

III. THE BIBLICAL TEACHINGS CONCERNING "JUSTIFICATION"

To understand the meaning of justification we must see it as a judicial term in the setting of a court of law.

W.E. Vine says this word "denotes the act of pronouncing righteous." It signifies "the establishment of a person as just by acquittal from guilt" (284).

To appreciate what's involved in the believer's justification we must understand the awful predicament we were in as sinners before a holy God. Lest we look upon it lightly, we must have an understanding of how God judges righteously.

Dwight Pentecost has illustrated how God judges righteously:

We as parents are apt to find excuses for the misbehavior of our children. We do not sit as just 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 our children, and we love them, we excuse and do not condemn the guilty. If it is the neighbor's children, we judge justly, but love keeps us from so judging our own. God, in keeping with His holiness and righteousness and justice, must judge and condemn the guilty (103).

Someone has said that "no just judge passes judgment without first having all the evidence presented before him." And when all the evidence was presented against us we were found guilty and we were justly condemned.

Upon what grounds then could God declare the believer righteous and acquitted of all charges and condemnation in regard to sin? The answer lies in the substitutionary work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just how God could be just and at the same time justify or declare us righteous is a wonderful truth for us to comprehend and appropriate. And as we study the things associated with this biblical truth it should lead us to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts and in our lives.

the Word of God teaches...

A. THAT GOD HAS A PRINCIPLE UPON WHICH HE EXECUTES JUDGMENT (Psa. 19:9; 119:75; Dan. 9:14)

1. This means when He judges it is always in line with a set standard that reflects His holy and righteous character (Psa. 119:137).
2. This means when He judges it is always in accordance with truth and righteousness and never with respect to persons or unjustly (Psa. 19:9).
3. This is the same principle that Israel was given upon which to execute judgment according to the Mosaic law (Dt. 25:1). What it says is - if one judges justly and righteously he must justify or acquit the righteous and condemn the wicked.
4. Notice this is the same principle upon which God must deal with all men - since He is absolutely just in all of His dealings He cannot acquit the wicked or condemn the righteous. But rather because He is a just God He must acquit the righteous and condemn the wicked (Prov. 17:15).
5. This means in keeping with this principle God must administer justice in accordance with truth and righteousness and not with respect to persons or upon some other basis (Rom. 2:11).

B. THAT GOD IS JUDGING RIGHTEOUSLY AND JUSTLY WHEN HE RENDERS A VERDICT OF GUILTY UPON THE WORLD AND CONDEMNS IT TO JUDGMENT (Rom. 3:10-19)

1. This is because we have all sinned (Rom. 3:23; Ecc. 7:20).
2. This is because we are all guilty and the only righteous judgment is to condemn us (Gal. 3:22). To acquit us who are guilty would be to judge us unjustly and unrighteously. Notice the repentant thief recognized this principle in his own condemnation and judgment upon the cross (Lk. 23:40,41).

C. THAT GOD IN LOVE AND MERCY HAS PROVIDED A WAY THROUGH WHICH HE CAN BE JUST AND AT THE SAME TIME JUSTIFY THE UNGODLY (Rom. 4:4,5; I Pet. 3:18)

1. Notice the problem that it poses for God to be righteous and just, to act in accordance with truth and righteousness, and to justify or declare us not guilty when we are. How can He be just and at the same time justify or acquit the wicked? (Job 9:2; 25:4).

2. Notice secondly the solution and the answer to this problem of how we who are guilty could be acquitted.

- a. For us who are guilty, to be acquitted someone had to take our place and suffer our condemnation. This is what the Lord Jesus did when He died on the cross (Isa. 53:5,6) for us.
- b. For us to be righteous who are guilty someone had to be made sin for us. This is what the Lord Jesus was made (II Cor. 5:21) for us.
- c. For us to be declared not guilty someone had to make an offering that satisfied God for our sins. This is what Christ did (Jn. 1:29; Heb. 10:14).
- d. So then for us to be declared righteous or not guilty we must be "in Christ." It is only "in Christ" that God can be just and at the same time justify the ungodly (Rom. 3:24) apart from Him God must condemn the wicked and there is none righteous. But in Him there is no condemnation (Jn. 3:18; Rom. 8:1).

Someone has illustrated this truth in a story of a wagon train going west and encountering a prairie fire.

The wagon master called out for someone to set another fire behind them as the fire was approaching far ahead of them. Then several minutes later as the wind was driving the flames closes to them, he ordered everyone to gather in the area which has been burned. As the wind drove the flames closes to them a little girl fearfully asked the wagon master "will we be safe here?" He replied by saying, "yes little lass, you see the flames can't hurt you where they have already been."

D. THAT GOD JUSTIFIES OR DECLARES US RIGHTEOUS THE MOMENT WE BELIEVE IN CHRIST (Rom. 3:26).

1. This means it is a verdict of acquittal or not guilty which has already been given (Acts 13:39). We see then it is a declaration of God in behalf of all who believe when they believe.
2. This means on the other hand that no one can ever be acquitted outside of Christ by his own deeds (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:11). Some folks have the erroneous idea that one day their works will determine what their destiny will be.

E. THAT OUR JUSTIFICATION HAS CERTAIN ELEMENTS. THESE ARE TRUTHS WE CAN COMPARE AND COMPREHEND.

1. Our justification first of all has a source (Rom. 3:26; 8:33). We are declared not guilty by God, but it is only when we receive Christ and are placed in Him.
2. Note secondly that our justification has only one ground or basis. We are justified by Christ's blood (Ro. 3:24-26). In other words this is the basis upon which God can declare us not guilty.
3. Next our justification has a channel and we see that we are justified by faith (Rom. 3:28; 5:1). Notice that our justification is by, through, or upon faith (Rom. 1:17; 4:3, 16,24; Gal. 2:16; 3:8, 9, 5:4; Phil. 3:9) but it is never because of our faith. In other words we are not justified or declared righteous because of our faith or upon the basis of faith. Justification is based upon the shed blood of Christ and His finished work. It is not based upon the fact of whether we have enough faith to believe but rather upon the facts that we believe. Some folks mis-interpret Eph. 2:8 and say that God must give an individual the faith to believe. But if God had to give faith to believe, how could He be just and condemn those to whom He gives no faith?
4. Our justification is also said to be by grace (Rom. 3:24). Here we see the essence of it. In other words we are justified in Christ because God is gracious and bestows unmerited favor upon sinners. The word "freely" in Rom. 3:24 means "without a cause" or without any reason within us.
5. In I Cor. 6:11 we have the agent in our justification - it is by the Holy Spirit. He places us in Christ the moment we believe (I Cor. 12:13) and it is only when we are in Christ that we can be acquitted.
6. The Bible also teaches us that we are justified by works (Jas. 2:24). But notice this is not a contradiction to being justified by faith in the finished work of Christ, but here we see the evidence of our justification. No one is justified before God by his works (Gal. 2:16) but we are justified before men by our works. When a man is placed in Christ by the Holy Spirit when he believes, he is pronounced acquitted or guiltless and as a result he will begin to produce the righteous fruits of this position. These will be evident to men and will justify him before them.
7. Then finally we see that our justification is in Christ (II Cor. 5:21). This is the position for our justification. It is only when a person is in Him that justification or a pronouncement of acquittal is possible. Again for all those outside of Christ - God must condemn the wicked.
8. Then before we conclude with the elements of our justification we see that our justification has some proof (Rom. 4:24). Some have propagated that the resurrection of Christ justified us. But justification rests upon the basis of Christ's work on the cross and the word "for" should be rendered "on account of" or "because of." Thus we see that the resurrection of Christ was the proof or token that God had accepted Christ's sacrificial death and that those in Him are accepted in the Beloved and declared righteous in Him.

To summarize this great doctrinal truth we see first of all that we were saved by God's grace the moment we believed. At that very same moment the Holy Spirit placed us in Christ. Then and only then, based upon the shed blood of Christ and His redemptive work alone, God in a judicial sense declares us righteous or not

guilty and a verdict of acquittal is given. It is comforting also to know that this verdict has already been pronounced before the bar of God's justice; it is not something we must look forward to with fear and uncertainty. Hallelujah what a wonderful Saviour we have!