



Justification

Note: The Scripture references in this hand-out are taken from the New King James Version. Some of the answers are taken from, "The Gospel According to Jesus" by John MacArthur.

The most unsettling aspect of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is this statement: "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). If the gauge of righteousness is absolute perfection, what hope is there for anyone?

Jesus also said, "*Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 5:20, emphasis added). If you believe that establishes an impossible standard, you have understood the message.

- Recall the encounter Jesus had with the rich young ruler... he was a Pharisee who evidently believed he had kept the law as completely as humanly possible. After he walked away unbelieving, Jesus told his disciples, "*It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 19:23). What was their response? Astonished, they asked him, "*Then who can be saved?*" (v. 25). Jesus' reply was, "*With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*"

Genesis 15:6 is an example of the doctrine of justification which runs throughout the Bible. What can we learn about the doctrine of justification from Genesis 15:6?

Genesis 15:6 - And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Justification is God recognizing us as righteous because we accept God's Word as truth. Regeneration is the change in the inner man through faith in Christ, while justification is a legal term which pictures the believer's new status before God.

Romans 4:5 - to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness

No one has ever been saved through the merit system — salvation has been available only by grace through faith ever since our first parents fell.

How does the Bible's teaching on how we may be made right with God clash with all the religions of the world?

All the religions of the world teach what a person must do to earn acceptance by God. Even Christianity became a religion of rituals and ceremonies in the Middle Ages. Martin Luther rediscovered the doctrine of justification by

faith alone thus bringing about the Protestant Reformation and ending what has been known as the Dark Ages...

Romans 1:17 - the just shall live by faith

How does the biblical doctrine of justification set true Christianity apart from every form of false religion?

The cornerstone of justification is the reckoning of righteousness to the believer's account. This is called, "imputed righteousness." Apart from righteousness being imputed to a person, salvation is utterly impossible.

How is it that the righteousness of Christ may be imputed to Christians?

Christ made the atonement for our sins by shedding his own blood on the cross. That provides forgiveness...

Hebrews 9:22 - according to the law... without shedding of blood there is no remission [of sins]

And just as our sins were put to his account when he bore them on the cross, so now his righteousness is reckoned as our own. His perfect righteousness thus becomes the ground on which we stand before God.

What does Romans 1:17 tell us about how faith is linked to justification?

Romans 1:17 - the just shall live by faith

Having faith in Christ goes along with being justified before God...

Philippians 3:9 - be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith

Where do we come by our faith that justifies us?

This too is a gift of God...

Ephesians 2:8 - For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

No one can justify himself...

Romans 8:33 - It is God who justifies.

Jesus told the Pharisees...

Luke 16:15 - You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.

What is the benefit to us through justification by God?

Romans 8:33 - Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

No one can accuse true Christians of not being righteous before God. Justification by God contains several elements:

imputed righteousness, forgiveness of sins, a new standing before God, and a reversal of God's wrath.

Who accuses us before God?

The Bible says that Satan accuses us but the time will come when God will bring an end to this...

Revelation 12:10 - Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.

Fortunately for us, Jesus our Advocate sits at the right hand of God interceding on our behalf...

Romans 8:34 - Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Does God forgiving us mean that He excuses or disregards our wrongdoing?

If God simply ignored sins, he would compromise his own holiness. Instead, the penalty sin demands was fully paid in the death of Christ. We are therefore *"justified as a gift by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness ... that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"* (Romans 3:24-26).

What does Isaiah 53:6 have to say about how people may be justified before God?

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 [Christ] the iniquity of us all.

Justification is grounded on the fact of man's sin being laid on Christ. Jesus bears the sin of all who accept Him. He is our substitute...

1 Peter 2:24 - [Christ] who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness-- by whose stripes you were healed.

As the sinful nature in man was caused by *the fall*, one single event (Genesis 3), so man, in the same manner, must be raised from *the fall* by the Lord Jesus Christ through one supreme event, the Cross...

Romans 5:19 - For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

What does Romans 3:24 have to say about how people may be justified before God?

Romans 3:24 - being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Justification originates in the grace of God. God, in His grace, justifies freely.

Does justify does mean to be made righteous?

Romans 4:5 - But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

To be justified means to be seen as righteous by God. God sees us in Christ and it is just as if we had never sinned. Praise God!

What is the difference in being made righteous and being seen as righteous by God?

Being seen as righteous is for the here and now. There is a subtle difference but the most important aspect of the outcome is the same (eternal life). When we are resurrected, God will make us righteous...

1 Corinthians 15:52 - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

What is necessary for people to be justified before God?

Romans 3:28 - Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

People are justified by faith alone. Paul states that justification is not by success in observing God's law, but by faith in Christ.

Does James 2:24 conflict with Romans 3:28?

James 2:24 - You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

Paul and James can not be in conflict, because both wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The difficulty lies in our understanding. The point made in context by James is that if a person has saving faith, there will be works that reveal his faith...

James 2:18 - But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

It looks to the world like the person of faith is being justified by works but we know the difference... the works are the result of a true faith.

James 2:26 - faith without works is dead

If you don't have good works, you don't have a true faith. The two great writers are simply saying:

- before God, "Justified by faith"
- before men, "Justified by works"

Does God need to see our works to know that a person believes?

1 Samuel 16:7 - the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

God does not need to see our works to know that a person believes. He looks upon the heart while men look at the outward appearance.

What value then do good works have in the life of a believer?

Works are the evidence of faith. Good works result from a change in a person's attitude and world view. Rightly motivated good works are used by God to serve His purpose and there will be rewards in eternity for our obedience to Him.

How do our good works motivated by faith in Christ serve others?

The world looks for a real demonstration of faith which works in love. They expect us to simply pay lip-service to good works by doing religious activities but looking like the rest of the world when we argue among ourselves. People can see through the façade, rightly motivated good works attract people to God.

Should we be satisfied to only be justified by God?

Christians should strive to demonstrate the faith they confess before the world so they might see our justification.

What does the parable of the Pharisee and the publican tell us about justification?

Luke 18:9-14 - Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men-- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

During his earthly ministry, Jesus rarely used the word *justification*. Nevertheless, justification by faith was the underlying theme of the messages He preached.

When does justification occur?

The parable reveals that justification is instantaneous. The repentant tax-collector "*went down to his house justified*"; he did not have to do any ritual to be justified. Justification is an instantaneous change of one's standing before God, not a gradual transformation.

How is it that God would find a traitorous tax collector more acceptable than the Pharisees who took great pains to obey every detail of God's law?

The Pharisees "*trusted in themselves that they were righteous*" (Luke 18:9).

What kind of righteousness describes the attitude of the Pharisees?

People who trust in their own righteousness are called self-righteous. The self-righteous assume they have ample righteousness of their own and do not see the need for imputed righteousness.

What is the rest of the story here... do you think the tax collector continued praying in fear and anguish on every visit to the temple?

Certainly not... like Matthew and Zaccheus, two real-life tax-gatherers, this man would have discovered that justification offers the only possible relief from the guilt of sin. We can be certain that his life would not have continued as before.

What is the distinction between justification and sanctification?

Roman Catholic theology confuses justification with sanctification. Both sanctification and justification are works of God but sanctification involves a change in the sinner's character, not just a new standing before God. Catholic theologians include sanctification as an aspect of justification thus rendering instantaneous justification impossible. Even worse, Catholic theologians substitute the believer's own imperfect righteousness in place of Christ's unblemished righteousness as the basis of justification.

Can you have justification and sanctification separate from each other?

You can not have justification without sanctification, and visa versa. God will not justify those he does not sanctify and God does not offer justification as a stand-alone means of salvation.

- Election, regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification, and even glorification are all integral facets of God's saving work: "*Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son [sanctification], ... and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified*" (Romans 8:29–30).

Does justification by faith mean that Christians do not have to observe God's laws?

Not if the doctrine is properly understood... Paul addressed this error: "*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?*" "*What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be*" (Romans 6:1 & 15).