

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH



Justification is the act of God whereby He declares that a sinful person is righteous, based on a belief and trust in Jesus Christ rather than in the person's own good works. It is a change of state from guilt to righteousness.

The concept of justification has its background in the Old Testament. The Hebrew term for *to justify* or *to be righteous* indicated that one was declared free from guilt. The idea carried legal connotations. This can be seen in usages where justification is contrasted with condemnation (Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Isa. 5:23). It can also be found in settings that imply a process of judgment (Gen. 18:25; Prov. 143:2).

Justification was not merely an ethical quality of character. Rather, it emphasized being righteous—that is, having a right relationship to a certain standard. This standard was God's very own nature and person. As such only He could perfectly judge whether a person had lived up to the criterion for the relationship. Therefore, justification in the Old Testament involved declaring that a person had been faithful to the requirements of the relationship in accordance to the standard given by God.

The New Testament further advances this idea, mainly in Paul's writings. His understanding of justification is the starting place for developing the implications of the central truth of the gospel, namely, that God forgives believing sinners.

From justification flows the understanding that God gives grace and faith equally to all people (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 3:8-14). The concept of grace is defined in accordance with justification (Rom. 3:24). Paul's explanation for the saving significance of Christ's life, death, and resurrection arises from justification (Rom. 3:24; 5:16).

The way a person receives God's justification is through faith. Faith is an absolute reliance in Jesus Christ and His work for salvation. Faith should not be considered a good work (Rom. 3:28), for it rests on grace (Rom. 4:16) and excludes works (Eph. 2:8-9). Faith is a condition that has no merit in itself; rather, it rests upon the merit of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Justification is something that is completely undeserved. It is not an attainment but the gracious gift of God. Not every sinner is justified, but only those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Item 9

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