

Justification

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Sunday, 28 August 2011 20:15

Introduction

We know. We have lived with ourselves for some time and we do not like ourselves as we are. Others do not always like us either. On the other hand, some think very highly of themselves, which may be a psychological mechanism to cope with low self-esteem. Regardless of human opinion, the crucial question is, "What does *God* think about us?"

Paul's Discovery

Saul of Tarsus made an outstanding discovery. This discovery changed his life radically for the better. The personal change was so deep that his name was changed to Paul. He later became the Apostle Paul, the chief spokesman for Christianity. Paul penned the Epistle to the Romans and 2 Corinthians. He records,

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:21-26, NIV

God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV

The book of Romans contains the spiritual autobiography of Paul. Paul had been a Pharisee and as such believed in the resurrection, the supernatural and the inspiration of the Old Testament. He had been trying to earn salvation and right standing with God by his own good works. However, there must have been a nagging doubt in the mind of Paul that drove him into

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frenzied activity. This question arose and stayed in Paul's mind: "How much of the Law must I keep in order to be in a right relationship with God?" The rational answer is, of course, that one must have *always* kept the Law and then he must keep it *perpetually*. Paul discovered that no one could keep the entire Law of God. See my ebook, *The Amazing Paul*

Autosoteric Religion

Many people assume that they meet God's requirements when they do their best to keep the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." They are trusting in their own efforts to please God. However, the Bible teaches us that we *cannot* save ourselves.

James adds that any infraction of the Law of God violates the Lawgiver himself:

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

James 2:10-11, NIV

Further investigation reveals that the standard by which God judges us is not some *relative* standard established by human consensus, but by the person of God himself. People often compare themselves with one another—it does not work in God's

absolute

standard of justice. God's standard extends beyond human

external

actions and speech. God said that we must be

internally

and

absolutely

morally pure:

I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.

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Leviticus 11:45, NIV

But just as who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

1 Peter 1:15-16, NIV

In summary,

1. All of us have broken God's Laws by acts and speech.
2. All of us have violated the Lawgiver.
3. Our hearts are sinful.
4. God himself is the standard of holiness to which we must attain—not some human norm.

5. We all fall short of God's personal holiness.
6. We cannot attain the moral perfection of God by self-effort.
7. God himself must justify us and make us holy.

How Do We Become Acceptable to God?

How can a human being get into right standing with God? How can one meet God's standard? Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus and personally experienced that for which he had so zealously contended: his own right standing with God.

In the Old Testament, God revealed himself as *YAHWEH-TSIDKENU*, "the Lord Our Righteousness":

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.

Jeremiah 23:5-6, NIV

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In this prophecy concerning the Messiah, God revealed that He Himself is our sole source of righteousness.

In the New Testament, both the words *justification* and *righteousness* come from a common Greek word root (stem). The adjective

dikaios

is translated "righteous [one]," whereas, the verb form

dikaioō

is translated "justify" (Earle 1974, 74).

Dikaioō

occurs thirty-nine times in the New Testament (twenty-seven times in Paul's writings) and its cognates occur over two hundred times, establishing justification by faith as one of the most important truths in the New Testament (Earle 1979, 188-189). The word

righteousness

means to have the same standing with God that Jesus has (Schrenk 1967, S.v. "

Dikaiosune

in Paul").

Three Aspects of Our Salvation

There are three aspects of our salvation:

1. Justification—we are saved.

1.1 The New Birth follows justification.

1.2 The Baptism of the Holy Spirit follows the New Birth.

2. Sanctification—we are being saved.

2.1 *Crisis* experience.

2.2 *Progressive* experiences.

3. Glorification—we will be saved.

3.1 We will receive a new and immortal *Soul*.

3.2 We will receive a new and immortal *Body*.

Justification is *objective*, that is, it happens in the mind of God. God declares the believer to be right with Himself legally (Thiessen 1979, 273), (Cf. Schrenk 1967, S.v. "

Dikaiosune

in Paul," Earle 1974, 74-77 and Earle 1979, 188-190).

Earle, after discussing positions by Cremer, Abbot-Smith, Burton (ICC), Thayer, Sanday and Headlam, Schrenk, and Vincent, warns of the error of holding to a mere doctrine of *imputed* righteousness without *imparted*

righteousness. In other words, if one has not experienced the new birth with a changed life, he has not been justified either (Earle 1974, 74-77).

Sanctification is *subjective*, that is, it happens within the believer. Sanctification consists of both crisis and progressive experiences by which God conforms the believer more and more into the image of Christ, while in this life.

Glorification will be a subjective experience. Glorification of the believer will occur at the resurrection. At this time the Lord will recreate both the believer's soul and body, making them perfect and immortal. Our spirits are immortal now.

Paul teaches that we shall have a new mind, resulting in a higher form of knowledge:

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

1 Corinthians 13:12, NIV)

In Corinth, the mirrors were polished metal, unlike our high fidelity silvered glass mirrors today. God will restore reason to our minds and our minds will be sin-free. God will greatly improve our understanding and we will grasp things that are mysteries to us now. We will have the same type of knowledge that Christ has.

Paul does not try to explain what our glorified bodies will be like except to say that they will be real, immortal and superior to what we now have. He explains the necessity of this body passing away in order to receive a perfect one. He presents several analogies and then says,

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44, NIV

Jesus said that we will no longer be male or female—glorified human beings will no longer have children:

At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.

Matthew 22:30, NIV

Notice that Jesus said that we will not *become* angels, but be *like* them. His point is that we will be like the Angels, which are neither male nor female.

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Therefore, we can say that

1. God has saved us—he *justified* us;
2. God is in the process of saving us—he is *sanctifying* us; and
3. God will save us—he will *glorify* us.

Aspects of Justification

There are at least four major aspects of justification:

1. God alone justifies the sinner, based solely on the sacrifice of his Son.
2. God justifies us on the condition of our faith in Christ alone and not by our works.
3. God alone forgives our sins.
4. God alone imputes Christ's righteousness to us.

The Dynamics of Justification

The believer in Christ is justified by faith alone. And, just as important, the believer is kept justified by faith alone. One cannot earn righteousness by good deeds or right conduct—righteousness is a gift. If one could earn righteousness, then he would not need Christ.

One cannot grow into righteousness or justification. The believer is just as righteous as he will ever be the moment God justifies him! On the other hand, one grows 1) in the knowledge of Christ and 2) in sanctification.

Justification occurs in the mind of God whereas the new birth occurs in the believer:

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Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV

A later step will deal with the new birth.

Also, one does not keep Christ's imputed righteousness (or remain justified) by keeping the Law. How much of the Law would one have to keep in order to stay justified? Of course the answer is one would have to keep 100 percent of the Law, 100 percent the time! This includes keeping the letter of the Law as well as the spirit of the Law. Since the standard is the absolute moral perfection of God and not relativistic human standards, only the continued imputed righteousness of Christ will satisfy the justice of God!

When Jesus died on the cross, He spoke the Greek word *tetelestai*, "It is finished." *Tetelestai* is the perfect passive indicative, third person singular of [the verb]

teleō

, "from [the noun]

telos

; to

end

, that is,

complete

,

execute

,

conclude

,

discharge

(a debt): - accomplish, make an end, expire, fill up, finish, go over, pay, perform" (Strong 1890, S.v., "

teleō

"). "The Greek perfect tense denotes the present state resultant upon a past action" (Machen 1957, 187). Jesus' death on the cross never needs to be repeated. He paid the price for our salvation once and for all!

Life is not static, but ongoing and dynamic. How does one maintain a right relationship with God? Does he keep the Law of God in order to remain justified? Even if it were possible to keep the known Law of God, one would break the unknown Law of God. David implies that all are guilty of secret sins (unknown or *subethical* sins) as well as known sins (presumptuous or *ethic*

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al
sins):

Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.
Psalm 19:12-13, NIV

If it were possible to avoid sins of *commission* (known and unknown sins), one would miss the mark with sins of *omission* (failing to do what is right in given circumstances): "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17, NIV).

Even if one could flawlessly execute proper conduct and speech, how can one change his own internal sinful state? Can the *Adamic nature* be changed by self-effort? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil" (Jeremiah 13:23, NIV). The answer is obvious: one can no more keep himself justified as he can justify himself initially.

God keeps us justified on the condition of our continued believing. The dynamic aspect of our justification rests on the same basis as our initial justification. "But," someone will say, "What about my sinning after I was saved? Somehow, I don't feel as clean as I did right after being born again." John answers,

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
1 John 1:9, NIV

If God *purifies the believer from all unrighteousness*, then the believer is righteous. *Partly righteous*

Partly justified
is an oxymoron—it is *self-contradictory*

. We must take God at his word and not become discouraged. We must let our moral failures

or
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drive us

to

God for restoration, rather than

away

from God. We must

instantly

1) ask God for forgiveness and 2) repent when we sin. This must be the Christian's lifestyle.

Jesus died for the sins of the believer:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

1 Peter 2:24, NIV

God has forgiven our sins and has forgotten them: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17, NIV).

We must forget them, too. Perhaps the reader will remember the old Sunday school acrostic; *It is Just - as - if - I'd never sinned*

.

A bumper sticker reminds us that "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven sinners." The first part is true, but the second is not quite true—we are not "*just* forgiven sinners." The *negative* aspect of justification is that our sins are forgiven, but we must include *the imputation of Christ's righteousness*.

God imputes to believers the *positive* right standing that Christ has with God. We must understand this very important, *positive* aspect of justification today. Paul publishes the good news:

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

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Romans 10:10, NIV

After one believes in Christ as Lord and Savior, then God imputes Christ's righteousness to the believer based on Christ's death *alone*. Then, the believer confesses publically that Jesus is his Lord and Savior. We no longer *run* from life, but we *reign* in this present life:

For if, by the trespass of the one man [Adam], death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the *gift of righteousness* [italics mine] reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:17-19, NIV

What is the ultimate experience of freedom? It is for us to have the settled knowledge that God's *gift* of righteousness belongs to all who trust Christ. Righteousness or justification is unearned, because we cannot earn it—it is a gift. God removes worry about our relationship with himself. That God should love us to that extent is amazing! "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!"

On the other hand, the untaught believer is kept in bondage because he does not understand that God views him as having Christ's righteousness. Untaught believers experience mental anguish and unnecessary suffering. The resultant low self-esteem,

1. Inhibits achievement.
2. Produces an ineffective prayer life.
3. Opens the door to discouragement.
4. Hinders our work for the Lord.

God wants us *to reign in this life, right now!*

Could such an untaught believer come before God boldly as God tells him to do?

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Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:16, NIV

God and the knowledge of his Word give us the "ability to stand in the presence of God without the sense of sin, guilt or inferiority" (Kenyon 1964, 219).

James gives Elijah as an example of a righteous man:

Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

James 5:17-18, NIV

Elijah is a man with whom one can identify. He was "up and down" emotionally in his relationship with God: calling fire down from heaven one minute and being depressed the next. He outran the king's chariot one minute and ran from a woman the next. He performed miracles one minute and wanted to die the next. Why did not James choose Daniel or Joseph as examples of righteous men? Daniel and Joseph were stable and had no recorded sin in their lives. The answer lies in the basis of justification. All the saints of the Bible were justified on the same basis as the believer is justified today—by faith alone.

One must receive the Word of God into his heart and take the Word of God over human opinion. *It is a sin to say anything less about oneself than what God says.*

If you have not received Christ as your Savior, do so now. Do not put it off another moment. Go to the next chapter if you need help.

Assignment: Tell a friend that God has justified you and that you now have Christ's righteousness. Make 2 Corinthians 5:21 personal by confessing it aloud:

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God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for me, therefore, in Christ, I have become the righteousness of God.

(Confession personalized from 2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV)

Read and meditate on the scriptures in this chapter on justification for one week every night before going to bed.

Chapter 1 of my eBook, *How to Raise Your Self-Esteem Using Proven Biblical Principles*.

Download this book free at

<http://BusterSoft.com/JRCM/>

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