

The Elements of Justification

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.”
—**Romans 8:33**

Justification is one of the most important teachings in the Bible. It helps us to understand the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ and how our relationship with God is estab-

lished. Our loving Heavenly Father desires to have some of Adam’s progeny share in blessing “all the families of the earth” under the administration of Christ’s kingdom. In that regard, he has provided the means necessary to justify those whom he has called from the world during this present Gospel Age.

Defining Justification

In the *King James Version* of the New Testament, the words “justification” and “righteousness” both come from the same Greek root that denotes being made “right, innocent, or holy.” (Rom. 5:16-19; 6:18) The Bible further states that it is God who justifies, as noted in our opening verse. Therefore, the thought behind the word justification is to be made right with our Heavenly Father. Justification, as it

pertains to the called in Christ Jesus during this present time, is the arrangement by which God recognizes believers as being made right even though they are not actually righteous. Thus, having been made acceptable, God begets these to a spiritual life that permits them to have fellowship and communion with him.—I Cor. 6:11; I John 1:3,7

One of the features of justification is the removal of any estrangement and discord that may exist between God and the one justified. Someone may ask how this is possible since we were all born sinners, and how can righteousness be conferred upon anyone born imperfect? (Ps. 51:5; Isa. 64:6) How does the Bible answer this question?

A Fundamental Doctrine

Each of the following scriptures presents an element, or aspect, of the Christian's justification. These are taken from the Apostle Paul's letter to the brethren at Rome, and all apply to the justification of the church class during this present age since Pentecost. As we review these, we must keep in mind the statement of our theme text: "It is God that justifieth."—Rom. 8:33

We are justified by God's grace.—Rom. 3:24

We are justified by the blood of Christ.—Rom. 5:9

Christ was raised again for our justification.—Rom. 4:25

We are justified by faith.—Rom. 5:1

By God's Grace

With the foregoing brief introduction we will consider some of the aspects of the Christian's justification. In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul explained, "But now the righteousness of God

has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”—Rom. 3:21-24, *English Standard Version*

The last phrase is especially important: “justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” This introduces to us a righteousness, or justification, that is set apart from the Law of Moses, or any other written law, and is not dependent upon deeds and works. The Jewish people tried to attain righteousness through keeping the Mosaic Law, but they failed. This scripture points us to a righteousness, or justification, that is obtained by faith in Jesus Christ. Both Jews and Gentiles need to be made right with God, as Paul proclaimed, “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (vs. 20) Thus, justification is made manifest: “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ.” God accepts us only because we have faith in Christ Jesus.

We need this wonderful grace because, as Paul states, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Adam in his perfection was crowned with glory and honor, but none of his children have enjoyed the glory of human perfection. All have sinned and all are imperfect. Paul points out that we are “justified by his grace as a gift.” God’s grace is his unmerited favor resulting from his love and lovingkindness. It is because of his great love for us

that he arranged for our justification. Therefore, the first feature of our standing before God in righteousness is our Heavenly Father's love for us.

Had it not been for his loving grace and his great goodness and kindness, there would be no opportunity for us to be anything other than sinners in the sight of God, with none excepted. This realization brings to our minds the words of a familiar scripture: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) He gave, and we are justified freely by his grace. The gift of his Son was not without cost to God. It cost him much in that it required the death of his beloved Son. It was also not without cost to our Lord Jesus. It cost him crucifixion and death, condemned unjustly as a blasphemer of God. (I Pet. 2:21-24; 3:18; John 10:33) This great love was freely given and without cost to us, and it opened up a new and living way for us to come back into fellowship and communion with God.—Heb. 10:19,20

Let us pause and think for a moment of God's love for us. The Heavenly Father was the one who was sinned against. It was his instructions that were dishonored in the Garden of Eden. (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 5:12) It was Adam and Eve, who owed so much to him and that sinned against him. Yet, it was our loving Father in heaven who made the first overture toward reconciliation, and at great cost. He arranged the first step so that those under condemnation could be brought back into fellowship with him. (I John 4:9,10) This was a wonderful expression of his grace and lovingkindness. It was the first requirement in providing the

way for our justification. Through God's great love he provided the "redemption that is in Christ Jesus."
—Rom. 3:24

By Christ's Blood

Paul speaks of another requirement to our being justified. We read, "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." (Rom. 5:9) We are justified by the blood of Christ, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation [or atonement] through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."—Rom. 3:25

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote, "Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." (Eph. 2:13) These scriptures explain that the blood of Christ is a fundamental requirement to our standing of justification before God. The "sins that are past" refer to Adamic sins. The "wrath" of God speaks of the condemnation of Adam under which all mankind is born.—Rom. 1:18

The "blood of Christ" has primary reference to his death. The "life of the flesh is in the blood." (Lev. 17:11) Shed blood results in the death of the life that existed in the body. Thus, we understand the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This principle is, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (I Cor. 15:21,22) That is, because of the shed blood of Jesus, and the fact that as a perfect man he was a ransom, an exact corresponding price for perfect

Adam before he sinned, all will be given the opportunity to gain life that was lost due to Adamic sin.

It is written, "Take heed therefore ... to feed the church of God, which he [Jesus] hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28) When we are purchased with Jesus' precious blood, then our relationship with God is dependent upon that purchase price. We cannot separate Christ's sacrifice from salvation. Our salvation depends upon it. The Apostle Peter wrote, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, ... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."—I Pet. 1:18,19

In the Old Testament, the Israelites' sacrifice of the Passover lamb illustrated this point. The lamb "without blemish" was sacrificed, its shed blood was applied according to God's instructions, and the firstborn received life as a result. (Exod. 12:3-14) The offering of a life to God is the essential matter in sacrifice, and therefore, blood becomes a symbol of sacrificial death. The blood of Christ is a gift to us because he sacrificed his life for us.—I Cor. 5:7; Eph. 5:2

The expression "being justified by Jesus' blood" emphasizes the fact that the ransom, which signifies "the price of redemption" (*Thayer's Greek Definitions*), is a prerequisite of our justification. The philosophy of the ransom, and the part it plays in our deliverance from God's condemnation of our race to death because of sin, is an important and fundamental truth. It clearly teaches that our redemption, which is from God, is made possible through Christ Jesus and his shed blood.—Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; I Tim. 2:5,6

By Jesus' Resurrection

Another aspect of justification is found in Paul's letter to the brethren at Rome. When speaking of the righteousness imputed, or reckoned, to Abraham because of his faith, the apostle said, "For our sake also, unto whom it [righteousness] shall be reckoned, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification."—Rom. 4:24,25, *Revised Version*

Christ was "delivered" up in death for our trespasses. Had he remained dead, however, none of the human race could ever be accounted righteous in the sight of God. Therefore, he was raised from death that we might be justified. Justification depends upon a change from our being at enmity with God to being reconciled to him, and from being under condemnation to being freed from that condemnation of death because of sin. Only by Jesus' resurrection could this be fully accomplished.

Paul referred to Israel's Tabernacle sacrifices and the future offering of "better sacrifices." "It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." Then he explained, "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." (Heb. 9:23,24) When Christ entered into the presence of God for us, he did not take the blood of a bull or the blood of a goat as was done in Israel's Tabernacle arrangement. Rather, he presented the merit, or value, of his own sacrificed life "for us"

and, subsequently, for all mankind, to be manifest under the provisions of his future kingdom over the earth.—Matt. 6:10

If Jesus had not been resurrected and had not appeared in God's presence for us, we would not be justified. John recorded Jesus' words, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."—John 10:17,18

It was indispensable that Jesus take up that life again in order to accomplish the full purpose of his death. He said, "No man taketh it from me." This was not true of Adam, whose life had been taken from him because of his disobedience to God's law. Jesus was always obedient to his Father's will and voluntarily laid down his life in sacrifice. Because he was perfect, his life was his own to either keep or to give. He chose to give it, but also proclaimed, "I have power to take it again."

This is not to suggest that Jesus raised himself from death. He was raised from the dead by the mighty power of his Heavenly Father, as clearly taught in the Scriptures. "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." (Acts 2:24) Jesus was raised from the grave to the highest of all spirit planes. He appeared in the presence of God on behalf of his faithful consecrated followers who are being called "in Christ Jesus" during this present Gospel Age. (Phil. 3:14) This was a necessary step before anyone could be released from Adamic

condemnation and be justified through the “redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

By Faith

The next element of the Christian’s justification is also found in Paul’s letter to the Romans, where he said, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:1,2) God’s love and grace in providing a way through the gift of his Son was the first step toward our justification. Christ’s faithfulness even unto death, his resurrection, and his appearing in the presence of God for us were further steps towards our justification.

We recognize the importance of God’s part as well as the importance of our Lord Jesus’ part in this providential arrangement of grace on our behalf. We have a part also. Our part and privilege is the full exercise of our faith, which is to be an active principle in the life of every child of God. Our faith must result in action. “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”—James 2:17

At the beginning of our walk with God, we were moved to act upon our faith by offering ourselves to him in full consecration, or dedication, to do his will. This was a most important step. During this present age, the merit of Christ’s blood is imputed only to those who have truly consecrated themselves to God. If we have made a full and acceptable consecration to God, through the imputation of Christ’s merit, we are covered with the robe of his righteousness. (Isa. 61:10) Thus we are made acceptable to

God as a “living sacrifice.” “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”—Rom. 12:1

The statement previously quoted, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God,” does not refer to the peace of a tranquil life, but rather that we have peace with God in the sense of no longer being at enmity and in opposition to him. This peace of reconciliation is possible only because we have had imputed to us the merit of Christ’s blood. The Heavenly Father sees us as being righteous and clean before him only because we are covered with the righteousness of Christ. Thus, we are justified in God’s sight. At this present time, only those consecrated to God may receive this redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Of them, Paul said, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”—Rom. 8:1

One of the connotations of the word “peace” is reconciliation. It is the same word used by Luke when he recorded the words of the angelic host: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:14) It brings us joy in the realization that the time is coming when there will be reconciliation and peace between God and all mankind. Thus will be fulfilled the words, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”—vss. 10,11

One of the most beautiful texts that the Apostle Paul has written in explanation of justification is found in his letter to the church at Rome. “To

declare, I say, at this time his [God's] righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Rom. 3:26) Our Heavenly Father was just in sentencing man to death. However, if the sentence was just, how could he remove that sentence and still be just? He can do so only because of the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who died "the just for the unjust."—I Pet. 3:18

The foregoing scriptures emphasize God's justice, even as his grace emphasizes his great love. These also affirm his eternal consistency. He provides the way whereby we may come to him and be justified, the way that enables him to be just and yet the justifier. God provides his Son that he can be just and yet be the justifier of the ones made acceptable through faith in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

God Is for Us

When emphasizing God's special care over his people whom he justifies during this present time, the inspired Apostle Paul wrote, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."—Rom. 8:31-34

The subject of justification is a wonderful teaching as it is presented to us in the Word of God. We rejoice in the knowledge that faithful Christians, by virtue of the merit of Christ's precious blood

being imputed to them, are made righteous and acceptable to our loving Heavenly Father. Justification is not the process of being made right, but the imputed righteous condition that is attained by the fully consecrated child of God.

The question may be asked whether God deals with anyone before they are consecrated. There is no doubt that he does. The Scriptures are clear on this point, and the experiences of every child of God confirm that he does indeed deal with those who are drawn to the way of righteousness. Jesus exclaimed, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John 6:44) The thought of the drawing power of God most beautifully expresses the experience of our own lives prior to consecration. Our providences and our experiences, as we sought after the Lord, made us realize that the drawings of God through the power of his Holy Spirit were directing us into the way of truth and righteousness. They were leading us, through his providences, toward the act of consecration and to our justification.

When writing to the Colossian brethren, Paul made the following statement that harmonizes these thoughts. He said, "Having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight."—Col. 1:20-22

This is a wonderful scripture with which to summarize this study. Justification is only the beginning

of our heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. It then leads us on to the subject and work of sanctification. Even as justification changes our status before God at the beginning of our walk in newness of life, sanctification changes us daily as we grow in grace and in knowledge.—I Cor. 1:30; I Thess. 5:23; II Pet. 3:18

Thus we develop as Christians and continue towards the completion of the good work that has begun in us. (Phil. 1:6) Let us consider the great privilege that we enjoy of being justified in God's sight and appreciate the privilege of daily sanctification through the power of the Truth. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17) If faithful unto death, our Christian walk will be finished and we will hear those longed-for words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."—Matt. 25:23

Finally, let us also rejoice in the knowledge that the blood of the cross has a further dimension for the whole sin-sick world of mankind. The Scriptures testify that it will extend the redemption blessings to all people under the administration of Christ's kingdom of life and peace. (Rev. 5:9-13; 20:4,6; 21:2-5) At the close of the thousand-year reign of our Lord and the faithful members of the church class, all the obedient of the human family will have been reconciled to our loving Heavenly Father, and their enmity will be removed. Truly we can say with the Apostle Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"—Rom. 11:33 ■