

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Key Teachings: **justification** - Faith (Romans 5) and Works (James 2)

The subject we have to look at today is one that has bothered thoughtful people for a very long time.

The Book of Job is possibly the oldest book in the Bible. In it, Job twice poses the same question. In 9:2, he asks, "How should man be **just** with God?" In 25:4, he raises the query, "How can man be **justified** with God?" It is our job today to find an answer, indeed the answer, to this very question.

It is sometimes suggested that to be **justified** is to be made "**just** as if I'd never sinned". At first, this sounds fine. "Wipe the slate clean." "Cancel all the debt." "Clear the decks completely." "Let me have another go." "Let me start again from scratch." Unfortunately, my personal experience of life is that such an approach would be no good, certainly for me. Knowing myself as I do, I have to say that if I was given a second chance, the opportunity to start again, make a fresh start, I would undoubtedly go twice as far in the wrong direction, at twice the speed, than I did the first time round. No! It would do me no favours at all to be given a second chance, without the power to respond to God's proffered way of earning the blessing, if such a thing were possible.

There is no doubt that the fundamental concept in **justification** is that it clears me of every charge that a holy God can **righteously** lay against me. That is what I would call the negative side of the very positive truth of **justification**; the **righteous** dealing with every valid charge that was previously hanging over me. It is a very good start, but it is only a start. It would be a very sad thing indeed if I was content to enjoy the fact of my being cleared of every charge of sin, but did not progress on to the very positive truth that God has, in a very definite way, pronounced me to have a fully **righteous** standing before Him.

That I have such a standing is without any shadow of doubt. Listen to what the Apostle John has to say in 1 John 4:17: "Herein is love with us made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgement: because as He is, so are we, in this world." Think about that! The love of God has reached its object when believers on the Lord Jesus Christ are absolutely convinced that they need have no fear in respect of the day of judgement. And why? Because Christ has fully answered to God in respect of every **righteous** demand that a Holy God can make against sinners. And how do we know that? We have to ask ourselves a vital question.

Where is the Lord Jesus now? In heaven, at the right hand of God. On what basis is He there? We would not dream of questioning the right of Christ to be in heaven now. There is, and can be, no suggestion that there could be any charge that could be laid against the Son of God that could rightly exclude Him from the presence of God. That we can fully and readily understand. But this verse goes further. It says that we have equal title to be in the presence of God as He has - with this difference: He is there, in heaven, because He personally is qualified to be there, because of Who He is. Our right to be there is based upon what He has done on our behalf. Wonder of wonders! Our place in heaven is as secure as Christ's own place there! As is plainly said, 'As He is, so are we in this world.' That is, even while we are alive in this life, in this world, we have the full assurance that we are as clear of eternal judgment as Christ himself is. And none would dare suggest that Christ needs to suffer again for sin. That work will never need to be repeated, or added to, because He did it perfectly the first time.

The longer I live, the more grateful I am, and ever shall be, that my salvation, my assurance of a place with Christ in heaven, is not dependent in any respect, or to any degree, on anything that I have done, or ever could do. The strength of a chain is governed by the strength of its weakest link. How glad I am, and am entitled to be, that not one link in the chain of salvation is in the least or smallest degree dependent on me or anything I could ever do. This is one of the many things that the truth of **justification** brings to me. Again, how can this be so? Well, so far I have found nine aspects of this wonderful truth.

Let us look at them one by one.

1. We are **justified** by God.

It is God against Whom we have sinned. It will be God Who will judge us in the final analysis. So, if we are to be cleared of the **righteous** charges of which we shall be rightly accused, it must be the same God Who assesses us

clear in His Holy sight and pronounces us **righteous**, or **just**, according to His own absolute standards. Can it be done? Listen to Romans 3:26. 'God is **just**, and the **justifier** of him that believeth in Jesus.' Secondly, in Romans 8:33, we read, 'It is God that **justifieth!**' How can a **righteous** God possibly do that, on behalf of those who have clearly sinned against Him in every possible way?

2. We are **justified** by the grace of God.

Listen to Romans 3:24 – 'being **justified** freely by His grace'. That is, while God is the personal **justifier** of the saved sinner, He does it by means of His free, unlimited grace. God is the source of the **justification**. His grace, His rich, unmerited favour, is the channel through which the blessing flows.

3. We are **justified** by the precious blood of Christ.

Romans 5:9 says, 'being now **justified** by the blood of Christ'. That is, if the **righteous** claims of a Holy God against us are to be fully met, it can only be so because the price of redemption has been fully paid, by the shedding of the precious blood of Christ, when He offered Himself without spot to God.

4. We are **justified** by the personal bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The personal, actual, bodily resurrection of Christ has proved the truth of **justification** to be beyond dispute. In what way? In this way! Romans 4:25 – 'He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our **justification**'. How can we be sure that the price has been fully paid? How can we be sure that the debt we owe to God because of our sins has been fully discharged? We can be absolutely certain that God is fully satisfied with the work of Christ, because He has raised Him from the dead. There need be no lingering doubt in any of our minds. Nothing remains to be done. The work has been fully accomplished. The debt has been fully discharged. There is nothing to do. Nothing to pay! Christ has completed the work. He has paid the full price, whereby we can be fully assured, because God has raised Him from the dead. The victory has been openly, fully declared.

5. We are **justified** freely from all things from which we could not be **justified** by the Law of Moses.

How much has been gained by the full discharge of the debt we owed to God in respect of the sins we have committed? Acts 13:39 gives the answer. 'We have been **justified** freely from all things from which we could not have been **justified** by the Law of Moses.' The Law of Moses held out blessing on the basis of what the Law-keeper deserved. Far be the thought! Being sinners by nature and by practice, the utmost we could ever deserve in respect of our own performance would be condemnation at the hand of a Holy God. But, what we could never deserve on our own account, God has credited us with. Not because we deserve it, or ever could! No! No! Solely on account of the value to Him of the Person and work of His beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. What a vast panorama of blessing is held out – 'all things' – but God in His goodness has made it available because of what Christ has done.

Let us pause at this stage. There are two things I want to draw to your attention. First of all, what we have considered so far hasn't depended in any way on you or me as individuals. Nor has it depended on any particular Christian, or group of Christians, or the vast aggregate of all those who have believed the gospel of their salvation since the Day of Pentecost. It is all of God. It is what we call the sovereign side of the truth of **justification**; God's side, if you like. They are matters connected with our salvation and blessing that we could have no part in. We do well never to forget that.

Moving on, then, to man's responsible side, we find that if we are indeed **justified**, we are **justified** by faith.

6. We are **justified** by faith.

Romans 5:1 says, 'Wherefore, being **justified** by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Without the sovereign work of God, there would be no blessing to secure or enjoy. But, once it has been established, it is to be enjoyed, by the apprehension of faith. What God has planned, provided, procured, and proved, opening out such a vast panoply of blessing, faith grasps, or possesses, by simple trust. Take that grand acrostic of the word faith. F - A - I - T - H. **Forsaking All, I Take Him**. That's the answer. Personal trust in the One Who died for your sins! That is the quality that grasps this wonderful blessing of **justification**. Faith accepts as a free gift what we could never deserve or achieve by any performance of our own.

And, now to move on to number 7, we come to what to some minds appears to present something of a problem.

7. We are **justified** by works.

Scripture certainly affirms that if we are **justified** at all, we are **justified** by faith, simple trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith is an essential requisite to the reception of **justification**. But, equally plainly, we read in James 2:21-24, that **justification** is by works. Is there a ready solution? Oh! Yes! The secret is declared in Romans 4:2 – ‘if Abraham were **justified** by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God’. Again in Galatians 3:11 – ‘no man is **justified** by law in the sight of God’. So, then, we are **justified** in the sight of God by the value to Him of the work of Christ for God’s glory, and on our behalf. That having been settled, once and for all, before God, we are under a moral obligation to be **justified** before men on the basis of our works, the lifestyle that men can see. Our works demonstrate the effect of **justification** in us. If our faith possesses **justification**, our works proclaim to men the fact that we are **justified**.

Listen to how James puts it in chapter 2 of his Epistle, verses 21 to 24: ‘Was not Abraham our Father **justified** by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar. Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect. And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for **righteousness**, and he was called the friend of God. Ye see, then, how that by works a man is **justified**, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot **justified** by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way.’

So far, so good! But, there are yet at least two more aspects of **justification** to look at before we are finished our study. Take account of what is said in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: ‘Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.’

What a terrible catalogue of sinful living is given in these verses. The most horrific thing about the list is that they are things that we are all capable of doing, if the circumstances are conducive and we lose our grip and control of our desires and actions. As long as we live in this world, the flesh is still in us, and looking for every opportunity to express itself. How can we control these urges we will always have as long as we live in this world? We get here a double answer. But, before we are given the answer, we get the reminder of the change that has taken place since we trusted Christ as our Saviour, and confessed Him as Lord.

Verse 11 says, ‘And such were some of you’. This was no figment of the imagination. These were real matters affecting real people. ‘And such were some of you.’ But then, verse 11 goes on to declare the double answer, in two more aspects of **justification**.

8. We are **justified** in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In confessing our sins, and the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only one who could meet our desperate need of salvation, we put ourselves willingly, voluntarily, under the Lordship of Christ. We owned His authority over us. That is the secret. We are **righteous** in the sight of God because we believe that ‘Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the scriptures’. Nothing can affect that. We are saved, and saved for ever, because of the value to God of the work of Christ on the Cross of Calvary. But, if we are to live clean lives, well pleasing to God, and witnessing to unbelievers, it is only by continuing to submit to the Lordship of Christ in every aspect of our lives. Can it be done? What power have we to do so?

9. We are **justified** in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The only power by which anything can be done for God and in the Name of the Lord Jesus is the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us recap. **justification**, rightly understood, and spelled out by the Bible, has at least 9 aspects. If we are indeed **justified, vindicated** before God and men, we are **justified**:

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| 1. | By God. | God PLANNED it. |
| 2. | By grace. | Grace PROVIDED it |
| 3. | By blood | The blood of Christ PROCURED it |
| 4. | By the resurrection of Christ | The resurrection of Christ PROVES it. |
| 5. | From all things. | The whole PANOPLY of blessing secured by it is indescribably vast. |
| 6. | By faith. | Our faith POSSESSES it |
| 7. | By works. | Our works PROCLAIM it. |
| 8. | In the Name of the Lord Jesus | His Name AUTHORISES it. |
| 9. | In the power of the Holy Spirit. | The Holy Spirit EMPOWERS it. |

Scripture tells us that a three-fold cord is not easily broken. In engineering, we know that each added strand gives extra strength and flexibility. Here we have a nine-fold cord that certainly cannot be broken, at all. Let us commit ourselves to live in the light of what we know to be true. In doing so, we shall demonstrate the enjoyment and thrill of knowing that we are **justified** before God. This will give us rich incentive to so live that we shall also be fully **vindicated, justified**, before our fellow men, giving ample evidence that we have put ourselves willingly under the Lordship of Christ, and His authority, and seek to do all things in the power of the Holy Spirit. God grant that it might be so.

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