

## DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

### Lesson 16

#### Christ's Work of Justification

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Have you ever wondered how a perfectly holy God could endure to save us? How we could approach Him in prayer when He cannot endure to have evil in His presence? How God is able to accept us though we are sinners and continue to sin even after salvation? Part of the answer to these questions is the doctrine of justification. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation the Word of God tells us we are justified before God. What does this mean and why is this important? In this study we will find out.

#### I. DEFINITION OF JUSTIFICATION

- A. John Walvoord: "In theology, justification is the judicial act of God declaring one to be righteous by imputation of righteousness to him. It is judicial not experiential, and all believers in Christ are equally justified."<sup>1</sup>
  
- B. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: "When God justifies, He charges the sin of man to Christ and credits the righteousness of Christ to the believer (2 Cor. 5:21). Thus, "through one Man's righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life" (Rom. 5:18). Because this righteousness is "the righteousness of God" which is "apart from the law" (Rom. 3:21), it is thorough; a believer is "justified from all things" (Acts 13:39). God is "just" because His holy standard of perfect righteousness has been fulfilled in Christ, and He is the "justifier," because this righteousness is freely given to the believer (Rom. 3:26; 5:16)."<sup>2</sup>
  
- C. *The New Bible Dictionary*: "Justification means to Paul God's act of remitting the sins of guilty men, and accounting them righteous, freely, by his grace, through faith in Christ, on the ground, not of their own works, but of the representative law-keeping and redemptive blood-shedding of the Lord Jesus Christ on their behalf."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pg. 155.

<sup>2</sup>Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, R. K. Harrison and Thomas Nelson Publishers, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Rev. Ed. of: *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> *New Bible Dictionary*, under justification, Logos Bible Software.

- D. *Great Doctrines of the Bible*: “[Justification] has to do with relations that have been disturbed by sin, and these relations are personal. It is a change from guilt and condemnation to acquittal and acceptance. Regeneration has to do with the change of the believer’s nature; justification, with the change of his standing before God. Regeneration is subjective; justification is objective. The former has to do with man’s state; the latter, with his standing.”<sup>4</sup>

**II. THOUGHTS TO PONDER ABOUT JUSTIFICATION**

- A. Louis Berkhof: “The pardon granted in justification applies to all sins, past, present, and future, and thus involves the removal of all guilt and of every penalty.”<sup>5</sup>
- B. Roman Catholicism teaches that justification is an ongoing process and really a synonym for sanctification. The chart below was constructed from Louis Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology* showing how justification differs from sanctification.

<b>Justification</b>	<b>Sanctification</b>
Justification removes the guilt of sin and restores the sinner bringing them to adoption as God’s son with all the privileges of a true son.	Sanctification removes the pollution of sin and renews the sinner ever increasingly in conformity with the image of God.
Justification takes place outside of the sinner with God, and does not change his inner life.	Sanctification takes place in the inner life of man and gradually affects his whole being.
Justification takes place once for all. It is not repeated, neither is it a process; it is complete at once and for all time. There is no more or less in justification; man is either fully justified, or he is not justified at all.	Sanctification is a continued process which is never completed in this life.
God the Father declares the sinner righteous because of the work of Christ.	The Holy Spirit sanctifies the believer because of the work of Christ.

**III. APPARENT PARADOX’S CONCERNING JUSTIFICATION**

- A. How is it that believers continue in sin after being justified? If we are justified once, for all time, how is it that the sins we continue to commit do not un-justify us before God? How can we stay just if we continue to sin?

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<sup>4</sup>William Evans and S. Maxwell Coder, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, Enl. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998, c1974), 156.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 514.

1. **Jam. 3:2** For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.
  2. **I John 1:8** If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.
- B. It is often thought that Paul's teaching concerning justification contradicts James' teaching. Paul says, "*Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,*" but James says, "*Was not Abraham justified by works.*" How can both be true? Are we justified by faith or works?
1. **Rom. 3:19-4:25** Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. 21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. 27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. 31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law. 1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered. 8 "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." 9 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "Faith was credited to Abraham as

righteousness.” 10 How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; 11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. 13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; 15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. 16 For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 (as it is written, “A father of many nations have I made you”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. 18 In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” 19 Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. 22 Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness. 23 Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, 24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

2. **Gal. 3:1-14** You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 6 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. 10 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a

curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.” 11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “The righteous man shall live by faith.” 12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “He who practices them shall live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”— 14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

3. **Gal. 5:4** You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.
  
4. **James 2:14-26** What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18 But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.
  
5. *The New Bible Dictionary* discussing the paradox between Paul’s teaching on justification in Romans and Galatians and James’ teaching says:

“Of the other writers in the NT we must notice James, for he has often been held to be in opposition to Paul in this matter. Where Paul insists that a man is justified by faith and not by works James maintains ‘that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone’ (Jas. 2:24). There is no more than a verbal contradiction, however. The kind of ‘faith’ that James is opposing is not that warm personal trust in a living Savior of which Paul speaks. It is a faith which James himself describes: ‘You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder’ (Jas. 2:19). He has in mind an intellectual assent to certain truths, an assent which is not backed up by a life lived in accordance with those truths (Jas. 2:15f.).

So far is James from opposing faith in the full sense that he everywhere presupposes it. Right at the beginning of his Epistle he speaks naturally of 'the testing of your faith' (Jas. 1:3), and he exhorts his readers, 'show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory' (Jas. 2:1). He criticizes a wrong faith but assumes that everyone will recognize the need for a right faith. Moreover, by 'works' James does not mean what Paul means by that term. Paul thinks of obedience to the commands of the law regarded as a system whereby a man may merit salvation. For James the law is 'the law of liberty' (Jas. 2:12). His 'works' look uncommonly like 'the fruit of the Spirit' of which Paul speaks. They are warm deeds of love springing from a right attitude to God. They are the fruits of faith. What James objects to is the claim that faith is there when there is no fruit to attest it."<sup>6</sup>

#### IV. SCRIPTURAL PROOF OF JUSTIFICATION

- A. **Isa. 45:25** "In the Lord all the offspring of Israel Will be justified and will glory."
- B. **Isa. 53:11** As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.
- C. **John 5:24** "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.
- D. **Rom. 5:1, 9** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.
- E. **Rom. 8:29-34** For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

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<sup>6</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, Logos Bible Software under "faith."

- F. **I Cor. 6:9-11** Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.
- G. **Gal. 2:16-17** nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. 17 “But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!
- H. **Phil. 3:8-9** More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,
- I. **Titus 3:5-7** He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

V. **ERRORS CONCERNING JUSTIFICATION**

- A. Justification is a process.
- B. Justification is the same thing as sanctification.
- C. Justification changes a believer’s inner life.
- D. Justification enables us not to sin.
- E. Justification is by works.
- F. Justification is accomplished partly by God and partly by our good works.
- G. Justification is what saves us.

## VI. APPLICATION OF JUSTIFICATION

- A. Justification frees you from all guilt and the consequences of any sin.
- B. Justification should help you live for Christ out of love rather than guilt, fear, or compulsion.
- C. Justification should remind you that you are God's child and are on perfect terms with your heavenly Father.
- D. Justification cost Christ His life and therefore you should not sin because you have been justified by grace.
- E. When Satan tempts us to despair over our sin, to think that God has rejected us, or will not accept us, or is angry with us, let us remember – we are justified.

### **“All that believe are justified.” — Acts 13:39**

The believer in Christ receives a present justification. Faith does not produce this fruit by-and-by, but now. So far as justification is the result of faith, it is given to the soul in the moment when it closes with Christ, and accepts him as its all in all. Are they who stand before the throne of God justified now?—so are we, as truly and as clearly justified as they who walk in white and sing melodious praises to celestial harps. The thief upon the cross was justified the moment that he turned the eye of faith to Jesus; and Paul, the aged, after years of service, was not more justified than was the thief with no service at all. We are to-day accepted in the Beloved, to-day absolved from sin, to-day acquitted at the bar of God.

Oh! soul-transporting thought! There are some clusters of Eshcol's vine which we shall not be able to gather till we enter heaven; but this is a bough which runneth over the wall. This is not as the corn of the land, which we can never eat till we cross the Jordan; but this is part of the manna in the wilderness, a portion of our daily nutriment with which God supplies us in our journeying to and fro. We are now—even now pardoned; even now are our sins put away; even now we stand in the sight of God accepted, as though we had never been guilty. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” There is not a sin in the Book of God, even now, against one of his people. Who dareth to lay anything to their charge? There is neither speck, nor spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing remaining upon any one believer in the matter of justification in the sight of the Judge of all the earth. Let present privilege awaken us to present duty, and now, while life lasts, let us spend and be spent for our sweet Lord Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, Logos Bible Software.