

Justification by Grace through Faith

Author Mike Forfar

Introduction.

Justification is a legal term that declares a person to be innocent of any wrong doing. It is an acquittal by a Judge in a court of law. The justified christian is released from the death penalty demanded by the law of God and is granted the free gift of eternal life.

Justification: “a forensic term, opposed to condemnation. As regards its nature, it is the judicial act of God, by which he pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ, and accounts, accepts, and treats them as righteous in the eye of the law, i.e., as conformed to all its demands. In addition to the pardon of sin, justification declares that all the claims of the law are satisfied in respect of the justified. It is the act of a judge and not of a sovereign. The law is not relaxed or set aside, but is declared to be fulfilled in the strictest sense; and so the person justified is declared to be entitled to all the advantages and rewards arising from perfect obedience to the law”

([Romans 5:1-10](#)) M.G. Easton M.A., D.D., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Third Edition, published by Thomas Nelson, 1897. Public Domain, copy freely.

In the parable of the unmerciful servant recorded by Matthew, Jesus gives a clear picture of how much we owe God and how justification is obtained.

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Matthew 18:21-35 “21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times? 22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 26 “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27 The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. 28 “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. 29 “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ 30 “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32 “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.’ 33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” NIV

Justification, the wiping out of our debt, the record of our sins. The debt that we owe God is pictured as being 10,000 bags of Gold. This equates to 10,000 talents each talent being about 20 yrs wages for a labourer. Quite an impossible sum of money to pay back. But because he begged for mercy God had pity on him and cancelled his debt. This is a picture of God justifying his people. He wipes out the debt and carries the cost himself. The servant was free to go. But a fellow servant owed the man a hundred silver coins, each coin equalling a denarii about one days wages for a labourer. Quite a small amount in comparison to the debt the man owed God. The master was furious and called the man in. Because he failed to show mercy to his fellow servant like the master had shown to him he had his justification taken off him and he was thrown in jail. Not only was it not possible for him to repay the debt now he is in jail where he cannot work to earn money making it impossible to repay any money at all. Jesus finished by saying that this is how God will treat us who refuse to extend to others the same mercy and grace that God has shown to us. Clearly Jesus is teaching that Justification is a free gift given on account of God’s mercy and that there is nothing that we can do to earn it. And that by our works we can lose that Justification.

The sin problem: All of mankind is infected with a mysterious mental disease that the Judaeo-Christian bible calls “SIN”. This disease entered our world through the wilful disobedience to God by Adam in the garden of Eden. Our debt that we owe God is the penalty we have on account of *our* sin.

In an attempt to explain to man what sin is God has given us his law. The law of God has two purposes. To educate man as to what sin is. And to condemn those who transgress that law.

Justification

Romans 3:19-20 *“Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.” NASB*

1 Timothy 1:8-11 *“8 But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 realising the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers 10 and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, 11 according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.” NASB*

Paul describes the purpose of the law of God. The law is described here as an educator not a saviour. The law gives us the knowledge of sin and apart from that can do no more for us. Paul talks about the law being good if it is used lawfully. This shows that there is a right way and a wrong way to use the law. If we use the law as an educator that is good. Problems arise if we use the law as a saviour to justify us or as a way to find favour with God.

Romans 3:28 *“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” NIV*

Galatians 2:16 *“nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. NASB*

The reason Paul emphasises this is because many in the early church and others ever since have been deluded into thinking that by obeying the of law they are entitled to eternal life.

The heresy being taught to the Galatian Christian church was that due to their obedience to the law God was obligated to justify them. This heresy made the grace of God of no effect.

Romans 7:7 *“What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.” NASB*

Again Paul emphasises the fact that the law of God is designed to educate us about the reality and nature of sin, but the law cannot justify us. Therefore if a person were able to recite all the laws of God and be able to quote the entire bible verbatim that would only show that they were are an educated person not a justified person.

Justification by Faith

Romans 3:21-24, 26 *“21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 26...so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” NASB*

Jesus Christ himself is the Righteousness of God apart from the law. He was witnessed by the law and the prophets as being the genuine thing. He alone can satisfy the demands of the violated law of God and freely give us Justifying grace to receive eternal life.

Results of Justification

Romans 5:1-5 *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” NASB*

Justification

Romans 5:8-10 “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. **9** Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. **10** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” NASB

Romans 5:9	Romans 5:10
Justified	Reconciled to God
By His blood	Through the death of his son
Shall we be saved from the wrath of God.	Shall we be saved

Is a Christian who has been Justified freely by Grace alone required to obey the law of God?

Titus 2:11-14 “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, **12** instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, **13** looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, **14** who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good deeds.” NASB

Titus 3:4 “But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, **5** He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, **6** whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior; **7** so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” NASB

The Grace of God given in mercy does a number of things for us.

1. It teaches us to live a godly life in the present age
2. redeems us from being law breakers
3. makes us zealous for good deeds
4. Justifies us.

Salvation by the Grace of God			
Justification (Forgiveness of Sin and the granting of Eternal life)	Live righteously and godly in the present age	redeem us from every lawless deed (We become doers of the law of God)	Zealous for good works.
Sanctification (to separate from sin)			

We receive all these when we accept the grace of God. If we at any time reject any of these we are rejecting the grace of God. We are justified apart from the law yet Paul also writes this:

Romans 2:13 “it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.” NASB

Is Paul contradicting himself here? Elsewhere he is clear that by the law no one will be justified and yet here he clearly states that only the doers of the law will be justified. This is because as shown above the transforming grace of God redeems us from being law breakers. Those people who refuse to obey the law of God are showing by their actions that they have rejected the Grace of God and as a result will also lose justification that comes from that same grace. So in this sense the doers of the law who are being redeemed from every lawless deed by the grace of God are also the ones justified by that same grace.

Romans 3:31 “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.” NASB

Justification

Therefore those who receive the grace of God through faith will establish the law. They will obey it. Not as a means of salvation but because they have been justified by grace through faith.

Romans 6:1-2 *“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” NASB*

Paul asks the question, shall we continue to transgress the law of God, ie sin, so that grace may increase? Never! Grace is not a licence to sin. Grace redeems from sin.

1 John 3:4 *“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.” NASB*
Here we are told by the Apostle John that sin is the transgression of the law of God.

1 John 5:18 *“We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin;...” NIV*

In the same letter the Apostle John informs us that Christians who are born again will not deliberately transgress the law of God.

Romans 7:12 *“So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” NIV*
Even though the law is not a saviour it educates us to know what is righteous, holy and good.

Isaiah 55:6-7 *“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; 7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ESV*

In the writings of the Prophet Isaiah he talks about salvation. God will only Justify (Abundantly pardon) those who return to the Lord and turn from wickedness.

The Apostle James on Justification

Faith in Action

James 2:14 - 26 *“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*

18 But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognise, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, [Genesis 15:6] “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.” NASB

Paul. Galatians 3:6-9 *“Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness [Genesis 15:6]. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.” NASB*

In Gen 15:6 is recorded that Abraham was justified by faith. A careful reading of the story shows that he was 86 yrs old when this happened. Abraham was 100 yrs old when Isaac was born and Isaac was a teenager about 16 yrs when Abraham offered him as a sacrifice. This puts around a 30 yr gap from the time of his being Justified by God to the time that he offered Isaac. Abraham was justified by faith from the time that he believed the promise of God. When he offered Isaac around 30 yrs later the action was an evidence of that faith. The action did not contribute to the justification but shows how people of faith obey God as opposed to demons who merely believe the facts and tremble of the thought of God.

Dictionaries - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology - Justification

Paul insists that people are not justified by what they themselves do. Justification is not the result of the infusion of new life into people, but comes about when they believe. The apostle points to the important example of Abraham, the great forbear of the Jewish race, as one who was not justified by works (Rom 4:2-3). And, of

Justification

course, if Abraham was not justified by works, then who could possibly be? Specifically Paul says, "a man is not justified by observing the law"; indeed, "by observing the law no one will be justified" ([Gal 2:16](#) ; cf. also [Gal 3:11](#)).

There is something of a problem in that, whereas Paul says quite plainly that justification is by faith and not by works, James holds that "a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone" ([2:24](#)). James chooses Abraham and Rahab as examples of people who were justified by works ([James 2:21](#) [James 2:25](#)). He points out that Abraham "offered his son Isaac on the altar" and that Rahab lodged the spies and sent them away.

But we should notice that both these Old Testament worthies are elsewhere singled out as examples of faith. Paul cited Abraham to establish the truth that we are justified by faith rather than by works. Indeed, he quotes Scripture, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" ([Rom 4:3](#) , citing [Gen 15:6](#) ; he cites it again in v. 22). In Romans 4 Paul has a strong argument that it was not works that commended the patriarch to God, but faith: Abraham is, for Paul, the classic example of a man who believed and who was accepted by God because of his faith. And the writer to the Hebrews says plainly that it was "by faith" that Rahab welcomed the spies ([Heb 11:31](#)).

If we look more closely at what James says we see that he is not arguing for works in the absence of faith, but rather for works as the evidence of faith. "Show me your faith without deeds," he writes, "and I will show you my faith by what I do" ([2:18](#)) and goes on to cite the demons who believe that there is one God as examples of the kind of faith he deprecates. James is sure that saving faith transforms the believer so that good works necessarily follow; and he complains about people who say they have faith, but whose lives show quite plainly that they have not been saved. When people have saving faith God transforms their lives and James' point is that in the absence of this transformation we have no reason for thinking that those who profess to be believers really have saving faith. We should not overlook the fact that James as well as Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 to make it clear that Abraham was justified by faith. And we should bear in mind that this was many years before he offered Isaac on the altar; indeed it was before Isaac was born. While the offering of Isaac showed that Abraham was justified, his justification, even on James' premises, took place long before the act that showed its presence.

And we must say much the same about Paul. He certainly calls vigorously for faith, but he calls equally vigorously for lives of Christian service. And when he writes, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" ([Gal 5:6](#)), he is saying something with which James would surely agree. For James says, "I will show you my faith by what I do" ([2:18](#)). Leon Morris

Conclusion

Two of Satan's most successful lies:

- (1) By obeying the law of God a person will become more holy and acceptable to God and will be justified because of obedience to the law and given eternal life.
- (2) A justified person is exempted from having to obey the law of God.

The Gospel: Through the Grace of God alone a person is freely justified and granted eternal life. This transforming grace turns a justified person from a life of sin to a life of holiness manifested in obedience to the holy law of God and from a life of selfishness to a life zealous for good works.

Any person who refuses to live a holy life, who refuses to obey the law of God, who refuses to do good works is showing by his actions that he has not been transformed by the Grace of God and therefore will not receive the Justification and the granting of eternal life that also comes from that Grace.