

Theme: Question 38: What is justification? Justification is the gracious act of God in which He declares that we are totally righteous, as if we had never sinned and as if we had positively obeyed all of God's law perfectly.

## I. Intro - The Yankees Disastrous World Series

- A. Yankees' meltdown in the 5<sup>th</sup> inning of game 5
- B. They were terrible in the basics - and it cost them!
- C. Today we shore up the basics - What is justification?

## II. Understanding Justification

### A. Justification is by grace alone

Question 38: What is justification? Justification is the **gracious act of God** in which He declares that we are totally righteous, as if we had never sinned and as if we had positively obeyed all of God's law perfectly.

#### 1. Justification is rooted in God's gracious work

**God made** him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? **It is God who justifies.** Romans 8:33

For we maintain that **a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.** Romans 3:28

- a. God made - justification is God's work!
  - b. It is God Who justifies - I do nothing to earn justification!
  - c. We do not even receive it by our works but by faith alone: faith apart from my efforts & works of the law.
- #### 2. Thank God that my justification is based on grace and God's work rather than my merits or efforts - for that would leave me with no hope!

### B. Justification is God's legal declaration

Justification is the gracious act of God **in which He declares that we are totally righteous**, as if we had never sinned and as if we had positively obeyed all of God's law perfectly.

#### 1. Justification is a legal declaration that we are righteous

Who will bring any **charge** against those whom God has chosen? It is God who **justifies.** Romans 8:33

Therefore no one will be **declared righteous** in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now **a righteousness from God**, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. Romans 3:20-21

- a. Any charge (legal charge) is opposed to God's justification.
  - b. Justification does not refer to an infusion of righteousness or a change in our nature but rather refers to a legal declaration by God that we are counted as righteous.
  - c. Justification is a change in our legal standing before God. We who were guilty are now declared to be "not guilty"!
  - d. Justification is God's declaration that we who were not righteous are declared to be righteous!
- #### 2. In justification God accepts the work of Christ in our place, declaring that we who are guilty are innocent and free of guilt before Him!

### C. Justification is "the Great Exchange"!

Justification is the gracious act of God in which He declares that we are totally righteous, **as if we had never sinned and as if we had positively obeyed all of God's law perfectly.**

1. Justification is a legal transaction that places my sin on Christ, Who fully pays for it in my place.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

- a. Justification is the great exchange where our sin is placed on Christ, Who fully bears the penalty we were due!
- b. This is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system where sin was transferred to the animal which was killed in place of the sinner.  
“If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male **without defect**. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord. <sup>4</sup> He is to **lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him**. Leviticus 1:3-4
- c. God laid our sin on Christ the Spotless Lamb, and He paid the penalty in full!
- d. Our debt has been fully paid so that is is just as if I had never sinned!

2. Justification is the legal transaction where Christ’s righteousness is given to me so that I am fully righteous before God.

Justification is the gracious act of God in which He declares that we are totally righteous, as if we had never sinned **and as if we had positively obeyed all of God’s law perfectly**.

- a. We often stop at the first part: my sin is given to Christ.
- b. But in justification, my sin is exchanged for Christ’s righteousness! His righteousness is given to me!  
God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, **so that in him we might become the righteousness of God**. 2 Corinthians 5:21

- c. In justification, I am given the righteousness of Christ, the righteousness of God Himself!

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> **and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith**. Philippians 3:7-9

1. This is why Paul threw his own righteousness aside - so He could be given the righteousness of Christ!
2. In justification, the believer is actually given the righteousness that comes from God - the righteousness of God that is given to us through faith alone!

- d. This is why justification is by faith alone and our works are not part of our justification - when we are given the perfect righteousness of God we need nothing else!

Therefore **no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law**; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now **a righteousness from God, apart from law**, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> **This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**. Romans 3:20-22

1. No one will be declared righteous - justified - by their own works!
2. The righteousness we need is the righteousness that comes from God - it alone can justify us!
3. This righteousness is not received by working, doing acts of penance, giving money, etc - it is received by faith, a living trust in Jesus and His work in our behalf!

3. Justification is the Great Exchange, where my sin is placed upon Christ, and His Perfect righteousness is given to me, so that I am counted as if I had never sinned and had perfectly obeyed God's will with my every desire, thought, word, and deed.

### III. Applying the Word

#### A. Justification is important theologically

1. Humans always try to justify themselves - but this is a fool's errand!
2. I can never hope to stand before a holy God by my efforts, works, or righteousness!
3. But thanks be to God He offers to give us the righteousness we need!
4. It is a free gift - only costing me my pride, my desire to say I am good enough, my desire to justify myself!
5. Have you ever ceased your attempts to justify yourself and simply received Christ's work in your place?
6. He has borne your sin, paid its penalty, obeyed in your place, and offered all of this to you - receive it today!

#### B. Justification is important experientially

1. Most people, including many Christians, live with a constant undercurrent of guilt, shame, and a sense of rejection.
2. This often leads to harsh, legalistic actions towards others - I can't justify myself and so I tear others down.

3. This is true even in our age that proclaims there is no such thing as sin - this is why we have cancel culture, which is harsher than any Pharisee ever was!
4. Christians can easily fall into this trap as well, for if we forget our justification guilt, shame, and a fear of rejection lead to harsh legalism for ourselves and others.
5. The antidote for all of this is truly understanding, embracing, and daily experiencing that God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us!
6. The antidote for all of this is truly understanding, embracing, and daily experiencing that no one will be declared righteous by works, but that God gives us His righteousness as a free gift!
7. But since the garden we are always tempted to construct fig leaves of our own righteousness - and this temptation and tendency does not cease when I become a believer for it is the way of the old nature that still remains!
8. Hear and believe the good news - if you are in Christ, God declares that you are totally righteous, just as if you had never sinned, and just as if you had positively obeyed all of God's law perfectly in every desire, thought, word, and deed!
9. Take time to meditate on this glorious truth each day this week - and regularly return to it!

#### C. The Feast of Grace

1. This Table is a Feast of Grace - for we come not by our righteousness and works but by those of Christ!
2. Come and feast upon the Grace of God!

3. [Keep the Feast \(video with lyrics\)](#)

**What Is Justification?**

2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 8:33

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Communion

Number 6:24-26

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salvation and deliverance

The Lord bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup> the Lord make his face  
shine upon you and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> the Lord turn his face  
toward you and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that  
in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2  
Corinthians 5:21

Who will bring any charge against those whom God  
has chosen? It is God who justifies. Romans 8:33