

JUSTIFICATION - What God does for ungodly people

- 1) **UNDERSTANDING JUSTIFICATION** - It is important to see that this is a *legal term* (in some translations the word is actually rendered as "*acquittal*"). It deals with one's *standing before God*. It has to do with having the *sentence of guilt* changed to a *sentence of peace* - **Romans 5:1** - "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The important distinction to remember here is the difference between "*peace with God*" (**Romans 5:1**) and the "*peace of God*." Paul writes of the latter in **Philippians 4:7** - "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." This is a precious blessing for all Christians in Christ Jesus. But peace *with* God, which comes through being justified is the peace of *acquittal*, not the peace of *relationship*.

All human beings stand in need of justification. Both *sinister* and *outwardly moral* people are equally guilty before God. Paul makes this clear in **Romans 3:9-10 and 20** - "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, [10] as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one....'20.... For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

Remember, though the process of salvation is difficult to break up into its component parts, justification has to do with God *pronouncing or declaring us to be righteous*. Technically, it isn't the process that *makes* us righteous in our actions. *The shocking truth is God justifies, not the godly, but the ungodly* - **Romans 4:3-4** - "For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." [4] Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due."

There are no righteous people - **Romans 3:10** - "....as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one....'" Therefore, it is only the *unrighteous* (or *ungodly*) whom God can possibly justify. There is no one else available. The one justified is the one *declared by God to be righteous in spite of his or her sin*.

We should rejoice in the wonder of it all! Hear this - **we do not have to prove ourselves and qualify** for His justifying grace. We do not have to be anxious about His final judgement against us because of our own lack of worthiness. We do not have to *struggle to be acceptable before God* (not to be confused with the ongoing, love-driven struggle to *please* God in all we do). He freely declares us to be righteous.

Our grasp of this truth, and our *remembering* this truth, has everything to do with the way we will *forgive others* when they sin against us. The unforgiver proves he or she has no deep concept of the most basic, saving truth in the Christian faith. He has no accurate, motivating picture of his own offensiveness when justified by God.

- 2) **THE NON-IMPUTATION OF SIN** - The Psalmist saw great rejoicing in this truth - "Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity...." - **Psalms 32:2**. Paul expresses the same sense of wonder in **Romans 4:8** - "....blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

Notice, this is a *non-accounting* of sin. Sin there will still be, but God no longer charges it against our account. Understand this, *the non-imputation of sin is a central truth in Biblical Salvation*. There will be no *assurance of salvation until this is firmly grasped*. It is what the Cross of Jesus is all about - **2 Corinthians 5:19** - "....that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." There is no "*message*" to proclaim without this truth.

- 3) **NON-IMPUTATION OF SIN NOT AUTOMATIC FOR EVERYONE** - God doesn't let us off the hook simply because He is very *loving*. God's love, all by itself, forgives no one. God doesn't forget about our sins because He's *senile* or *absent minded*. And it is not that He isn't serious about *holiness*. Non-imputation of sin is a result of receiving God's forgiveness specifically through the *sin bearing work of salvation in Jesus Christ* - **Isaiah 53:6** - "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."
- 4) **NON-IMPUTATION OF SIN AND FUTURE JUDGEMENT** - See Paul's argument in **Romans 8:33-34** - "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." His conclusion is there will be nobody to successfully accuse us before the throne of God. We can have full confidence at Christ's appearing, *not because of our own moral perfection*, but because God has already *pronounced* us righteous in Christ.
- 5) **THE IMPUTATION OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS TO US** - This is the other half of this great doctrine. Not only does God *not count our*

sins against us, He also credits to our account the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Years ago, Jeremiah saw this day coming with joy - Jeremiah 33:14-16 - "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. [15] In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. [16] In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'"

Paul wrote of the glorious day when this truth finally dawned upon his struggling heart - Philippians 3:8-9 - "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—"

We must grasp as fully as we can all this means for us. We are credited with a *perfect righteousness* - a *complete righteousness*, and an *alien righteousness*, with nothing *lacking*. Again, this is not a righteousness we *achieve* in order to have God pronounce us justified. It is not *earned* in any way. We do not have to first *work out this righteousness in order for salvation to occur*. This is not in any way a righteousness of our *own moral efforts*. Remember again Paul's words in Philippians 3:8-9. This is nothing less than the righteousness of Jesus, credited to our bankrupt accounts, received by faith in Christ's shed blood.

- 6) **FAITH - THE CHANNEL OF RECEIVING JUSTIFICATION** - But this faith must be properly understood. This is not merely faith as a vague belief in God's existence or some supreme power. Paul makes it clear that one must believe in God as the One who completed the work of redemption in raising Jesus Christ from the dead - Romans 4:22-25 - "That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." [23] But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, [24] but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, [25] who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

See also Romans 3:26 and Galatians 2:16. Only faith in Jesus Christ, specifically focussing on and relying on the *saving nature* of His life and death, brings salvation. One final word. It is important not to turn faith into works. Anxiety comes when misdirected questions are asked - "*Have I believed enough to be saved? Is my weak faith sufficient? What if I experience doubts?*" Faith is better seen as merely the *channel* - an empty one at that - that relies on Jesus' finished work in spite of fears, doubts and weaknesses.