

## 1. What Does it Mean to be Justified?

- a. It is to be "right" with God
  - i. "Justify" (*δικαιωω*) is the verbal form of "righteous" (*δικαιοσυνη*), so to be justified is to be declared righteous, that is to have the standing of righteousness before God
    1. Record of right actions – "justified"
    2. Record of lawbreaking – "guilty"
  - ii. It is to be in a state of complete and utter obedience and thus owing God nothing because it has all been fulfilled
    1. Legal standing whereby God has "nothing against you", no liabilities, no claims
    2. Thus, it is not merely an absence of lawbreaking, but also the presence of law-keeping
- b. It is a gift
  - i. "justified" (declared to be in a right standing with God) "by His grace, as a gift"
    1. Thus, this righteous standing before God is something that we *receive*
  - ii. "apart from the Law"
    1. Thus, it does not come from our ability or performance to adhere to the Law
    2. Now, this sounds contradictory, based upon the definition of righteousness above, but there is a solution
    3. Note 3:20 – "nobody will be justified in His sight by observing the Law"
    4. Righteousness is "free" in that is not merited or earned by us, but completely given

## 2. How do we receive this gift of righteousness?

- a. By faith, not by our efforts
- b. By faith in Christ, not by "faith" in general
  - i. Two primary variations of "faith" in the world
    1. Faith = Religion, nominal
      - a. There are many "faiths" today practiced in the world
      - b. "The Buddhist faith" or "The Muslim faith"
      - c. You have your "faith" I have mine, etc.
      - d. Simply a synonym of religion or worldview
    2. Faith = subjective personal choice
      - a. Not tied to particular truth or fact in any sense, "just have faith" or "just believe"
      - b. "You must have faith in Jesus" is presented as a personal subjective choice from among other choices; it is the choice that is important, not the object
        - i. "You can have faith in Buddhism" or "You can have faith in Allah or Mohammed" or "Believe in yourself" are alternative options
        - ii. Faith becomes the justifying work itself, rather than its object
      - c. Although the Scriptures speak of faith in different ways, none of them is ever used this way! Never!
  - ii. Note that this righteousness is not by "faith" in general, as if the object didn't matter
    1. it is specifically faith in Jesus Christ by which we are given the righteousness of God

- a. Faith *unites us through dependence* upon something which either can or cannot deliver on its promise
    - b. Rock ledge example: I can jump onto either rock, but the only one which will save me is the one that can hold my weight, not merely that I trust it to
  - 2. Justification is a forensic, or legal, standing with God based upon being united to Jesus through faith (dependence) upon Him to “hold my weight” of sin/salvation
- iii. The object of our faith is the vital element of salvation and freedom
  - 1. You are only as free and as secure as that which you depend upon
  - 2. If I’m leaning on (faith) that which cannot or will not hold me up, then I will fall over
- c. By faith in Christ’s *substitutionary* work on the cross, not by general admiration of Him
  - i. “through faith in Him as a propitiation by His blood”
    - 1. Propitiation is a sacrifice (substitute) which squares debts between the offender and the offended
    - 2. Many people admire Jesus and thus say, “I believe in him”, but they only believe in him as an *example of a good person* or *as a sage or wise teacher* or *a helper in time of need*
      - a. But this is not a faith which results in justification.
  - ii. In Christ, God substitutes Himself for man, *and this is the key to justification with God*
    - 1. In the pagan worldview – man always appeases the gods by means of propitiating sacrifices
    - 2. But in the gospel – GOD appeases GOD by means of *paying the propitiation HIMSELF*
      - a. This is the only way that God is both just (sin debts are paid) and the justifier (forgiveness/redemption is accomplished)
      - b. This is only fair and merciful because the Offended one is also the Debt-payer
        - i. If God sent an innocent man to atone for others’ sins, it would not be just
        - ii. But God didn’t send a mere innocent man, but sent HIMSELF, for an Offender is the only one who can pay down a debt against him without it being unjust
    - 3. “The doctrine of propitiation is precisely this – that God loved the objects of His wrath so much that He gave His own son to the end that He, by His blood, should make provision for the removal of His wrath.” ~ John Murray
  - iii. The beauty of the Cross is that in the very same stroke...
    - 1. Jesus’ death satisfies the love of God (that aspect of His nature that seeks our justification)
    - 2. Jesus’ death satisfies the justice of God (that aspect of His nature that demands justice)
    - 3. Because of the Christ’s death as our divine substitute, God can be both just and the justifier in forgiving us freely and giving us His righteousness.
  - iv. The Cross does not represent a compromise between God’s wrath and God’s love.
    - 1. It does not satisfy each partly
    - 2. It satisfies both fully.
      - “The cross does not represent a compromise between God’s wrath and love; it does not satisfy each one half-way. Rather, it satisfies each fully in the very same action.” ~Tim Keller

3. The gospel “upholds the law” (v31), meaning that the righteous standard of God still stands – it must be satisfied for anyone to stand in God’s presence.
  4. For those who trust in the finished work of Christ, it has been. It is finished by Him! It is done by Him! The blood of Jesus washes your sin away!
- d. By faith as a *reception*, not as a kind of righteousness or merit itself
- i. Faith is not righteousness
    1. We *receive* righteousness *by* faith “freely” (v24) – that is “without cause”
    2. It is possible to think of faith as a type of righteousness, a work whereby God then saves you, but that will only leave us questioning the strength, the condition, or the perfection of faith
      - a. Many people say, “The OT Law saved people then, but now God requires faith”
        - i. This is unbiblical then and now
        - ii. Faith has always been the *means of receiving* righteousness, not the righteousness itself
      - b. When doubts hit, it will shake us to the core
      - c. When successful, we will boast – “I am saved *because of my faith*”, but Paul clearly states that there is no cause of boasting in the gospel (v31)
    3. Faith is the not the cause or the ground of our righteousness – Christ’s atoning work on the cross is – faith is only the instrument by which you receive righteousness, not the cause of it
- e. What is this talk of God “demonstrating” His righteousness?
- i. Does this mean that the Cross was *merely* God showing how righteous He is in punishing sin?
    1. To some extent, yes, He is showing that He is just in His wrath toward the sins committed before (by those in the past). But that is not all the Cross shows us.
    2. In fact, the substitution of Jesus in our place of sin, actually satisfying God’s righteousness, is what makes God righteous in His forgiveness of those in the past. God “held back” His judgment from those who repented and trusted in His mercy *until Christ atoned for them*.
    3. It was God’s forgiveness and mercy that made Him appear unrighteous (incoherent with His own glory). *Forgiveness* had to be shown to be *righteous*. *Mercy* had to be proved to be *Just*.
  - ii. This means that our righteousness with God is not only secured by God’s love, but also by God’s righteousness: they are never opposed to one another in the gospel.
    1. Since God is unswervingly allegiant to His great name, then He is unswervingly allegiant to keeping you in His Son, for He has rescued you for the sake of His great name.

### 3. How Does This Change the Way That We Live Now?

- a. All sin, turmoil, and unrest is rooted in *trying to establish or defend our own righteousness*
  - i. Self-Pity: we fail to establish our own righteousness
    1. We are not accepted by God or others due to our failures or insufficiency
    2. Anxiety and Fear, Depression, Self-loathing
  - ii. Arrogance: we believe that we are establishing, or have established, our own righteousness

1. We have not yet *proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt*, that we are worthwhile, significant, acceptable, however
  2. *Defend Ourselves*: When somebody questions or attacks our righteousness we fight back, destroying and belittling (shaming) others
  3. *Attack Others*: We attempt to tear down other people's righteousness so that we look better by comparison
- b. Every relationship's struggles are rooted in these attempts to self-justify ourselves to the point where we end up destroying our relationships through self-righteous attacks and defensiveness (prove we're right) or a retreat into isolation of bitterness and anger due to our failures
- i. Marriage: Do I have to defend my righteousness in this situation?
    1. What am I trusting to make me acceptable before God?
    2. Only when I am secure in Christ's righteousness can I truly love for the sake of another (my wife) and serve her without bitterness, blame, or fear.
  - ii. Employment: Why do I need to cover up my failures or blame them on another? What righteousness am I trusting to justify me as a person? I can admit my failures freely.
  - iii. Competition: How do I handle losing? Why do I respond that way? What righteousness am I trusting in to make me important, significant, or worthwhile?
- c. All joylessness is rooted in self-righteousness
- i. When I am trusting in my own righteousness and I fail, then I lose my joy
    1. Boredom and bitterness / Self-pity and shame
    2. Lack of joy in the Lord is the sin underneath all other sins, for when I forget all that I have in Christ, I will try and pursue joy through sinful falsities
  - ii. The imputed righteousness of Christ, given to me by faith, means that my sins are gone, and I am *completely* and *ultimately* accepted by God!!!
    1. There is a tremendous reason for joy in this statement
    2. WHAT COULD ANY SINFUL PURSUIT DELIVER THAT I DON'T RECEIVE IN CHRIST?
  - iii. Faith in the righteousness of Christ imputed to me means life and peace

#### Conclusion:

Romans 15:13 – “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” We abound in joy and peace through *believing the great news* which results in our hope through the Holy Spirit.

So, in Christ Jesus, by faith, you are not only given a new nature and a new identity, but you are given a new record of righteousness before God. You are fully and completely accepted by God as if you had never sinned at all. Do you doubt that God is for you, dear Christian? Do you think of God as angry and scowling, indifferent or indecisive towards you? He is not! He is surely not, for the cross is evidence of His great righteousness AND His great love for you! He does not waver in His love or wander in His allegiance to His great name. You are righteous in Christ, now live like it. Flee from sin! Flee to Christ Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, your righteousness before the Father, and your divine security for eternity. Remember His righteousness in your salvation and His love for you in the atoning work of the Son of God for you.