
“Paid in Full”

The Doctrine of Justification

Various Passages

This morning’s lesson on the Doctrine of Regeneration, continues a discussion of the subject of conversion. These studies have included the Doctrines of Salvation, Repentance, Faith and last week’s study on Regeneration. As with previous lessons, this is intended as simply an overview of the subject.

If you would like to have earlier studies from this series, they are available at www.cfdevotionals.org. Follow the Bible study link. As with the previous doctrinal studies, the material is drawn primarily from *Through the Bible in One Year*.¹

The Doctrine of Justification is found throughout scripture. It is a truth that has often been lost. It is a truth that disappeared from Roman Orthodoxy and its rediscovery was the foundational truth that brought about the protestant reformation. It was this truth Martin Luther discovered in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11.

“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” ... “Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.””

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- I Introduction**
 - II A Definition of Justification**
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I Introduction: There is a significant distinction between what we saw last week in the study of regeneration and justification. Where the former is a term used to describe the inner change with the individual, the latter is essentially a legal concept.

Justification focuses on our positional status before God. It relates to the implications of Christ’s payment for sin on the cross. When we accept His payment for our sin, our “bill” is stamped “paid in full.” Our sins are paid for, not by anything we have done, but by accepting Christ’s payment. The bottom line is sin must be paid for; the only question is, will we make the payment, or will we accept Christ’s? Tying last week’s study to this, Stringfellow states:

“Regeneration is the change in the inner man through faith in Christ, while justification is a legal term which pictures the believer’s new status before God. Justification is grounded on the fact of man’s sin be-

¹ Stringfellow, Alan B., ed., *Through the Bible in One Year*, Vol. 3, “Great Truths of the Bible,” Copyright © 1981 by Virgil W. Hensley, Inc., Publisher, Tulsa, OK, p. 123-128.

ing laid on Christ (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus bears the sin of all who accept Him. He is our substitute (1 Peter 2:24). As the sinful nature in man was caused by the fall, one single event (Genesis 3), so man, in the same manner, must be raised from the fall by the Lord Jesus Christ through one supreme event, the Cross (Romans 5:18-19).²

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

“Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:18-19).

II A Definition of Justification: Let’s start by looking at a summary of the concept of regeneration as found in the NIV Dictionary:

JUSTIFICATION (Heb. *tsedheq, tsadheq*; Gr. *dikaioo*, to make valid, to absolve, to vindicate, to set right). Justification may be defined as “that judicial act of God by which, on the basis of the meritorious work of Christ, imputed to the sinner and received through faith, God declares the sinner absolved from sin, released from its penalty, and restored as righteous.” It is being placed by God in a right relationship with himself. The doctrine is found in Paul’s letters, chiefly those to Galatia and Rome.

As a reversal of God’s attitude toward the sinner because of the sinner’s new relation in Christ, justification is: (1) a declarative act by which the sinner is declared to be free from guilt and the consequences of sin (Rom 4:6-8; 5:18-19; 8:33-34; 2 Cor 5:19-21); (2) a judicial act in which the idea of judgment and salvation are combined to represent Christ fulfilling the law on behalf of the sinner (Matt 10:41; Rom 3:26; 8:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; 1 Tim 1:9; 1 Peter 3:18); (3) a remissive act in which God actually remits sin in complete forgiveness (Rom 4:5; 6:7); and (4) a restorative act by which the forgiven sinner is restored to favor through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness (Rom 5:11; 1 Cor 1:30; Gal 3:6).³

“David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”” (Romans 4:6-7).

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

“However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:5).

“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

² Ibid., p. 129.

³ Douglas, J. D., and Merrill C. Tenney, editors, NIV Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1989 The Zondervan Corporation.

Stringfellow as part of defining justification gives three supporting statements.⁴

- 1. Justification Originates in the Grace of God:** As with all we've seen throughout scripture, justification is a work of God. There is nothing we can do to deserve or earn it. It is a product of His grace. It is also important to remember we are talking about a legal concept rather than an internal change, as is the case with regeneration. Paul notes in Romans 3:24 that we are ...

“... justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

- 2. Justification is the Act of God Whereby the Guilty Sinner is Declared Just by Faith in Christ:** This is why we say justification is that act by which God declares us, as sinners, as just by our faith in Christ. We see this with Abraham.

“What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”” (Romans 4:3).

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies” (Romans 8:31-33).

It is important to understand beyond being forgiven, having our sin declared paid in full, that being justified means God sees us through Christ's righteousness, as if we had never sinned. The NIV Dictionary describes it this way:

“Mere acquittal or remission would leave the sinner in the position of a discharged criminal. Justification implies that God's treatment of the sinner is as if that one had never sinned. The sinner is now regarded as being personally righteous in Christ (Gal 3:6). There is not only acquittal but also approval, not only pardon, but also promotion.”⁵

“Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”” (Galatians 3:6).

“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39).

- 3. Justification is Based on the Completed Work of Christ:** God is the one who declares us just based on the completed work of Christ on the cross and validated by His resurrection.

“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:24).

III Example of Justification: Here Stringfellow turns to the Old Testament and Paul's presentation of Abraham as an illustration of justification understood by his readers in Romans.

⁴ Stringfellow, p. 129-130.

⁵ Douglas et al.

Romans 4 then presents Abraham as God's demonstration of justification by faith rather than justification through the Law.

“After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

But Abram said, “O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:1-6).

As Paul says:

“What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:3).

This is the point of justification. God said it, God did it. There is nothing Abram could do. And most importantly the Law does nothing to justify either.

“For the promise to Avraham and his seed that he would inherit the world did not come through legalism but through the righteousness that trust produces.” ... “Here is what I am saying: the legal part of the Torah, which came into being 430 years later, does not nullify an oath sworn by God, so as to abolish the promise.. (Romans 4:13; Galatians 3:17 CJB).

The point of the example is to reinforce the principle that what was true for Abraham is still true for believers today. The point is God does not change. So, we are not justified by works, but by faith.

“Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.”” ... “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Galatians 3:11; Romans 4:5).

IV The Process of Justification: As we have already noted, we are justified by faith alone, in Christ alone. This is the truth that undercuts the position of all cults, even the position within Christendom which links work with salvation, either in obtaining or maintaining it.

“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” ... “... he (God) did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:28, 26).

It probably should be noted there is a distinction between the justification that Paul is talking about and the justification James speaks of. Paul speaks of justification before God, while James speaks of justification before men.

But since men cannot see the heart, James says we demonstrate our faith by our works. This is an issue of our testimony before others. James position on works must not be confused with salvation. Stringfellow notes that James says ...

“ *“Faith without works is dead ... (James 2:26). This is true—just as a tree without fruit is useless. What is the explanation to this question between Paul and James? James says, “**Show me and I will show thee**” (James 2:18). Jesus said, “By their fruits shall ye know them” (Matthew 7:20).*

*Paul tells us how a sinner is justified in God’s sight by faith, apart from works. James speaks of the ones already justified by faith and how these people **may be justified in the sight of men.**”⁶*

Since God sees the heart, He knows our faith.

“The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7).

On the other hand, while we can’t know for sure if a person is saved or not, we do know if their works support their claim to salvation, which is the point James’ makes. He too goes to Abraham, although he focuses on the incident between Abraham and Isaac when God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son.

“And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (James 2:23-24).

Burdick summarizes this distinction in his commentary on James when he states:

“ *“The scripture” to which James refers as “fulfilled” is Genesis 15:6. The account of the offering of Isaac on the altar appears in Genesis 22:1-14. Thirty years may have intervened between the events of these two chapters. In the former passage Abraham’s faith is said to have been “credited to him as righteousness.” The obedient offering of Isaac in the latter passage “fulfilled” the statement of the former passage. This is not to be understood as the fulfillment of a prophecy. Rather, it is fulfillment in the sense of completion (cf. v.22). What Abraham did in Genesis 22 was the outworking of the faith described in chapter 15. That it was the kind of faith that justifies is shown in chapter 22. God’s act of crediting Abraham with righteousness because of his faith was vindicated by Abraham’s act of obedience in offering his son. In this way Genesis 22:1-14 fulfilled Genesis 15:6. James adds, as a parallel description of Abraham’s standing with God, that “he was called God’s friend” (see 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isa 41:8). This is another way of saying that he was right with God. It was not that Abraham earned the favor of God by obeying him; instead, he acted as a friend of God should act and thus showed that he was in reality God’s friend.*

In this summary statement James assumes that a person is justified by faith but “not by faith alone.” It is by faith and “by what he does.” Taken by itself, this declaration may seem blatantly contradictory to such Pauline statements as that of Ephesians 2:8-9. If both passages are studied in context, however, the seeming contradiction disappears. James has indicated that deeds complete faith (v.22). They are the outworking of genuine faith. Thus deeds are the evidence that saving faith is present in a person’s life (v.18). James was combating a superficial faith that had no wholesome effect in the life of the professed believer. Paul, on the other hand, was combating legalism—the belief that one may earn saving merit before God by his good deeds. Consequently Paul insisted that salvation is not by works but by faith alone. However, the following context of the Ephesians passage (2:10) reveals that Paul did not depreciate good works. He declared, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” In Paul, therefore, as well as in James, good deeds are the product of genuine faith. In both writers faith that produces no good deeds is incapable of saving a person.”⁷

⁶ Stringfellow, p. 132.

⁷ Burdick, Donald W., The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, “James,” Zondervan Interactive Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990

V Conclusion: I want to end where we started. Regeneration is that internal change which God performs at the moment of salvation.

“ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins” (Colossians 2:13).

Justification is that legal term by which God declares us righteous.

“ ... we ... rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” (Romans 5:11).

The most important point to take from these two studies is the fact that it is God who does all this, and we are the recipients of His love and mercy. Now we need to live in the reality of our blessings.

*I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all, and frees us
From the accursed load.
I bring my guilt to Jesus,
To wash my crimson stains
White in His blood most precious,
Till not a spot remains.*

*I lay my wants on Jesus
All fullness dwells in Him;
He heals all my diseases,
He doth my soul redeem.
I lay my griefs on Jesus,
My burdens and my cares;
He from them all releases,
He all my sorrows shares.*

*I long to be like Jesus
Meek, loving, lowly, mild;
I long to be like Jesus
The Father's holy Child.
I long to be with Jesus,
Amid the heav'nly throng,
To sing with saints His praises,
To learn the angels' song.⁸*

⁸ Bonar, Horatius, The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration, “*I Lay My Sins on Jesus*,” World Music, Waco, TX, 1986, #340.

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I Introduction

(Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Isaiah 53:6; 1 Peter 2:24; Romans 5:18-19)

II A Definition of Justification:

(Romans 4:6-7; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 4:5; 1 Corinthians 1:30; see Romans 4:8; 2 Corinthians 5:19-20; Matthew 10:41; Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; p 2 21 Peter 3:18; Romans 6:7, 5:11)

1. Justification _____ in the _____ of God
(Romans 3:24)

2. Justification is the _____ of God Whereby the _____ is
_____ Just by _____.
(Romans 4:3, 8:31-33; Galatians 3:6; Acts 13:38-39)

3. Justification is Based on the _____ of Christ.
(Romans 4:24)

III Example of Justification:

(Genesis 15:1-6; Romans 4:3; Romans 4:13; Galatians 3:17, 3:11; Romans 4:5)

IV The Process of Justification:

(Romans 3:28, 26; 1 Samuel 16:7; James 2:23-24)

V Conclusion:

(Colossians 2:13; Romans 5:11)