn from reliance on yourself, your religion, or anything else, to Christ, trusting His death and resurrection to pay your penalty for sins.

As seen, there are many considerations involved in the great subject of justification. Man, by law, is condemned and cannot effect his freedom. However, God has provided the means of man's being pronounced innocent. All that God has supplied is sure and certain. However, the failure is on the part of man. Man must exercise obedient, saving faith (Ephesians 2:8-10). If justification were all of God, as some teach, universal salvation would result. Alas, only a few will be saved because only a few will obey God and accept His terms of pardon (Matthew 7:13-14; Hebrews 5:8-9). The matter that is incomprehensible about God's justification is why do most remain in a state of condemnation?