

The Prerequisites 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 doctrinal studies in the Bible. It helps us to understand the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ and how our relationship with God is attained. Our loving Heavenly Father, wishing to have some of his creatures share in blessing all the families of the earth under the administration of Christ’s future kingdom, has provided the important prerequisites necessary to justify those whom he has called from the world during this present Gospel Age.

DEFINING JUSTIFICATION

In our English Bible, the words “justification” and “righteousness” both come from the same Greek root which means “to be made right.” The Bible states in many places that it is God who justifies us. 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 Gospel Age, is the

arrangement by which God recognizes us as being made right even though we are not actually righteous. Thus, having been made acceptable, God begets us to a spiritual life that permits us to have fellowship and communion with him.

One of the qualifications of justification must be 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? How does the Bible answer this question?

A FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE

Each of the following scriptures presents a prerequisite of our 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 Gospel Age. We must keep in mind the statement of our theme text that, "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 this brief introduction we will consider some of the prerequisites of our justification. In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul explained, "Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by

faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”—Rom. 3:21-24

The last phrase is especially important, “being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” This introduces to us a righteousness that is set apart from the Law of Moses, and is not dependent upon the deeds of the Law. The Jewish people tried to attain righteousness through keeping the 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, “even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ.” God accepts us only because we have faith in Christ Jesus.

We need this wonderful grace because, “all have sinned, and come 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 “being justified freely by his grace.” God’s grace is his unmerited favor resulting from his love and loving-kindness. It is because of his great love for us that he arranged for our justification. Therefore, the first prerequisite 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 toward us, there would be no opportunity for us to be other than sinners in the sight of God. This is true of every one of us with none excepted. This realization brings to our minds the words of a very 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. 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.

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. It was Adam and Eve who owed so much to him and who 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. This was a wonderful expression of his grace and loving-kindness. This was the first requirement in providing the way for our justification. Through his great love he provided the "redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

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Paul speaks of another prerequisite 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 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 prerequisite 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.

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

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

The sacrifice of the Passover lamb illustrated this point. The lamb died, its shed blood was applied, and the firstborn received life as a result. 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.

The expression "being justified by Jesus' blood" emphasizes the fact that the ransom is a prerequisite of our justification, and it plays a very important part in our relationship with God. 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 that clearly teaches that our redemption, which is from God, is made possible through Christ Jesus and his shed blood.

BY JESUS' RESURRECTION

Another prerequisite is found in Paul's letter to the brethren at Rome. When speaking of "The Christ," he said, "For us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."—Rom. 4:24,25

Christ was "delivered" up in death for our offences. Had he remained dead, 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 thus 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.

Paul referred to the Tabernacle and the typical applications of better sacrifices which they were designed to illustrate. "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." (Heb. 9:23) 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. (vs. 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 the typical application. 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.

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 fruition of his death. He said, "No man taketh it from me," which

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, and 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. In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, Paul told them, "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." 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 prerequisite 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 was a further step toward 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. Our part is the full exercise of our faith, which is an active principle in the life of every child of God. Our faith must be active. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."—James 2:17

Faith moves us to offer ourselves to God in full consecration, which is another step in our justification. We are justified by Jesus' blood which provides the merit of his ransom sacrifice. During this present Gospel Age, the merit of his blood is applied only for those who have truly consecrated themselves to God. If we have made a consecration to God, through the imputation of Christ's merit, we are covered with the robe of his righteousness and are thus 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, "Therefore 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 and are no longer 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 robe of Christ's righteousness. Thus, we are justified in God's sight. Only those consecrated to God may receive this redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Of them, Paul said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit."—Rom. 8:1

One of the connotations of the word "peace" is reconciliation. It is the same word used by Luke when he recorded, "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 man. Because of that reconciliation, there will be "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

Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are reconciled to God by the death of his Son. We are justified by Jesus' blood and by the imputation of its merit. We thus exercise faith in that precious blood, and offer ourselves in complete consecration to the Heavenly Father. This is another important step in partaking of the merit of Jesus' sacrifice, and is therefore a prerequisite of our justification.

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 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, because the merit of the ransom is extended to those who have full faith in our Lord Jesus. This scripture emphasizes God's justice, even as his grace emphasizes his great love. It also affirms 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. He 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 who he justifies during this present Gospel Age, 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 doctrine as it is presented to us in the Word of God. We rejoice in the knowledge that the elect, 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 righteous con-

dition that is attained by the fully consecrated child of God.

The question may be asked whether God deals with anyone before they are consecrated, and 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 deal with those who are in 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 expression, "the drawings of the Lord," 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 directing 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 conclude this study. Justification is only the beginning of our heavenly calling in Christ Jesus, and 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.

Thus we develop as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. We go on towards the completion of the good work that has begun in us. Let us consider the great privilege that we enjoy of being justified in God's sight, and appreciate the privilege that we have 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, at last 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

We 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 the entire world under the administration of Christ's future kingdom of life and peace. 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. Paul said, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."—Eph. 1:10

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