

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What God's Word teaches about

JUSTIFICATION

Gordon Lyons

KJV Edition

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Justification

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Justification

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Part 1

Synopsis: Justification

Justification is a judicial declaration that all the claims of God's justice upon a sinner have been fully met and satisfied; that all the demands of God's holy and righteous law have been fulfilled, and that all the penalties for transgression of that law have been fully paid. The justified sinner's past, present, and future sin has been taken into account, and all has been atoned for and forgiven. None of this has been achieved by the sinner himself. Rather, all of God's demands against the sinner have been met by a sinless substitute—Jesus, the Son of God. From before the creation of the world, God appointed his Son to be the Lamb slain for the sins of his people. He is the perfect atoning sacrifice for sinful men and women. In virtue of his vicarious and atoning death, and on account of his subsequent resurrection, God imputes the perfect righteousness of his Son to all who believe on him. Through their faith in Christ, God fully and forever justifies them or declares them righteous in his sight.

Note 1

Mankind Condemned

Because of their depravity and sin (i.e. inherent corruption derived from Adam, and actual personal sin), God declares all mankind guilty. For their sin and guilt, all unregenerate mankind is abiding under the sentence of condemnation and under God's just and holy wrath. Unless the righteous demands of God's law are fully met, their sin atoned for, and the penalty of sin paid in full, this declaration of guilt and condemnation against fallen and sinful mankind will remain in force. Ultimately, if they remain impenitent to the end, they will perish for all eternity. If sinners are to be delivered from the holy and just wrath of God, a way must be found whereby those who previously have been declared 'guilty' and condemned, can now be declared 'not guilty' and justified. (Ps. 1:18-32; 2:5-16; 3:9-19)

Scripture References

Romans 1:18-20

- ⁽¹⁸⁾ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;
⁽¹⁹⁾ Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed *it* unto them. ⁽²⁰⁾ For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (See vv.21-23)

Romans 1:32

- ⁽³²⁾ Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. (See vv.24-31)

Romans 2:5-6

- ⁽⁵⁾ But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; ⁽⁶⁾ Who will render to every man according to his deeds {*Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12*}; (See Rom. 2:1-4)

Romans 2:7-9

⁽⁷⁾ To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: ⁽⁸⁾ But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, ⁽⁹⁾ Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; (See vv.10-16; cf. v.8 with Rom. 1:18; 2 Thess. 1:6-10)

Romans 3:9-12

⁽⁹⁾ What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;

⁽¹⁰⁾ As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ⁽¹¹⁾ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

⁽¹²⁾ They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one {*Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20*}. (See Rom. 3:13-18)

Romans 3:19

⁽¹⁹⁾ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (Cf. v.23; cf. also John 3:18,36)

Note 2

Meaning of Justification

In the Bible, 'to justify' means 'to declare righteous' or 'to pronounce righteous'. It is important to realise that the term 'to justify' is a forensic or legal term that declares a person to be righteous in the eyes of the law—in this case, God's law. Justification effects the immediate acquittal of the repentant and believing sinner from guilt and condemnation, and declares him to be righteous in the sight of God. Justification, therefore, consists of two distinct elements:

1. *Forgiveness of sin*, and
2. *Imputation of righteousness*.

Scripture References

Romans 3:20

⁽²⁰⁾ Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. (See vv.9-19)

Romans 3:21-24

⁽²¹⁾ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ⁽²²⁾ 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: ⁽²³⁾ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ⁽²⁴⁾ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (See vv.25-28; cf. vv.21-22 with Rom. 1:17; Phil. 3:9)

Romans 4:4-5

- ⁽⁴⁾ Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.
⁽⁵⁾ But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. (See vv.1-3)

Romans 4:6-8

- ⁽⁶⁾ Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,
⁽⁷⁾ *Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.* ⁽⁸⁾ *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin {Psalm 32:1,2}.* (See Rom. 4:9-16)

Romans 8:1

- ⁽¹⁾ *There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (See vv.2-4)

Note 3

Justification is Not Sanctification

The act of justification does not change a person's character, thereby making that person inwardly or inherently righteous or holy. Again, the act of justification does infuse righteousness or holiness into that person. The believer's character and conduct is initially renewed at regeneration. The Holy Spirit continues to transform the believer's life after the likeness of Christ (from one degree of glory to another) through the ongoing and life-long process of sanctification. It is this process—the process of sanctification—which changes the inward man, and which produces the fruit of holiness in the lives of God's children. (Rom. 8:5-14; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; 1 Thess. 4:2-8)

Scripture References

Romans 8:5-8

- ⁽⁵⁾ For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. ⁽⁶⁾ For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. ⁽⁷⁾ Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. ⁽⁸⁾ So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. (See vv.1-4)

Romans 8:9-11

- ⁽⁹⁾ But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. ⁽¹⁰⁾ And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. ⁽¹¹⁾ But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Romans 8:12-14

- ⁽¹²⁾ Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.
⁽¹³⁾ For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. ⁽¹⁴⁾ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (See vv.15-17)

1 Corinthians 3:17-18

⁽¹⁷⁾ If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. (See vv.7-16)

1 Thessalonians 4:2-8

⁽²⁾ For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. ⁽³⁾ For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: ⁽⁴⁾ That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; ⁽⁵⁾ Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: ⁽⁶⁾ That no *man* go beyond and defraud his brother in *any* matter: because that the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. ⁽⁷⁾ For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. ⁽⁸⁾ He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit. (See v.1; cf. 1 Cor. 6:12-20)

Note 4

Imputed Righteousness

A person whom God has justified or declared righteous has not been justified on the ground of his own righteousness. The sinner's own inherent moral qualities, such as 'uprightness of character', are totally unacceptable to God since they are thoroughly corrupted by that person's sin. The righteousness which God sees in the believing sinner—and by which he has been justified—is the righteousness of God's own Son. The believer stands before God 'clothed' or 'covered' with the perfect righteousness of Christ. On this ground alone God justifies him or declares him righteous. This righteousness of Christ that God has credited to the believer's account is known as *imputed* righteousness.

Scripture References

Isaiah 53:4-5

⁽⁴⁾ Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁽⁵⁾ But he was wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. (See vv.1-3; cf. 1 Pet. 2:24)

Isaiah 53:6

⁽⁶⁾ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. (See vv.7-9; cf. 1 Pet. 2:25)

Isaiah 53:11

⁽¹¹⁾ He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. (See vv.10,12)

Isaiah 64:6-7

⁽⁶⁾ But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. ⁽⁷⁾ And *there is* none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. (See vv.1-8)

2 Corinthians 5:21

⁽²¹⁾ For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (See vv.18-20)

Philippians 3:9

⁽⁹⁾ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (See vv.4-8)

Note 5

Vicarious or Substitutionary Sacrifice

God forgives and justifies a sinner only because all the righteous demands of his holy law have been fully met, and his justice has been completely satisfied. By himself, a sinner is incapable of meeting the demands of God's holy law, or of satisfying God's justice. If a repentant sinner is to be justified in God's sight, another person—*with no sin of his own*—must meet all the demands of God's law, and satisfy God's justice, on the sinner's behalf. Christ was the only person capable of keeping the law of God in its entirety, and of meeting all of God's righteous demands on the sinner's behalf. This he did by his life of perfect obedience to God's law, and by his atoning death on the cross. Since the Son of God obeyed, suffered and died *as a substitute* for sinners, his sacrifice of atonement is known as a *vicarious* sacrifice.

Scripture References

Romans 3:22-26

⁽²²⁾ 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: ⁽²³⁾ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ⁽²⁴⁾ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ⁽²⁵⁾ 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; ⁽²⁶⁾ To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (See vv.21-31)

1 Peter 1:18-20

⁽¹⁸⁾ Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; ⁽¹⁹⁾ But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: ⁽²⁰⁾ Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, (See vv.13-23)

1 Peter 2:22-24

⁽²²⁾ Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth {*Isaiah 53:9*}:

⁽²³⁾ Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously:

⁽²⁴⁾ Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (See vv.18-25; cf. v. 24 with Isa. 53:5)

Related Bible Truths

Closely related to the doctrine of justification are the doctrines of regeneration, adoption and sanctification. When, by effectual calling, the Holy Spirit regenerates a person and makes him or her able and willing to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that person is justified. Having been justified (declared righteous) by the grace of God, he or she is adopted into the household and family of God. Having received the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the believer is thereafter being sanctified by the Spirit. This process continues throughout the believer's life until they reach heaven's glory. There, God completes and perfects the believer's sanctification in glorification.¹

¹ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Regeneration; Adoption; Sanctification*, by the same author.

Part 2

Doctrine of Justification

Explanation of Terms

1. Justification: To justify means to declare righteous or to pronounce righteous. Justification consists of the following two elements:

(a) Forgiveness of sin.

(b) Imputation of righteousness.

Justification does not make a person inwardly righteous; i.e. it does not alter a person's moral character, thereby making him holy in all manner of life or conduct. Holiness of life is the resultant fruit of regeneration and sanctification—not justification.

2. Righteousness: This word is used in two distinctly different senses:

(a) The moral sense.

(b) The legal or forensic sense.

In the **moral** sense, righteousness is equivalent to uprightness of character. (See further below, under *Inherent Righteousness*.)

In the **legal** or **forensic** sense, righteousness is equivalent to being free from condemnation. Thus a person whom the law has declared 'not guilty', is said to be justified or righteous in the eyes of the law. (His justification and acquittal, however, has not somehow made him a morally righteous person.)

It is in this legal or forensic sense that the Bible speaks of sinners being justified. When God justifies a person, he declares that person to be legally righteous in his sight. Although, therefore, not inherently righteous, the justified sinner *is considered to be* morally righteous with the imputed righteousness of Christ.

3. Inherent righteousness: Inherent righteousness is the innate moral goodness or uprightness of character that a person may possess. This inherent goodness or moral rectitude is seen in those people who endeavour to live honest and upright lives, and who do many commendable works of charity or benevolence. Uprightness of character, however, can never commend a person to God nor can it contribute in any way toward that person's redemption. Man's inherent 'righteousness' is thoroughly contaminated by his sin. However worthy and commendable may be his motives, a man's innate moral rectitude has its source in that person's fallen, sinful nature. The works of an unregenerate and unsanctified nature, however, are utterly abhorrent to God. Because the sinful nature pollutes the whole soul, any righteousness proceeding from this source must fall immeasurably far short of that perfect righteousness that God's law demands. As far as God is concerned, there is none righteous; no, not one (Rom.

3:10). In God's eyes, all our acts of righteousness—all our best intentions and endeavours—are like filthy rags. (Isa. 64:6)

4. Imputed righteousness: Imputed righteousness is that righteousness which God freely credits to a believing sinner's account. It is the righteousness of another person (Christ) which, by grace, God reckons or credits to the believer. For this reason it is sometimes spoken of as 'a righteousness from God'; * i.e. a righteousness that comes from God, and which he freely bestows upon the repentant sinner. Unlike inherent righteousness, which cannot justify a sinner in the sight of God, imputed righteousness can and does justify a sinner in God's sight. Everyone who repents and believes on Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord is thus freely justified through faith, and on the grounds of Christ's redeeming work on that person's behalf. This finished work includes the bearing of that person's sin and guilt at Calvary, and the imputing of Christ's perfect righteousness to the believing sinner's account.

* Rom. 1:17; 3:21-22; Phil. 3:9

5. Imparted righteousness: Imparted righteousness is that righteousness which the Holy Spirit conveys to the believer through the Word of God, during the ongoing process of sanctification. In ever-increasing measure, the believer is being sanctified or made holy as the Spirit of holiness moulds his character and conduct after the likeness of Christ, and in ever greater conformity to Christ himself.

6. Propitiation: A propitiation is an acceptable satisfaction for sin: a satisfaction that is able to turn aside or appease the righteous wrath of God against the sinner. As a satisfaction, it must meet every requirement of God's just and holy law to the full. God demands perfect obedience to, or total compliance with, his law—in every detail. For every transgression or falling short of this perfect standard, God requires that a propitiation (i.e., a satisfaction) be made. To secure our redemption from the curse and the penalty of the law—and from our sin and guilt—God set forth his only Son as a propitiation or sacrifice of atonement for our sins (Rom. 3:25). The propitiation effected by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God, provides a full and permanent satisfaction to God for the sins of all his people. This applies to all generations of God's redeemed people throughout the ages. Expiation is a related term.

7. Atonement: Atonement is an act, whereby, by means of a propitiatory or atoning and substitutionary sacrifice, God reconciles sinful men and women to himself. In his fallen and unregenerate state, man is at enmity with God by wicked works. (Col. 1:21) So long as he remains guilty and polluted because of sin, he is abiding under the wrath and curse of God. He has incurred sin's penalty, which is death: spiritual death—subsequently to be followed by physical death and eternal death—unless he be redeemed and reconciled to God. To effect man's forgiveness and reconciliation, the demands of God's holy law must be met in full, and atonement must be made for all his sin. This can be achieved only by perfect obedience and by the shedding of innocent blood on the sinner's behalf: for it is the blood (i.e., the perfect life sacrificed) that makes atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11,14; Heb. 9:22). The victim required for the sacrifice of atonement must be spotless, faultless, and in all respects unblemished or

perfect. As the Lamb of God, Christ was the perfect Victim whose blood was shed as a once-for-all sacrifice of atonement. Christ made this perfect sacrifice for the sins of his people, to effect their eternal redemption and to reconcile them to God.

8. Vicarious:

Vicarious means substitutionary. A person who substitutes for another is acting vicariously; i.e. he is taking someone else's place. When we say that Christ's obedience, sufferings and death were vicarious, we mean that he obeyed, suffered and died as a substitute for others. Christ obeyed the law of God perfectly for us, and he bore the guilt and penalty of our sins on his own body to the tree. On that tree, he endured the terrible wrath of God against sin, and in place of the sinner (Rom. 5:6-11; 1 Pet. 2:24).

Part 3

Summary of Justification

We may summarise the principal points included in the doctrine of justification as follows:

1. Justification comprises two elements:
 - (a) The forgiveness of sin.
 - (b) The imputation of righteousness.(Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; Rom. 4:22-25; cf. Ps. 32:1-2)

2. Justification is a once-for-all act whereby God forgives the sinner and declares that person to be righteous in his sight.
(John 5:24; Rom. 4:3-8; Heb. 10:10,14)

3. Justification is an act of grace to the sinner. The sinner deserves only condemnation when, in grace, God justifies him.
(Luke 18:9-14; Rom. 3:22-24; 5:6-8)

4. Justification is a forensic or judicial act. As a Judge, God declares a sinner to be righteous—but this does not make that person inherently righteous. It does not effect a change in that person's character; thereby making him holy in life and conduct. As has been stated above, holiness of life and conduct is the fruit of regeneration and sanctification—not justification.
(Rom. 7:15-25 (cf. Gal. 5:16-18); Phil. 3:9; 1 Thess. 4:3-8)

5. The person whom God has justified can no longer be condemned. Justification is the opposite of condemnation; and to justify a person is to declare that he is not condemned. By his meritorious and redeeming work, Christ has met in full all claims against the sinner.
(Rom. 5:9-10; 8:1-4; 31-34)

6. In justification, God imputes Christ's perfect righteousness to the believer's account. Thus, by God's grace, the believer is entitled to plead at the bar of God as though that righteousness were personally and inherently his own.
(2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:26-27; Heb. 10:19-23)

7. The sole ground of our justification is the righteousness of Christ, both active and passive. The *active* righteousness of Christ includes his perfect obedience to the entire law of God; both for himself, and for us. The *passive* righteousness of Christ includes his enduring the penalty of God's law—not for himself—but in our stead, and for us alone.

(Isa. 52:13 — 53:12; Phil. 2:6-11 (cf. vv.10-11 with Isa. 45:23); 1 Pet. 2:22-24)

8. A person whom God has justified, and who has been clothed with the imputed and perfect righteousness of Christ, is considered as though he had never sinned. This does not imply that he has no sin: but, in the sight of God, his sin—past, present and future—has been atoned for, once-for-all, by the sacrifice of Christ. By God's grace, therefore, the justified believer is entitled to the reward promised or due to perfect righteousness.

(Ps. 32:1-2; Col. 1:21-22; Heb. 9:12-15)

9. God does not justify us on the grounds of good works, good deeds, works of charity, works of righteousness, or any other kind of works. Nothing done by us, or wrought in us, can satisfy the demands of God's justice. Justification must come from outside of ourselves, and must have nothing to do with our 'good works', our 'acts of righteousness', or our feeble and futile attempts to keep the moral law.

(Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:15-16; Gal. 3:10-14 (cf. v.11 with Hab.2:4; cf. v.12 with Lev. 18:5; cf. v.13 with Deut. 21:23))

10. God justifies us by grace through faith—and by grace through faith alone. This faith does not originate from within ourselves. God freely gives it to us as a gift of his sovereign and unmerited grace. This kind of faith is known as *saving* faith. The object of our faith is the Son of God, and his redeeming work on our behalf. Everyone whom God has given to his Son from eternity, is granted the gifts of repentance and faith. Everyone whom the Holy Spirit thus enables to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is justified.

(Rom. 1:16-17; Rom. 10:4-13 (cf. v.5 with Lev. 18:5; cf. vv.6-7 with Deut. 30:12-13; cf. v.11 with Isa. 28:16; cf. v.13 with Joel 2:32); Eph. 2:8-10)

Part 4

The Whole World Stands Condemned

The Word of God declares all mankind to be sinners. They are sinners because they have transgressed God's law in attitude, inclination, thought, word and deed. Again, they are sinners because they have consistently fallen short of God's standard; i.e. they have failed to do the good they ought to have done.

Thus, God's Word says:

James 4:17

⁽¹⁷⁾ Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.

In addition, all mankind are sinners because they have incurred the guilt, and have inherited the corruption, of original sin.

Summarising these three aspects of sin, we may say that everyone outside of Christ stands condemned on the following counts:

1. A person is condemned because the guilt of Adam's sin has been imputed to him, and because he has inherited Adam's depraved and sinful nature (*original sin*).
2. A person is condemned because he personally has incurred guilt by having broken God's law (*actual sin*).
3. A person is condemned because he has come short of God's standard of perfect righteousness (*actual sin*).

Unless this sentence of condemnation can be reversed, and they can be justified, every person in the world must pay the full penalty which God's law demands for their sin. The penalty for sin is death: spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death. Eternal death means everlasting conscious suffering in the torments of hell. We must remember that death does not mean cessation of life. The body will pass into a state of death—temporarily. The soul, however, being immortal and spiritual, cannot cease to live. Primarily, therefore, death means separation or alienation from God—not the end of life, or the cessation of existence.²

Outside of Christ, all mankind is presently under a sentence of condemnation. If they remain impenitent to the end, God will punish them with everlasting destruction. To this end, God's Word says:

Romans 3:19

⁽¹⁹⁾ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Romans 3:23

⁽²³⁾ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (See vv. 20-26)

² See further on *Bible Truths Explained: The Fall of Man*, by the same author.

Romans 6:23

⁽²³⁾ For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (See vv.15-22)

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

⁽⁷⁾ And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, ⁽⁸⁾ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁽⁹⁾ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; (See vv.6-10)

Revelation 20:12

⁽¹²⁾ And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Revelation 20:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (See vv.11-14)

Revelation 21:8

⁽⁸⁾ But the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. (See vv.6-7)

Everyone, then, is under the just sentence of condemnation. If they remain impenitent and unbelieving, they will surely perish. How, though, can a condemned sinner escape from such a just, but dreadful, sentence? How can a condemned person become a justified person?

Part 5

The Law Cannot Justify

As we have shown above, justification is a legal or forensic term. When God justifies a person (by declaring him *not guilty*), he is thereby pronouncing that person righteous or blameless in the eyes of his holy law. The justified sinner is therefore free from any sentence of condemnation.

The law either condemns a person, or it justifies him—but it cannot do both at the same time. A person must be either guilty or not guilty of a particular crime. He cannot be both. A person found and declared *guilty* is a legally condemned person. A person found and declared *not guilty* is a legally acquitted or justified person.

God has declared everyone in the whole world to be '*guilty*' of breaking his Law and committing sin. For their sin and guilt, God has condemned all mankind. From this it follows that they cannot now be declared '*not guilty*' and be acquitted or justified. The law has rightly found them guilty of the charges against them, and has condemned them. On the basis and testimony of God's Word, these charges have been proved beyond all doubt. Therefore, that law cannot subsequently find the accused *not guilty* and acquit or justify them. They have been found guilty, and the penalty demanded by the law must be paid in full. A sinner's justification or acquittal, therefore, cannot come by means of God's holy law; for, by means of that same law, fallen and sinful mankind stands justifiably condemned to death.

Good Deeds Cannot Justify

A person's sincere attempts at obedience to the law's demands, or his performance of good deeds, can never justify that person, or secure his acquittal from God's righteous sentence of condemnation. By the standards of his most holy, just and righteous law, God has found everyone guilty. Now, because of their sin, everyone stands condemned. No-one, therefore, will find justification or acquittal from the sentence of condemnation and death by practising good works, or by performing deeds of righteousness. Again, a sinner cannot justify himself before God by works of charity, or by works of penance, or by faithful attendance upon religious duties, rites, or ceremonies.

All these things are ways of seeking to *merit* God's favour. To a greater or lesser extent, they depend upon what man can do to *make himself* acceptable to God. However, a condemned sinner is in no position to do anything to make himself acceptable to God. By his sin, he has already proved to be totally unacceptable to God. A sinner is wholly indisposed to any good work. He is an enemy of God on account of his wicked works (or evil behaviour [NIV]). Therefore, a sinner is utterly unable to earn, or to contribute toward, his salvation.

If a condemned sinner is to experience justification, he must be justified apart from anything he himself is able to do. This is because his sin thoroughly corrupts or pollutes everything that he does by way of good works, or acts of righteousness.

Thus, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 64:6

⁽⁶⁾ But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (See v.7)

Colossians 1:21

⁽²¹⁾ And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled (See vv.20-23; cf. Eph. 2:1-3)

This means that those people who make great sacrifices in the cause of their religion; or who give their whole lives to helping others, cannot be justified before God *by means of those righteous acts*. If God has not already saved them by his sovereign and unmerited grace, all their works of love and charity are of no avail to the saving of their soul. Such works, however, are commendable before God, and worthy of great reward in heaven, when—and *only when*—they come from a heart and life that has been regenerated and justified by God's grace. Such a life is also being daily sanctified by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Justification for Perfect Obedience

We have said that all men are sinners, and therefore all without exception stand condemned before a just and holy God. We have said also that when the law has rightly condemned a sinner, it cannot then justify or acquit him. However, if a person were not a sinner, a different situation would prevail.

Let us imagine a person to whom the guilt of Adam's sin had not been imputed. Let us suppose that this imaginary person did not possess a corrupt and sinful nature inherited from Adam. Let us suppose, too, that this person was able to obey God's law perfectly in every detail throughout his entire life. If such a person could ever be found, then indeed his perfect life would ensure justification by God's law.

Such a person has never lived—with one exception: Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus was, and is, totally without sin. Neither the guilt nor the pollution of Adam's sin was imputed or conveyed to him. He inherited no corrupt sinful nature from Adam. The Lord Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God, and he fulfilled every demand of God's law to the letter.

As such, the Lord Jesus is perfectly fitted to act as the one and only Mediator between God and man. He alone is eminently qualified to act on behalf of those who have broken God's law, and who stand guilty and condemned in God's sight. The Lord Jesus Christ was and is perfectly holy and sinless. He—the eternal Son of God—was therefore the only person fully qualified to make a vicarious (substitutionary) sacrifice of atonement for the sins of all his people.

Thus, it is written in the Word of God:

Hebrews 4:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. (See vv.14-15)

Hebrews 7:26-27

⁽²⁶⁾ For such a high priest became us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; ⁽²⁷⁾ Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. (See vv.19-25; see esp. v.25)

1 John 2:2

⁽²⁾ And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world. (See v.1)

Justification is Not Pardon Alone

Justification is much more than pardon or forgiveness alone. Pardon is the right of a sovereign to remit a penalty. With pardon, forgiveness is granted—but no satisfaction is made regarding justice. The claims of justice remain outstanding. A *pardoned* person is not therefore a *justified* person.

To justify a person, full satisfaction must be made for every offence committed, and for every defect in keeping God's law. This is what God did when he sent forth his own Son as a satisfaction ('propitiation') for sin on behalf of the sinner.

Christ fulfilled all the requirements of God's holy law, and of his justice. He obeyed and fulfilled perfectly the law of God on the sinner's behalf. He made full atonement for sin, thereby satisfying the demands of justice. He expiated the sinner's guilt, thereby securing the sinner's pardon or forgiveness.

Acting as Judge, therefore, God is able to pardon the believing sinner. Along with this, however, God is able to pronounce the believing sinner righteous (with the righteousness of his own Son). It is these two aspects taken together which constitutes justification.

Unlike pardon (the gratuitous remission of a penalty), justification includes these two elements:

1. *Forgiveness* of sin, including remission of the death penalty.
2. *Imputation* of the perfect righteousness of Christ to the justified sinner's account.

Part 6

Faith Justifies

If sinful people are to be justified in the sight of God, then their justification cannot possibly come by the law. For, by the law, they all stand condemned. Thus, the Scripture says:

Romans 3:9-20

- ⁽⁹⁾ What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;
- ⁽¹⁰⁾ As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:
- ⁽¹¹⁾ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.
- ⁽¹²⁾ They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one {*Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20*}.
- ⁽¹³⁾ Their throat *is* an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit {*Psalms 5:9*}; the poison of asps *is* under their lips {*Psalms 140:3*}:
- ⁽¹⁴⁾ Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness {*Psalms 10:7*}:
- ⁽¹⁵⁾ Their feet *are* swift to shed blood:
- ⁽¹⁶⁾ Destruction and misery *are* in their ways:
- ⁽¹⁷⁾ And the way of peace have they not known {*Prov. 1:16; Isaiah 59:7,8*}:
- ⁽¹⁸⁾ There is no fear of God before their eyes {*Psalms 36:1*}.
- ⁽¹⁹⁾ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ⁽²⁰⁾ Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. (See vv.1-8)

Again, the Scripture says:

Romans 3:21-23

- ⁽²¹⁾ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ⁽²²⁾ 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: ⁽²³⁾ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

A condemned sinner cannot merit justification by good works, nor by works of the law, nor by any other kind of works (or deeds). A sinner's justification must come by grace. This grace represents the unmerited and undeserved love and mercy of God that he bestows upon whom he chooses as a free and sovereign gift.

No-one deserves God's grace (otherwise, grace would cease to be grace). Rather, everyone without exception deserves the due penalty of their sin—which is death and eternal hell. Yet, although justly deserving only condemnation, God shows his great love for the sinner in that he redeems him from the curse and penalty of the law, through faith in Christ. In his great mercy, God justifies the ungodly, and delivers him from the just recompense of his sin.

Thus, the Scripture says:

Romans 3:24

⁽²⁴⁾ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

This is the essence of the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News that God, in his grace, is willing to forgive sinful men and women through faith in Christ. The Gospel proclaims that those whom God's law presently condemns; who are abiding under God's wrath, and who are in danger of perishing eternally, can be justified through faith.

Justification Requires an Atonement

The Day of Atonement

Under the old covenant, Aaron entered the most holy place with the blood of the sin offerings, to make atonement for his own sins and for the sins of the people. Once within the holy of holies, Aaron then sprinkled the blood on and before the mercy seat (or atonement cover). Once every year, on the Day of Atonement [*Yom Kippur*], the high priest repeated this solemn and sacred ceremony.

Thus, God's Word says:

Leviticus 16:5

⁽⁵⁾ And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. (See vv.1-4)

Leviticus 16:6-10

⁽⁶⁾ And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which *is* for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house. ⁽⁷⁾ And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD *at* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. ⁽⁸⁾ And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. ⁽⁹⁾ And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD's lot fell, and offer him *for* a sin offering. ⁽¹⁰⁾ But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, *and* to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. (See vv.11-14)

Leviticus 16:15-16

⁽¹⁵⁾ Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that *is* for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat: ⁽¹⁶⁾ And he shall make an atonement for the holy *place*, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. (See vv.18-19)

Leviticus 16:20-22

- ⁽²⁰⁾ And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy *place*, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat:
⁽²¹⁾ And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send *him* away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: ⁽²²⁾
And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. (See vv.23-34)

Leviticus 17:11

- ⁽¹¹⁾ For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it *is* the blood *that* maketh an atonement for the soul. (See vv.10-14; see esp. v.14)

The Atoning Blood of Christ

Matthew 26:27-28

- ⁽²⁷⁾ And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; ⁽²⁸⁾ For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (See vv.26-30; cf. Mark 14:23-24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; cf. also Ex. 24:6-8)

John 1:29

- ⁽²⁹⁾ The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (See vv.30-35)

1 Peter 1:18-19

- ⁽¹⁸⁾ Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; ⁽¹⁹⁾ But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: (See vv.17-21)

Hebrews 9:11-14

- ⁽¹¹⁾ But Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; ⁽¹²⁾ Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*. ⁽¹³⁾ For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: ⁽¹⁴⁾ How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (See vv.6-22)

Hebrews 9:24-25

- ⁽²⁴⁾ For 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: ⁽²⁵⁾ Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; (See vv.26-28; see esp. v.28; see also Heb. 10:1-18)

Justification Requires an Atonement

Justification requires that full satisfaction be made in regard to justice. The law of God must be fulfilled perfectly. Every sin must be atoned for, and the penalty of sin—which is death—must be paid. For without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin (Heb. 9:22).

The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin (Heb. 10:4). In his grace and mercy, however, God provided his one and only Son for our redemption. Jesus, the Lamb of God, assumed our nature (apart from sin), took our place, and obeyed and suffered in our stead (vicarious atonement). By means of his vicarious or substitutionary sufferings and death, Christ wrought out for us a perfect and infinitely meritorious righteousness. Only by the sacrifice of atonement can a sinner be justified, and only by that sacrifice can he be reconciled to God.

Concerning Christ's atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people, the Scripture says:

Romans 3:25

⁽²⁵⁾ 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;

The obedience and sacrifice of his Son on behalf of sinners, has fully satisfied God's justice. Therefore, God is able to accept every repentant sinner who has faith in the substitutionary and atoning death of Christ.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus spoke of a tax collector who, in humility and repentance, cried out, "*God be merciful to me, a sinner*". The Lord added that this man, rather than the self-righteous Pharisee, went home justified. Similarly, today, God will justify everyone who cries out to him from the heart, and who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. (Luke 18:13-14; Rom. 10:9-10,13)

God is Just in Justifying the Ungodly

God Justifies Those Who have Faith in Jesus

On the grounds of Christ's perfect righteousness and work of redemption, God can now be just in justifying the ungodly. To this end, the Scripture says:

Romans 3:25-26

⁽²⁵⁾ 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; ⁽²⁶⁾ To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Cf. Rom. 5:6-11)

God is just, because—when he justifies a sinner whom his law has condemned—he is not by-passing or overlooking the righteous demands of his holy law, or of his justice. When Christ suffered and died for our sin, he fully met every demand of God's law for us, making complete satisfaction to God's justice. The sinner whom God has justified has been completely absolved of all charges against him. This is because the Son of God met the law's demands and died as the guilty sinner's substitute; i.e. vicariously.

Christ obeyed and suffered on the sinner's behalf. Therefore, the sinner's debt of sin and guilt has already been paid. Thus, when God declares him *not guilty*, the believing and forgiven sinner finds real release from the sentence of condemnation. In other words, God has acquitted the believing sinner of all charges against him. If acquitted by God, then God has justified him.

However, as we have already stated, justification consists not only in the forgiveness of sin, but also in the imputation of righteousness. In addition to being forgiven, the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed or credited to the believing sinner's account

There is, therefore, a twofold reason why God can be seen to be just when he justifies those who believe in Jesus:

1. Because God has forgiven the sinner. The Son of God has fully satisfied all the demands of God's just and holy law, and has paid the penalty for sin—on the sinner's behalf.
2. Because God has declared the sinner righteous in his sight. God has imputed the perfect righteousness of his Son to the repentant and believing sinner's account. It is upon this perfect righteousness that God looks when he looks upon the redeemed sinner.

God, therefore, is completely just and righteous when—by his grace—he justifies the unjust or the ungodly. A perfect Substitute has paid their debt to God's law in full. In addition, God has credited to the believer's account the unblemished righteousness of that Substitute— his one and only Son.

Part 7

Imputed Righteousness

To impute means to reckon or credit to one's account. It means to take what pertains to one person, and attribute it or apply it to another, as if it were actually, inherently and personally his or her own.

When we speak of imputed righteousness, we are speaking of the perfect righteousness of Christ that God reckons or credits to the believing sinner's account. This means that God grants this righteousness to the believer's account, and then considers it as if it were personally and actually the believer's own righteousness.

Justification involves the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness to our account. It also involves the imputation of our sin and guilt to Christ's account. In saying this, however, we must emphasise that Christ was in no way defiled or contaminated by the corrupting effects of our sin. Our sin—i.e. the *legal liability and penalty* due to our sin—was charged to his account. He bore that sin—or rather, the guilt and liability of that sin—in his own body on the tree; and he paid the penalty for our sin in full. Although God reckoned our sin to his Son's account, the Lord Jesus did not at any time contract the moral pollution of our sin in his own person. On the contrary, though he became a sin offering, he remained the spotless, sinless, and holy Lamb of God.

The Believer's Sin and Christ's Righteousness

Concerning the imputation of our sin to Christ, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 53:6

⁽⁶⁾ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

In saying that the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all, this does not mean that the Lord Jesus contracted our sin in his own person. Rather, it means that he *bore the punishment* due to our sin—in his own person.

Again, concerning the imputation of our sin to Christ's account, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to our account, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 53:11

⁽¹¹⁾ He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

2 Corinthians 5:21

⁽²¹⁾ For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

By thus imputing our sin to Christ's account, and by imputing Christ's righteousness to our account, God justifies us. Now, when God looks upon us, he does not look upon any uprightness of character that we might possess—for our uprightness or inherent righteousness falls immeasurably far short of God's standard of perfection. Again, our old sinful nature contaminates and pollutes any semblance of inherent righteousness or moral rectitude in us. For these reasons alone, our inherent righteousness could never commend us to God. However, when God looks upon us, he looks upon—and sees in us—the imputed righteousness of Christ. God considers the perfect righteousness of his one and only Son to be our righteousness.

Thus, the Scripture says:

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

⁽³⁰⁾ But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: ⁽³¹⁾ That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord {*Jer. 9:24*}. (See 1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Christ our Lord is Christ our righteousness. Therefore is God's Word fulfilled which says:

Jeremiah 23:6

⁽⁶⁾ In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is* his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS [i.e. *Jehovah Tsidkenu*].

Imputation of Sin and Righteousness

Summary

We may summarise the imputation of sin to Christ, and of righteousness to the believer, as follows:

1. The believer's sin—past, present, and future—has been imputed to Christ's account. By his complete obedience to God's law, and by his sacrifice of atonement on our behalf, Christ has paid in full the penalty for all our sin.
2. God has imputed the perfect righteousness of his Son to the believer's account. The righteousness which God now sees in us is not our own, but Christ's perfect righteousness which—by grace—has been credited to us. Since we now stand before God clothed with the righteousness of his Son, God now considers us as though we ourselves were perfectly righteous.
3. God has imputed our sin to Christ's account. He has also imputed Christ's righteousness to our account. Therefore, since God has made full satisfaction to the demands of his justice and righteousness, he willingly justifies us or pronounces us forever righteous in his sight. Consequently, we can never lose our salvation.

To Justify is to Declare Righteous

As has already been shown, to justify is to declare or pronounce a person to be just or righteous. It is not, however, to infuse holiness or righteousness into him, thereby making the justified sinner inherently holy or righteous (the doctrine of subjective justification).

When God justifies a sinner, he *declares* that person to be righteous—but he does not *make* him inherently righteous. The redeemed sinner has not become inwardly righteous. However, by the grace of God in redemption, the believing sinner is credited with the perfect righteousness of Christ. In virtue of this righteousness and redemption, God has justified the sinner. He can stand, therefore, in the presence of God *as though* he had never sinned. Thus, with the apostle Paul, the believer is able to say:

Philippians 3:7-9

⁽⁷⁾ But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ⁽⁸⁾ Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, ⁽⁹⁾ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (See vv.1-11)

To Justify is Not to Make Righteous

To justify is to *declare* righteous. It is not to *make* righteous

Justification is a forensic or legal term. A person pronounced *not guilty* is acquitted and justified in the eyes of the law. This verdict, however, does not somehow effect a change in that person's character. The pronouncement of the *not guilty* verdict does not infuse moral goodness into the person, thus making him a holy or a righteous person. As far as the *not guilty* verdict is concerned, he remains the same person inwardly that he was before. The verdict has simply been a public declaration that the demands of justice have been fully met and satisfied; and that this person, therefore, now stands acquitted of all charges against him.

So it is with the justified believer. In the eyes of God's law, he has been declared *not guilty*. This verdict, however, has not changed his moral character. Although God has acquitted him, the justified believer is still inherently unrighteous. Although, however, he remains inherently unrighteous, the justified believer can stand confidently in the presence of God. This is because God has effectively clothed the believer with the perfect righteousness of Christ. God, therefore, has justified the believer because of Christ's perfect life, his substitutionary and atoning death, and his triumphant resurrection.

Justification, therefore, declares a person to be righteous in the eyes of the law—in this case, God's law. Justification, however, does not make that person inherently righteous. The believer is being made inwardly righteous—by degrees—through the progressive work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification (imparted righteousness).

No Perfection in This Life

The idea that one can attain to moral perfection in this life is erroneous doctrine. It is not the teaching of the Bible, nor has it been the experience of any of God's redeemed people while they lived on this earth. One can only be considered perfect when he is free from every sinful thought, word, action, attitude, disposition or inclination of the mind. Another characteristic of perfection is being totally concerned with righteous living, acting, thinking and doing. This will happen only when the old sinful nature (the 'flesh') has finally been eradicated; i.e. when the believer is presented faultless and blameless before the throne of God with rejoicing.

Meanwhile, the believer is being sanctified. His inward life is being changed from one degree of glory to another. Sanctification is an ongoing, life-long process. When the believer is taken into the presence of the Lord, then—and then only—will his sanctification be completed, and his glorification be fully realised.

Concerning these things, God's Word says:

2 Corinthians 3:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord. (See vv.7-17; cf. Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; Col. 3:10; cf. esp. 2 Cor. 4:16)

Philippians 3:20-21

⁽²⁰⁾ For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: ⁽²¹⁾ Who shall change our vile³ body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. (See vv.17-19; cf. 1 Cor. 15:43,48-49; Col. 3:4)

1 John 3:2

³ *vile*: Greek, ταπεινωσις (tapeinosis), meaning, *lowly* or *humble* body.

⁽²⁾ Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (See vv.1,3; cf. Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16-17)

Jude 1:24-25

⁽²⁴⁾ Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, ⁽²⁵⁾ To the only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (See vv.17-23; cf. Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22)

Justification, therefore, acquits the believer of guilt, and declares him to be righteous. However, it does not infuse righteousness into him, nor does it make him perfect, nor does it enable him to become perfect in this life (although, this must be his aim). Although the believer is daily being renewed after the image of Christ, he is still capable of falling into sin. Throughout his life, then, the believer's old sinful nature will remain present and active. Of course, by God's grace, we must constantly subdue the old nature, and we must never permit it to regain a controlling influence over our lives.

Part 8

No Justification Without Sanctification

It is a great mistake to believe that, after God justifies a person, that person can continue to gratify the desires of his sinful nature. Such a belief or attitude is contrary to the clear teaching of the Bible. The Bible constantly asserts or implies that everyone whom God has justified is also being sanctified by his Holy Spirit. (Rom. 6:1-23)

Since the Holy Spirit is sanctifying us, we must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. We are dead to unrighteousness and alive to holiness. We demonstrate growth in grace and holiness by showing increasing godliness in our character and conduct. We are being continually renewed after the likeness of Christ, as the Spirit of holiness effects his cleansing and sanctifying work within us (imparted righteousness).

Concerning this, the Scripture says:

Romans 6:15-18

⁽¹⁵⁾ What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? ⁽¹⁷⁾ But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. ⁽¹⁸⁾ Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. (See vv.1-14)

The apostle Paul continues:

Romans 6:19-23

⁽¹⁹⁾ I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. ⁽²⁰⁾ For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. ⁽²¹⁾ What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things *is* death. ⁽²²⁾ But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. ⁽²³⁾ For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:19b

^(19b) ...for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

We should observe that—in the verse quoted above—the term ‘members’ refers not only to the members or parts of the body, but also to the faculties of the mind. We are to yield the parts of our body and our soul—including our mind—as servants of righteousness that leads to holiness. Our whole being—with all its parts and faculties—is the temple of the living God: and the temple of God is holy.

To this end, God's Word says:

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

⁽¹⁶⁾ Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? ⁽¹⁷⁾ If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

⁽¹⁸⁾ Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. ⁽¹⁹⁾ What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? ⁽²⁰⁾ For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (See vv.9-17)

2 Corinthians 6:14-16

⁽¹⁴⁾ Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? ⁽¹⁵⁾ And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? ⁽¹⁶⁾ And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. {*Ex. 29:45; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27*}

2 Corinthians 6:17-18

⁽¹⁷⁾ Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you. {*Isaiah 52:11; Ezek. 20:34,41*}

⁽¹⁸⁾ And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. {*2 Sam. 7:14; 7:8; Jer. 31:1,9*}

2 Corinthians 7:1

⁽¹⁾ Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (Cf. 1 Thess. 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:15-16)

A Man Reaps What He Sows

By his providence, God judges—in this life—those believers who persist in disregarding the sanctity of their bodies. The Scripture warns:

Galatians 6:7

⁽⁷⁾ Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

A man reaps only what he sows. He who continues to nourish the desires of the sinful nature (the 'flesh') will eventually find himself overcome and ruined, or destroyed, by that nature. This is God's punishment or discipline upon the believer who persistently and wilfully disregards God's Word. Thus, that Word says:

Galatians 6:8a

^(8a) For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption... (Cf. Hosea 8:7; 10:12-13)

Short-term carnal satisfaction can result in long term corruption of our nature.

On the other hand, he who continues to nourish the desires of the Spirit of holiness, will certainly mature in holiness of life, and will reap the outcome—which is life eternal. Thus, the Scripture continues:

Galatians 6:8b

^(8b) ...but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.
(See vv.9-10)

A truly regenerated child of God cannot lose his salvation. However, if he wilfully persists in gratifying the evil desires of his sinful nature, God will certainly discipline him. Thus, it is possible for a believer to bring upon himself illness or disease.

Concerning this, God's Word says:

Psalms 107:17-20

⁽¹⁷⁾ Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he saveth them out of their distresses.

⁽²⁰⁾ He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered *them* from their destructions. (See vv.21-22)

Psalms 119:67

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.

Psalms 119:71

⁽⁷¹⁾ *It is* good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

In the first century church, some believers had fallen asleep (died) because they had disregarded the holy nature of their election and calling, and had despised the discipline of the Lord. No-one, however, can mock or despise the all-holy God. Eventually, God had applied the ultimate temporal punishment to these believers. He had withdrawn their lives—in order to preserve their souls.

Thus, God's Word says:

1 Corinthians 11:26-32

⁽²⁶⁾ For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come.

⁽²⁷⁾ Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ⁽²⁸⁾ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. ⁽²⁹⁾ For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ⁽³⁰⁾ For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. ⁽³¹⁾ For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. ⁽³²⁾ But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (See vv.17-25,33-34; cf. v.32 with Ps. 94:12-14; Heb. 12:5-11)

It is a fearful thing to profess faith in Christ, and yet to despise his Holy Spirit by yielding our bodies to the corrupt desires of the sinful nature.⁴

⁴ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Sanctification; Providence*, by the same author.

Part 9

Justification By Faith and Works (1)

Does James Contradict Paul?

Sometimes, people suppose that a contradiction exists between the teaching of the apostle Paul, and that of James regarding the method of justification. Paul, they say, asserts that God justifies a person by his faith, apart from works of the law. James, however, they say, insists that God justifies a person by his works, besides faith.

There is, of course, no contradiction between the two. When James speaks of justification, he refers to an entirely different aspect of justification from that discussed by Paul. These two distinct—but related—aspects of justification may be outlined as follows:

1. The *initial act* of justification, or justification by faith alone in Christ alone. The initial act of justification whereby God declares a repentant and believing sinner to be righteous, is effected—immediately and instantaneously—at regeneration or the new birth. It is this aspect of justification with which Paul deals primarily (although not exclusively).
2. The *subsequent evidence* of justification, or the living proof of justification (and of regeneration), is demonstrated by a believer's wholehearted obedience to the command and will of God. The subsequent evidence of justification is associated with sanctification—which includes faithful, holy and obedient living. It is this aspect of justification with which James deals primarily.

Like Paul, James uses the example of Abraham as an illustration. However, James cites a different period in Abraham's life. These two periods involve entirely distinct issues, and these issues are separated by many years.

Before considering what James says, we will look briefly at what Paul says about justification by faith alone.

The Initial Act of Justification

(Justification by Faith)

The *initial act* of justification occurs at regeneration. This act is entirely an act of God's will, and it is exercised toward the sinner in sovereign grace. By the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit, a sinner is drawn to Christ, regenerated spiritually, and enabled to believe on him. God justifies, or reckons righteous in his sight, everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this regard, Paul says:

Romans 3:20

⁽²⁰⁾ Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. (See vv.9-19)

The inspired apostle continues:

Romans 3:21-24

⁽²¹⁾ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ⁽²²⁾ 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: ⁽²³⁾ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ⁽²⁴⁾ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (See vv.25-27)

Romans 3:27

⁽²⁷⁾ Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. (See vv.29-31)

It is by the sovereign grace and mercy of God alone that he justifies a sinner. A person who is dead in trespasses and sins is in no condition to merit—or to work toward—his justification. God grants it to him as a gift.

By his Holy Spirit in effectual calling, God imparts faith to the sinner to enable him to believe on Christ as his Saviour and Lord. The ability to exercise this kind of faith, however, comes as a gift from God. Without this gift, the sinner would remain incapable of repenting and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

By Faith, Abraham was Counted Righteous

To prove that justification is by grace through faith, and not of works, Paul refers to the example of Abraham. God justified Abraham when he believed, and when he embraced the seemingly impossible promise that God would make of his seed a great nation.

In this regard, God's Word says:

Genesis 15:5

⁽⁵⁾ And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. (See vv.1-4; cf. Gen. 12:3)

We must remember that—when this promise was made—Abraham and his wife Sarah (or Sarai) were childless, and well advanced in years. Yet, the Scripture continues:

Genesis 15:6

⁽⁶⁾ And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. (See vv.7-21)

Abraham (or Abram) believed the LORD. Against all hope (humanly speaking), Abraham believed God's word that he would yet become a father, and Sarah a mother. Abraham believed too that his descendants would become as innumerable as the stars in the sky. He also believed that, through the promised Seed, God would bless all nations on earth. (Gen. 12:3; 15:5; Gal. 3:8,14,16)

Again, God's Word says:

Romans 4:18-21

⁽¹⁸⁾ Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. {Gen. 15:5} ⁽¹⁹⁾ And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: ⁽²⁰⁾ He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; ⁽²¹⁾ And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (See vv.9-17)

Romans 4:22

⁽²²⁾ And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. (See vv.23-25)

God justified Abraham because the patriarch believed the promise God made to him. By its very nature, works cannot enter into belief in a promise. If works cannot enter, then justification must be by faith—and by faith alone.

We may further emphasise that justification is by faith by referring to Paul's remarks in his letter to the Galatians:

Galatians 2:16

⁽¹⁶⁾ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (See vv.17-20)

Then the apostle adds:

Galatians 2:21

⁽²¹⁾ I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. (Cf. Gal. 3:21)

Therefore, we can see that the *initial act* of justification, whereby God pronounces a believing sinner righteous, is by faith alone. The granting of this faith to the sinner is entirely attributable to the sovereign grace of God. Salvation, therefore, is by grace through faith.

The believer having been justified by faith continues to live by faith at every step of his new Christian experience. However, the believer publicly demonstrates the reality of his faith by his daily conduct. We will now consider this practical outworking of the believer's faith; or, as James terms it, justification by works (besides faith).

Part 10

Justification By Faith and Works (2)

The Subsequent Evidence of Justification

(Justification by Works)

Justification is by faith and by faith alone. However, the *subsequent evidence* or proof of justification is shown by the believer's manner of life. Following his regeneration and justification, the believer must continue to live a life that demonstrates beyond all question that he is a totally changed person. He must show that the Holy Spirit has renewed—and is continuing to renew—his mind. He must demonstrate also his wholehearted obedience to the will and purposes of God for his life. It is in this regard that James asks concerning Abraham:

James 2:21

⁽²¹⁾ Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? (See v.22; cf. Gen. 22:9,12)

James 2:23

⁽²³⁾ And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness {*Gen. 15:6*}; and he was called the Friend of God. (Cf. Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; cf. also 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8)

Then James adds:

James 2:24

⁽²⁴⁾ Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. (See vv.25-26)

Paul refers to Abraham being justified by faith. God reckoned Abraham righteous through his belief in the LORD'S promise that he would make of his seed a great nation; even although, as yet, he remained childless. Abraham also believed that—through the promised Seed—God would bless all nations on earth. (Gen. 12:3; 15:4-6; 17:19,21; Gal. 3:18-19,29) This was the *initial act* of justification.

James, on the other hand, refers to Abraham being justified by works (besides faith), when he was about to offer his son Isaac upon the altar. (Gen. 22:1-18) This was the *subsequent evidence* of Abraham's justification.

Again, when God justified Abraham and imputed righteousness to him, this event occurred about 20 years before Isaac had been born. However, when Abraham took his son Isaac to Mount Moriah in obedience to God's command, this event occurred when Isaac had grown to young manhood. This means that there must have been a lengthy intervening period between these two events—perhaps as much as 40 years.

By Works, Abraham was Proved Righteous

Isaac was the son whom God had promised, and the one through whom the promised Seed (Christ) ultimately would descend. Now, God required Abraham to offer up his beloved son in sacrifice. Abraham, however, believed that—if necessary—God would raise his son from the dead (Heb. 11:17-19). Therefore, says James, this practical demonstration of Abraham's faith—a faith that resulted in works

of obedience to God's command—was imputed to Abraham for righteousness. Thus, God's Word says:

James 2:22-24

⁽²²⁾ Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? ⁽²³⁾ And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness {*Gen. 15:6*}: and he was called the Friend of God. ⁽²⁴⁾ Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. (See vv.14-25)

James 2:26

⁽²⁶⁾ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (Cf. v.17)

God, of course, had already counted Abraham righteous by faith; and, by his grace, the LORD had justified the patriarch. This is the initial (and only) act of justification; and the one to which Paul refers. Now, however, at this later stage in his life, Abraham proved the reality of his faith by taking God at his word. In trust and obedience to God, Abraham showed his willingness to offer up his promised and beloved son on the altar of sacrifice.

Relation of Faith to Works

By his faith, and by faith alone, Abraham was *declared* righteous. By his works—works of obedience to God—Abraham was *proved* righteous. Thus, the Scripture is fulfilled which says:

Habakkuk 2:4

⁽⁴⁾ Behold, his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith. (See vv.1-3; cf. John 3:36; Rom. 1:17)

As sinners, God justifies us solely by his grace, through our faith in his Son. Once justified by faith, however, we must continue to *live* by faith. As with Abraham, we prove the reality of our justification by our subsequent manner of life—including our obedience to God's command and will. Those who obey God wholeheartedly, prove—by their actions—that they have been regenerated and justified. Those who consistently disregard the word and will of God, prove—by their actions—that they have never experienced regeneration and justification.

Justification must result in obedience and holy living (the fruit of sanctification). It must result also in a life that shows loving and practical concern for the needs of others. For, as James rightly says:

James 2:14-17

⁽¹⁴⁾ What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ⁽¹⁵⁾ If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, ⁽¹⁶⁾ And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it* profit? ⁽¹⁷⁾ Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. (See vv.18-22; cf. v.16 with Prov. 3:27-28; 1 John 3:17-18)

