

Salvation—Justification (1th)

(Our study for today introduces the subject of justification. Not only is justification defined, but a brief overview of justification by faith, blood, Christ, and grace reveal that faith or man believing is not the means of justification.)

Thus far we have been looking at the overall work of the redemptive work of Christ. Now we desire to study more specifically the doctrine of justification. Previously in other podcasts we briefly mentioned this subject, but now we desire to further show that the justification of a child of grace is solely by the imputed righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. One thing must be kept in mind as we study this doctrine and that is that justification is a legal term and is not an experiential concept as is sanctification. Too often theologians and preachers present justification as something that happens at belief and as a result of belief, and if they do not believe that faith is the cause of justification, too often they are not clear in the relationship of faith and justification. This is because of the phrase “justified by faith” or other expressions where faith is used in connection with the subject of justification. The problem with this is that often other statements or verses are generally ignored when explaining the doctrine of justification. Notice the following verses:

Romans 3:28, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by *faith* without the deeds of the law.”

Romans 5:9, “Much more then, being now justified by his *blood*, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”

Galatians 2:17, “But if, while we seek to be justified by *Christ*, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.”

Titus 3:7, “That being justified by his *grace*, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

James 2:21, “Was not Abraham our father justified by *works*, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?”

We will discuss James 2:21 at a later time, but now we will focus our attention to the other four verses.

It should be obvious that we are not justified four different ways and that the words *faith*, *blood*, *Christ*, and *grace* are used to express the same thing; that is, that they are words used to declare that justification is by the Person and work of Christ or that justification is by the imputed righteousness of Christ. I believe Romans 3:27 gives insight to this as it is supplied in the discussion of justification. It says, “Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.” Here we see that there are two laws or principles: works and faith. To be clear as to what we mean by the term principle, we are following this definition of principle: “A fundamental truth; a comprehensive law or doctrine, from which others are derived, or on which others are founded; a general truth; an elementary proposition; a maxim; an axiom; a postulate.” *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* from Sword Searcher Bible program. From this definition, our focus is on “a fundamental truth; a comprehensive law or doctrine.” Therefore, regarding verse twenty-seven God clearly established two laws (or principles) that are mutually exclusive of each other—works and faith. It is this principle of faith to which I direct our attention regarding justification. Also, I remind you that in the passages previously quoted, we found that *faith*, *blood*, *Christ*, and *grace* are synonymous in the justification of sinners. This brings to our attention that justification is by the law or principle of *faith*. Equally, we might say that our justification is by the law or principle of *blood*, or by the law or principle of *Christ*, or by the law or principle of *grace*. Therefore, “justification by faith” is that we are justified by the principle of faith and not by an act of believing; that is, we are justified by the fundamental truth of faith or the comprehensive law or doctrine of faith. In other words, the principle or law of faith is defined as the whole Person and work of Christ. I believe our Lord directed the Apostle Paul to sum it up in Galatians 3:23, “But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.” Faith is used here to refer to the whole economy of faith or grace that was

fulfilled in the Person and work of Christ. Justification by faith is being justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ as fulfilled in His Person and work and not by man believing. This is what some theologians call being justified by the object of faith—Christ. It is true that when one believes he received the blessings and benefits of justification in his heart and soul, but faith does not create justification. It is equally true that faith is an evidence that one is justified. Yet, a person must first be justified before the law prior to faith because faith does not create, but more about this, the Lord willing, in future studies. However, at this point we will focus our attention to the definition of justification and, thereby, show that justification does not change a person or make a person just or righteous; it only pronounces one to be righteous or just. This cannot be better illustrated than by Luke 7:29-30. It says, “And all the people that heard *him*, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.” Here we see that those who heard the preaching of John repented and were baptized “justified God.” Did they make God just or righteous? Obviously not! They simply declared God to be what He is—just. Much more can be said regarding this passage but we will limit our remarks to the fact that justification does not make one righteous or just, but it simply declares one to be just or righteous. With this being said, we will now turn our attention to the Greek words for justification and quote from some major theologians and their definition for justification.

James Buchanan wrote, “Justification is a legal, or forensic, term and is used in Scripture to denote the acceptance of any one as righteous in the sight of God.” This is from his work *The Doctrine of Justification, An Outline of Its History In the Church and of Its Exposition From Scripture*, p. 226.

The renowned John Owen stated, “And I say, that in no place, or on any occasion, is it used in that conjugation wherein it denotes an action *towards another*, in any other sense but to absolve, acquit, esteem, declare, pronounce righteous, or to *impute righteousness*; which is the *forensic sense* of the word we plead for;—that is its constant use and signification, nor doth it ever once signify to make inherently righteous, much less to pardon or forgive: so vain is the pretense of some, that justification consists only in the pardon of sin, which is signified by the word in any one place of Scripture. Almost in all places this sense is absolutely unquestionable; nor is there any more than one which will admit of any debate, and that on so faint a pretense as cannot prejudice its constant use and signification in all other places. Whatever, therefore, an *infusion of inherent grace* may be, or however it may be called, *justification it is not*, it cannot be; the word nowhere signifying any such thing.... This word, therefore, whether the act of God towards men, or of men towards God, or of men among themselves, or of one towards another, be expressed thereby, is always used in a *forensic sense*, and doth not denote a *physical operation*, transfusion, or transmutation.” *The Works of John Owen*, Volume 5, pp. 125-126.

John Dick said, “Justification is a forensic term, which denotes not a change of personal disposition, but a change of his state in relation to the law. It does not make him righteous by an infusion of holy habits, but pronounces him righteous on valid grounds.... To justify the righteous is not to make him, but to pronounce him, righteous upon proof of his innocence, and of the goodness of the cause.... In the New Testament, the word *δικαιουν* always bears a forensic sense, or a sense closely connected with it, importing not to make, but to pronounce righteous.... The forensic sense of justification is manifest from its being opposed to condemnation. ‘It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?’ (Romans 8:33-34).... Justification is a change, not of our nature, but of our state.” *Lectures on Theology*, p. 371.

After supplying the Hebrew and Greek words for justification, Herman Hoeksema wrote, “Both these verbs have uniformly a legal, or judicial, significance: that is, they refer to declaring one just, placing him in a state of righteousness, setting forth as righteous by a legal decision.” After confirming that the New Testament word has the same meaning as the Old Testament word, he said, “It does not refer to one’s ethical righteousness, but to the state of righteousness which is the result of a judicial or legal decision.” *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 493.

John Gill summed it up simply by saying that “... justification is a pronouncing a person righteous according to law, as though he had never sinned” *Sermons and Tracts*, Volume 2, p. 457.

Many such like quotes could be added declaring this same truth as to the meaning of justification but these should be sufficient. Nevertheless, it cannot be said too much that justification does not make one righteous or

just; justification, as simply stated by Gill, “is a pronouncing a person righteous according to law, as though he had never sinned.”

Knowing our sinful nature we can exclaim with Job when he said, “I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God?” (Job 9:2).

It is not simply that we are sinners, but we are sinners from conception. David declared in Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” He did not mean by this that his birth was illegitimate. He knew that his parents were sinners and they could not produce a sinless child. As Job 14:4 declares, “Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? not one.” Furthermore, when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, the whole human race was declared sinners. This is stated in Romans 5:12, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Notice it does not say “all are capable of sinning”; it says “that all have sinned.” The whole human race were legally represented in Adam and sinned in him. Just as Levi, the son of Jacob, paid tithes unto Melchisedec because he was in the loins of Abraham when he paid tithes to Melchisedec. Hebrews 7:9-10 says, “And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.”

Therefore, since man is guilty before God from the fall of Adam, and, equally a sinner by nature because he is born of parents who are sinners, how is it that an individual can be declared not guilty? Or to echo Job 9:2 again, “I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God?” Yes, a person may commit a crime and be sentenced by the judge and later pardoned by the governor, but he is still guilty of the crime committed. But we are not talking about God pardoning a sinner; we are talking about God justifying an individual. Not merely justifying a sinner, but as Romans 4:5 declares, God justifying “the ungodly.”

The answer to these questions will have to wait until future podcasts because our time is up for today. Farewell.