

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 12

KEY TERMS: JUSTIFICATION; RIGHTEOUSNESS

Justification and righteousness. Justification is a legal term; it is δικαιόω. The BDAG lexicon has four varying shades of meaning and all of them have forensic or legal overtones. They are 1) to take up a legal cause, to show justice, do justice, or take up a cause; 2) to render a favorable verdict, vindicate; 3) to cause someone to be released from personal or institutional claims that are no longer to be considered pertinent or valid, to make free/pure; and 4) to demonstrate to be morally right, to prove to be right. It means to put right with, justify, vindicate, declare righteous, i.e. to cause a person to be in right relation. The Louw-Nida lexicon has several meanings assigned to the word but there are two of significance as used in Romans 5. It is the act of cleansing someone of transgression; to acquit, to set free, to remove guilt, or acquittal. It is also used to mean to cause someone to be in a proper or a right relation with someone else. "Justification is the act of God, whereby He declares righteous—that is, given a righteous standing to—one who believes on Jesus Christ" [C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*. P. 1256].

It is important that we understand the word to mean that we are declared righteous and NOT that we are made righteous. We are declared to be justified and righteous based on our belief in the person and work of Christ Jesus; we are never said to be made into righteous people. In Protestant theological circles, it is commonly asserted that the Roman Catholic Church teaches that a believer is made righteous but the true nature of their theology apparently isn't quite that simple. I consulted with an ex-Roman Catholic on the issue and this is what he said:

"This is pretty slippery ground in terms of terminology—'made righteous' and 'making righteous' (objective and subjective views). Justification equates to Sanctifying Grace which is bestowed (one time) in the Sacrament of Baptism into the Roman church, and which must be maintained through virtuous living (i.e. following the 10 commandments and church law). When one or more of these commandments are broken, the sacrament of Penance (Confession) is the way one gets back into the 'state' of Sanctifying Grace. The idea is to maintain this 'state' of grace till death to be pleasing to God and get into heaven. Therefore, to be 'made righteous' is not a permanent thing, nor is it spoken of in the same way orthodox Protestantism understands it, i.e. 'infusion' vs. 'imputation'. '...according to the teaching of the Catholic Church the righteousness and sanctity which justification confers, although given to us by God as efficient cause (causa efficiens) and merited by Christ as meritorious cause (cause

meritoria), become an interior sanctifying quality or formal cause (cause formalis) in the soul itself, which it makes truly just and holy in the sight of God.'" [*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s. v. "Justification"].

So in Roman Catholicism then, there is a sense of being made holy but it is something you can lose. Protestant theologians make the frequent claim that in Roman Catholic theology man is said to be made righteous but the closest I can come to finding such a doctrine in the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church* doesn't really quite say that. "The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us 'the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ... [par. 1987]...Justification is at the same time *the acceptance of God's righteousness* through faith in Jesus Christ [par. 1991]...It [justification] conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy [par. 1992]...Justification...conforms us to the righteousness of God [par. 2020]" [*Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*].

However, I can find quotes such as the following in many books written by Protestant authors: "Rome's argument was, and still is (formally), that Christ's righteousness is infused into the believer's heart, wherein a process begins that leads to final justification. Jerome, who produced the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible, actually translated the Greek word that meant 'to declare righteous' as 'to make righteous' [John Armstrong, *The Catholic Mystery: Understanding the Beliefs and Practices of Modern Catholicism*, p. 53]. [NOTE: With the exception of the ambiguous sentences just quoted from the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, I was unable to locate some primary sources written by Roman Catholics stating the doctrine that Catholics are made righteous. If this is what they teach, couldn't verify it, at this time, by using original, primary Roman Catholic sources. They may well teach this; I just couldn't verify it.] I do think that Roman Catholic theology sees justification as a lifelong process rather than as a once for all time event in the life of a believer.

The bottom line is that I want it understood that we are not made righteous; we are declared righteous.

We have no righteousness of our own; we are granted the grace gift of Christ's righteousness which is credited to our account but we are not made righteous in and of ourselves.

Abraham was not made righteous; rather, righteousness was credited to him as a result of his faith. The word credited, λογίζομαι, means to keep records of commercial accounts involving both debits and credits; to put into one's account, to charge one's account, or to regard as an account. In English accounting terms, we would say it is an

entry recording a sum received. It means to reckon or count; "to count something to somebody means to reckon something to a person, to put to his account, either in his favor or for what he must be answerable" [Zodhiates, s. v. "λογίζομαι"]. This word is used in the passive sense; Abraham did not earn righteousness; righteousness was given to Him. In the same way, righteousness is credited to the account of all who believe.

Romans 4:3–8 ³For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED [λογίζομαι] TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." ⁴Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited [λογίζομαι] as a favor, but as what is due [ὀφείλημα]. ⁵But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited [λογίζομαι] as righteousness, 'just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits [λογίζομαι] righteousness apart from works: ⁷"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. ⁸"BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT [λογίσηται from λογίζομαι]."

There is an extremely important contrast here between that which is credited and that which is due. Due, ὀφείλημα, is a debt, an amount owed. It is that which one must do out of a sense of duty or as the result of commitment; it is an obligation. Work creates a debt that must be paid to the one providing the labor; work makes the employer a debtor to the employee. If we could work for our salvation, God would be in our debt and He would owe us eternal life apart from what it is we believe and that would completely nullify grace. In verse 8, the word refers to keeping records of debits and credits so the meaning here is that sin is not recorded; God isn't keeping such records for those who believe. If we could work for our salvation, there was no need for Christ to go to the cross in our place. We could just work and thereby prove ourselves worthy of eternal life, but as Paul wrote in Romans 4:5, the only way to be justified is to believe and that faith is credited as righteousness.

Some, in fact many, theologians want to make the case that faith is a work; therefore, God must regenerate us in order for us to believe. Their doctrine is that a spiritually dead person is incapable of exercising belief when they hear the gospel and if they did believe while in that state, it would be a work. Their reasoning is that when God gives the elect life they are only then enabled to believe and that becomes His work and not their work. The problem for this doctrine is that Romans 4:5 specifically says that belief is not a work. It is so important to understand that exercising belief in Christ Jesus upon hearing the gospel is not a work. Anytime anyone attempts to convince you that faith is a work, take them to Romans 4 and specifically point verse 5 out to them.

Romans 4:22–5:1 ²²Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED [λογίζομαι] TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. ²³Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited [λογίζομαι] to him, ²⁴but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited [λογίζομαι], as those who believe in Him who raised

Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification [δικαίωσις]. ¹Therefore, having been justified [δικαιώω] by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

The idea that we have been justified by faith means that God has declared us “not guilty” in His divine courtroom at His bar of justice. This declaration is made not because we have done anything to deserve it but because Christ has done everything to make it possible. We are justified and credited with righteousness based only on the premise that we have believed God and He has freely declared us innocent because His standard of justice, righteousness, and holiness has been met in Christ. It is a pure free grace gift on His part. We cannot earn it and we do not deserve it but He freely gives it to any person the moment they believe.

Righteous. Righteousness is closely related to justification. The moment we are justified through faith that faith is credited to us as righteousness. Righteousness is an attribute of God and it is related to His justice. “Righteousness has to do with law, morality, and justice. In relation to Himself, God is righteous; i.e., there is no law, either within His own being or of His own making, that is violated by anything in His nature. In relation to His creatures He is also righteous; i.e., there is no action He takes that violates any code of morality or justice” [Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 48].

There are six Hebrew words in the Old Testament used to express the concept of righteousness.

יָשָׁר means to be straight, that is, pertaining to not being crooked. It can mean right or upright; to be morally innocent and proper according to a standard.

Job 4:7 ⁷“Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright [יָשָׁר] destroyed?”

צַדִּיק means to be righteous, upright; it pertains to being a person in accordance with a proper standard.

Genesis 7:1 ¹Then the LORD said to Noah, “Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you alone I have seen to be righteous [צַדִּיק] before Me in this time.

צֶדֶק means righteousness, justice, rightness meaning the act itself; it is doing what is required according to a standard; it can mean honesty, fairness, and accuracy but not only is it an act which is proper according to a standard but it is not deviant in any way.

Deuteronomy 1:16 ¹⁶“Then I charged your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously [צדק] between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien who is with him.

צדק means righteousness, justice, rightness; it is the state of doing what is required according to a standard. Pertaining to justice it is the state or condition of fairly deciding what is right in a legal case without prejudice. It can also refer to innocence, the state of not having any sin or its associated guilt according to a standard.

Genesis 15:6 ⁶Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness [צדקה].

צדק means to be righteous, innocent, or vindicated; it is to be in a state in accordance with a standard; it can refer to obtaining justice or to proving innocence resulting in being cleared of charges or innocent or righteous.

Job 9:15 ¹⁵“For though I were right [צדק], I could not answer; I would have to implore the mercy of my judge.

צדק means right doing or righteousness.

Daniel 4:27 ²⁷‘Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness [צדקה] and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.’

The Hebrew concept of righteousness is pertaining to adherence to a standard and it has forensic, or legal, ramifications as well. It is easily apparent just how that relates to the concept inherent in justification which is a forensic concept. The Greek is no different. There are four Greek words used in the New Testament for righteousness.

One word usually translated “just” or “righteous” is δίκαιος meaning righteous, just, or upright. It refers to being in accordance with God's compelling standards. It can refer to being put right with or being in a right relationship with someone and that indicates being in a state of rightness with God. This word is frequently used in connection with sanctification salvation issues. There is an expectation by the one who sets the rules by which man must live that it is a duty to conform to those rules. Being just means that a person's actions are in accordance with his character and without deficiency or failure. Righteous people then are those who orient their lives to the standard that is not their own, but God's standard.

James 5:6 ⁶You have condemned and put to death the righteous [δικαίος] man; he does not resist you.

Justified, δικαίω, has a very similar meaning but can also carry a forensic meaning. It means to put right with, justify, vindicate, or declare righteous. It can carry the nuance of causing someone to be in a right relation. It can be to show to be right or demonstrate something as morally just. The forensic meaning refers to acquitting, removing guilt, or setting free; it means to clear of transgression. It brings out the fact that a person is righteous. The word means “to justify never means to make anyone righteous or to do away with his violation of the law, by himself bearing the condemnation and the imposed sentence. In the NT, man in his fallen condition can never do anything in order to pay for his sinfulness and thus be liberated from the sentence of guilt that is upon him as it happens in the mundane world; i. e., when a guilty person has paid the penalty of a crime, he is free from condemnation” [Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, s. v. “δικαίω”. In other words, this word does not mean that a person bears his own penalty for his crimes and is freed from condemnation because of bearing that penalty. Rather, it refers to declaring a person righteous as a judicial act; it is to absolve, acquit, clear from any charge. It is the result of what is right or just.

Galatians 3:8 ⁸The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify [δικαίω] the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.”

The Septuagint used this group of words as well.

1 Kings 8:32 ³²then hear in heaven and act and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked by bringing his way on his own head and justifying [δικαίω] the righteous [δικαίος] by giving him according to his righteousness [δικαιοσύνη].