

## Justification

Romans 3:21-4:8

**It is a principle in most Western courts of law that a sentence in any case must be in accordance with the facts presented.** No judge has the right to clear the guilty or to condemn the innocent; and if justice is to be served, the judgment by the judge must be in keeping with this principle. In the Old Testament this principle is laid down very clearly in respect to the administration of justice in the nation Israel. **In Deuteronomy 25:1 it is written,** “If there be a controversy between men, and they come into judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked.” **This verse literally says,** “They shall acquit the righteous and condemn the wicked.” **In order that justice should be served, the Mosaic Law required that every sentence should be in accord with this principle.** It is because of this principle that Justice has always been pictured as being blindfolded, so that judgment should be according to truth and not with respect to persons.

**This is a principle of law designed to regulate the affairs of men, but it is also a principle by which God must administer justice.** When God, as a holy and righteous Judge, sits in judgment on men, His judgment must be in accordance with truth and righteousness. **God must justify the righteous and condemn the wicked.** **No judge could administer justice who treated facts other than as they are; and a judge would be an unjust judge if, out of favoritism, he cleared the guilty or condemned the righteous.** This law is so inflexible that it has given rise to what might be called “**the greatest riddle ever faced,**” the riddle that God faced when, as a holy and righteous God, He sought to accept sinners into His presence. **How could God be just and at the same time justify the ungodly?**

**The Apostle Paul has stated this problem in Romans 3:26.** **How could God “be just, and the justified of him which believeth in Jesus?”** Paul summarized the teaching of the first three chapters of Romans as he gave this divine verdict in verse 23, “...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” **This states the universality of sin, the experience of the human race in sin. “All have sinned...”** **Therefore, when God a just and righteous God, sits in judgment in order to dispense justice, He must pronounce the entire world guilty, for that is a true fact.** How then could God, who is a God of love and compassion, a God of mercy and grace, save any man? **How could God receive a sinner into**

His presence when such are the facts? God must acquit or justify the righteous, and God must condemn the guilty.

We as parents are apt to find excuses for the misbehavior of our children. We do not sit as judges on their conduct; when they disobey us we are prone to find some excuse for their conduct, for we do not want to administer justice, as we know that it should be administered. So we explain away their conduct. In so doing, we are not dealing justly; we are not dealing on the basis of the facts in the case. Because they are children, and we love them, we excuse and do not condemn the guilty. But, if it is the neighbor's children, we judge justly, but love keeps us from judging our own.

God cannot deal so unjustly with men. God, in keeping with His holiness and righteousness and justice, must judge and condemn the guilty. But since the entire world is guilty, how can any man be saved? That is the problem that God faced. How could He be just, and at the same time justify the one who does no more than believe? And this problem brings before us that which is the simplest and yet one of the most profound truths in all the Word of God: the doctrine of justification. It is that doctrine that we will study tonight as we discover how a just and loving God solved the problem so that He could receive sinners into His presence.

If you were to turn to Romans 8 you would find that the doctrine of justification is logically the conclusion of a process. I emphasize the world *logically*, because chronologically all God's saving work takes place instantaneously when we exercise faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. There is no chronological development in the act of salvation. But there may be a logical development, and it is that logical progression that Paul refers to in Romans 8:29-30 when he says, "...whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 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." You will notice the progression in Paul's presentation: it began with foreknowledge, moves on to predestination, then to a divine call, and then to justification. And justification is viewed as the climactic act of God in His saving work. It can be followed only by our glorification when we are transformed into the image of His Son in glory.

One becomes a child of God by the new birth. When one accepts Jesus Christ as personal Savior, that one is placed *in* Christ Jesus by the baptizing

**work of the Holy Spirit.** When one is placed in Christ Jesus he partakes of all that Christ is, just as when a bride is joined to her bridegroom she partakes of all that belongs to the husband.

**In order to understand God's work of justification it is necessary to remember something that takes place when we are placed in Christ Jesus.** First of all, according to 2 Corinthians 5:17, "...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." **If any man be in Christ, all things have passed away. By that statement Paul is affirming the truth that all of our old relationships have been severed.** We were born into the world related to Satan; he was the god of the world, the prince of the powers of the air, and we are members of his kingdom. We were related to the kingdom of darkness, to the kingdom of sin. **We were related to Adam, for Adam was our head.** We were related to sin, for sin not only characterized us but we were bond-slaves to sin. We were dominated by an old nature, which was the commanding general who motivated and controlled us. Those are the "old things" that have been broken, or have "passed away." **When we were placed in Christ Jesus we were made a new creation.** We were related to a new Head, Jesus Christ. We were given a new divine nature; we were brought into a new Kingdom and made citizens of a new commonwealth. **Our old relationships have been terminated and a new relationship has been instituted.**

**Twenty years ago, when we moved from Florida to North Carolina to become pastor of Mountain Grove Church, we left an old relationship and an old citizenship.** We had been citizens of Florida. We paid our taxes there and by that recognized the existence of that citizenship. **It was there that we had our residence.** Our life was governed and controlled by the laws of Florida. When we moved to North Carolina and established legal residence here, we automatically severed the old relationship. **By instituting a new relationship as citizens of North Carolina, we automatically cut off the old citizenship.** The State of Florida could no longer levy taxes on us; we were no longer subject to the laws of Florida as long as we were residing in North Carolina. The fact of the establishment of a new relationship automatically terminated the old relationship. Paul has established the fact that when we were put *in* Christ Jesus the old relationship was terminated and a new relationship was instituted because we were made a new creation in Christ.

**The second thing Paul affirms is the fact that we, because we were in Christ Jesus, were made righteous.** This truth is plainly taught in 1 Corinthians 1:30 when Paul says, "But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto

us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” To be *in Christ Jesus is to be made righteous*. 2 Corinthians 5:21 affirms the fact that Christ, “who knew no sin, was made sin for us.” Philippians 3:7-9, Paul says, “...what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but waste, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” **In these passages and in many others, Paul is making it very clear that the very moment we received Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, we were made *righteous in the sight of holy God*.** Therefore, when God looks at *any* believer, regardless of how *spiritual* or how *carnal* we might think they are, God sees in them the very righteousness of Jesus Christ so that there is *no fault, no guilt, and no basis for condemnation*.

**That means that the child of God has received forgiveness and has experienced redemption.** Paul says this in Romans 3:24-25, “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” **As one studies this passage of scripture it becomes clear there are several truths that stand out.**

**First, there is redemption in Christ Jesus.** In a previous study we look at the fact that the New Testament of redemption teaches us that when we were bond-slaves to sin, we were purchased in the slave market to be taken out of bondage to sin. We have been set free from sin’s *dominion*, from sin’s *guilt*, and from sin’s *penalty*, in the glorious liberty that belongs to the children of God.

**Second, there is a remission of sins that are past, a putting away, a canceling out of the catalog of sins that was charged against the sinner.** Before one could be accepted by God the sin question had to be settled, and that truth was affirmed in Ephesians 1:7, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” Therefore, the Bible clearly teaches that God has granted forgiveness to the one who is in Christ Jesus so that our indebtedness has been removed, for the debt has been paid, and we are made righteous in Him.

**Third, we have been perfected in Christ.** This truth is presented to us again in Hebrews 10:14, “For by one offering he (God) hath perfected for ever them that

are sanctified.” Therefore, when God looks at the child of God, He does not see our stumbling and falling, He does not see all of our imperfections and struggles, He sees us with all of the perfection that belongs to Jesus Christ.

**Fourth, we have received the fullness of Christ.** This truth is seen in John 1:16, “And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.” But this truth is expanded on in Colossians 1:19, “...it pleased the Father that in him (that is, in Christ) should all fullness dwell.” In Colossians 2:9-10 Paul goes one step further, “For in him (Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are completed in him, who is the head of all principality and power.” You see, just as Adam was the *head* of the human race and we were deemed sinners by our natural birth, Jesus is the *Head* of the church and we are deemed righteous by our new birth. Just as we received all the *failure* of Adam, we receive all of the *fullness* of Jesus Christ.

**Therefore, justification does not depend on altering the holiness of God, nor does it depend on altering the fact that you were once a sinner.** The judgment of God stands sure that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” But God has so perfectly dealt with your sin and mine, so perfectly met every demand on the sinner, that when the believer is *in* Christ Jesus there is no more basis to exclude him than there is to exclude the eternal, holy Son of God Himself.

Having said all of that, I want to very quickly give you the seven facets of the doctrine of justification. **First of all, we are justified by God.** Romans 8:30 says, “...whom he (God) called, them he also justified...” Verse 33 says, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth...” Romans 3:26 says, “...that he (that is, God) might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

**Second, we are justified by blood.** The Bible teaches that God planned for our righteousness, provided for our righteousness, and that righteousness is solely through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

**Third, we are justified by faith.** Romans 3:28 says, “...we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Romans 4:5 says, “...to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**Fourth, we are justified by grace.** Romans 3:24 says, “Being justified freely by his grace...” The word translated “freely” here means “without a cause.” God did not save us because He saw something in us worth saving, He saved us because of His matchless love and grace.

**Fifth, we are justified by the Spirit.** After giving us the list of the sins of the flesh in verses 9-10, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:11, “And such were some of you; but you are washed, you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” The Holy Spirit is the agent in the new birth Who puts us in Christ. And because we are in Christ, we are made righteous – justified.

**Sixth, we are justified by works.** In other words, the *evidence* of our justification will manifest itself in our works. James 2:21 says, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works...?” In verse 24 he says, “You see then how that by works a man is justified...” In verse 25 he asks, “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works...?” **These verses have reference to justification before men.** After a man has been declared acquitted by God, he will evidence his acquittal before men by the righteousness his position in Christ produces.

**Seven, we are justified in Christ.** That gives us the *position* of the believer. Look once more at 2 Corinthians 5:21 where we are told that God “hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

**Here is the summery of justification.** Justified by God is righteousness *planned*; justified by blood is righteousness *provided*, justified by faith is righteousness *procured*; justified by grace is the *principle* by which righteousness operates; justified by the Spirit is the *power* by which we are made righteous, justified by works is the righteousness *proved*; and justified in Christ is righteousness *possessed*. What a glorious doctrine.