

Our Standing and Progress in the Faith: Justification

If you're like me, you may not have always been aware of several things that take place *for* and *within* the new Christian. The three things we are going to discuss in this short series are:

1. Our Justification
2. Our Sanctification
3. Our *Progressive* Sanctification

I earnestly believe that because of the fact that we are often not aware of the nuanced differences between these three areas, we tend to live well below God's expectations. This results in several things:

- we place too much emphasis on "love" and not enough on "holiness"
- we often experience frustration and failure in our daily walk
- we do not experience the reality of a committed, dedicated life built upon God
- we likely have no real interest in daily reading/studying His Word

When I attended Bible college, we were taught the three things above. However, it is not just in the teaching of these three doctrines that we gain biblical knowledge, but we also begin to appreciate how these doctrines can and should *affect* our life as a Christian. In short, without this knowledge or an increasing knowledge and understanding of His Word regarding justification and sanctification, we will often fail in our daily walk.

This failure will be the hallmark of the Christian's life who is not living *with* the knowledge of these biblical doctrines and *by* the result of what that knowledge can mean for us in our daily walk.

I want to discuss the subject of our *justification* - what it means as explained in portions of God's Word and how it can affect and overhaul our thinking. I also want to clearly delineate how justification is *not* sanctification or progressive sanctification in future articles in this short series.

Justification - What is it?

The Bible teaches us about justification. Based on this fact alone, it is obviously something God wants us to know. But He wants doesn't simply provide information so that we have more *head knowledge*. That often does nothing except to promote "headiness" that results in a person thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to do. In other words, as Paul says, knowledge alone can puff up (1 Corinthians 8:1). Paul is commenting on the fact that if we simply pursue *knowledge* to make us feel smarter and more able to dialogue or debate with others, that kind of knowledge is worthless. It's worthless because it has not sunk down to the level of the person's heart or will and simply remains in the head. This head knowledge or intellectual assent can do nothing for a person.

The Christian can have either too much head knowledge that does not translate into the daily walk of faith or they lack true biblical knowledge regarding justification, using their *feelings* as a substitute. This latter aspect is often what atheists and agnostics do as well though they often

believe they are actually obtaining true knowledge that frees them from constraints of human limitations. This is exactly what the Gnostics thought. Shouldn't Christians be above relying on human arguments and our emotions to determine truth? Sadly, too many of us are not.

In a nutshell, to be *justified* before God is to be declared *righteous* (**Romans 3:21-26**). Being declared righteous by God means that we are no longer under any form of *condemnation* by Him (**Romans 8**). We are completely free from the punishment of our sin *and* our sin nature though we still will sin and continue to have our sin nature until the next life. Because of our inherent sin, we will not fully comprehend the ramifications of our justification (or sanctification), until we leave this life. However, this does not mean we cannot *begin* to appreciate it in the here and now. In fact, it is imperative that we do!

Legal Meaning

The book of Romans, as penned by the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is really a legal treatise about our justification before God. Paul takes pains to explain that all true Christians are justified because of *faith* in God's redemptive act through Jesus. The cross of course, was the culmination of Jesus' earthly life of *sinless perfection* (again, something we cannot attain in this life, though many wrongly teach that we *can* attain it here), and because His righteousness was perfect, that righteousness is translated to our accounts the moment we become truly saved.

In short, when a person becomes a true, authentic Christian, at the very moment this happens, God declares us *righteous*. This is our *justification*. It is done *for* us because of the faith we have *in* Jesus' atoning work on our behalf.

It is important to understand that justification does not *make* us righteous. Justification is the *result* of God *declaring* us righteous. In other words, the moment I receive salvation, God declares me righteous by *imputing* Christ's righteousness to my account. From that moment forward, when God the Father looks at me, He sees Jesus' righteousness in me and never condemns me from that moment forward. This is a very powerful truth that Paul takes many chapters in Romans to explain.

Paul offers a very good summation of our justified position before God and how we are made righteous by God.

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18-19)

and...

But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness... (Romans 4:5)

and...

...and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith... (Philippians 3:9)

So what does this result in for the Christian? We know that God declares us justified because of Christ's righteousness imputed to us. We are justified not on our own merit but solely because of what *Jesus* has accomplished on our behalf. God did it. We did nothing. We only came to exercise faith in what Jesus accomplished and then only when God "woke" us to that truth (**John 6:44**; cf also **14:6** and **2 Corinthians 5:21**).

Results of Justification

Understanding the reality and truth of justification means the following things:

- we have peace with God
- God's peace CAN rule in our hearts
- we have assurance of salvation
- our justification is the bridge to sanctification

If you do not "feel" you have peace with God, yet you know that you know that you know you are a Christian, might I suggest that you do not "feel" at peace with God because you lack a right understanding of our justification and resultant righteousness. This same peace that we have with God should also rule our hearts. This does not mean you will never experience circumstances that may cause worry, frustration or anxiety. It simply means that overall, the condition of our walk should be one of a growing awareness of peace with God.

However, if you have no real biblical concept of your justification resulting in declared righteousness, you will fail to comprehend the peace that you have with God and you will not experience a peaceful outlook in life, regardless of circumstances.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. (Colossians 3:15 KJV)

The more you understand biblical justification stemming from our imputed righteousness, the greater your peace. This particular peace that God grants has nothing to do with our circumstances at all. In fact, understanding this peace helps us rise above our circumstances. Focusing on the reality of this peace daily is not always that easy, which is why it is imperative that Christians read and study His Word daily. You don't go without food or water, do you? Why then do we place His Word off to the side and go days at times without opening it? Gaining and keeping His peace requires our focus. We must learn to focus on the truth of His Word (**Ephesians 6:11**). There is no other way, though there are plenty of people who will tell you there is and ALL of them point to your feelings as the barometer. They are wrong.

Paul had learned this "secret" in his walk with the Lord.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13 ESV)

Paul *learned* this truth by focusing on biblical reality in the face of many trials and circumstances that occurred in his life. Paul came to understand what it meant to be declared righteous by God through justification and the peace that came from God toward us because of it in his daily walk with God.

If you are a true Christian, you have been justified by God and the result is that God sees you as righteous. We must see and understand this! However, we need to also include a biblical understanding of our *sanctification*. If not, we will likely become like the **Galatians in 5:13**, who were actually flirting with *licentious living*. Paul warned the Romans about that (**Romans 6:1**).

There are two dangers for the Christian with respect to justification. The first is when the Christian knows little to nothing of the actual meaning of our justification and how it should penetrate the depths of our being. The second is when the Christian focuses on justification to the exclusion of our sanctification, causing that person to live with little regard to the sin in their life.

I've tried to keep this clear and I hope I've done that. We will be back next time with the meaning of sanctification and how that doctrine applies to us.