

DOUG BATCHELOR



A Assurance

Justification Made Simple

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“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”

—Romans 3:28

An Amazing Fact: *Abraham Lincoln didn't live long enough to witness the official end of the Civil War, but he was able to give the famous Emancipation Proclamation—freeing every slave in America.*

One day, a former slave living in Washington, D.C., who had escaped from the South during the war, approached Lincoln. He took some money from his pocket and offered it to the president. “What is this for?” asked Lincoln. The freed slave said that he only wanted to pay Lincoln for securing his freedom. But the president answered, “I can't take your money.”

The ex-slave protested, explaining, “But I want to give you something. I am so thankful!”

Lincoln paused a moment, thinking, and then said, “Before you try to offer that again, I want to show you something.” The president then began walking around the neighborhood,

until finally he pointed, saying to the grateful man, “You see that home over there? There’s a woman who lives there that lost her son, her only son, in this war fighting for your freedom.” And he continued, “See that house over there? That woman lost three sons fighting for your freedom.” Then he said, “You see that house over there? That’s an unusual house. In that house the woman lost her husband and two sons fighting on opposite sides.” Then the president turned to the man and said, “When you consider how much your freedom has already cost, are you going to give me money?”

The ex-slave said later of his encounter, “I realized that it would be an insult to offer money after they had paid so much.”

CHAPTER ONE

A Controversial Question

I want to look at a controversial subject in Christianity that we need to understand to have a right relationship with Christ—justification. It’s a word that confuses so many people, and brings up so much baggage, but

I think we can help stem that confusion by searching in the Bible and asking God what He has to say about this pivotal facet of faith.

So many Christians are worried about their salvation. Others who are on the edge of belief don't know what justification really means, if they can truly have it, and they're afraid of taking that first step toward Christ. If one of these describes you, I urge you to take a few moments and read through this short book. That confusion and fear is completely unnecessary, and I believe what you find out in this study will be a tremendous blessing for you, giving you confidence to face the future God has in store for you and providing a reason for you to believe.

CHAPTER TWO

What Is Justification?

Since our study centers on justification, it's wise to have a good definition. To justify means "to demonstrate or to prove to be just, right or valid; to declare free of blame; absolve; to free of the guilt and penalty attached

to grievous sin.” Therefore, justification is a legal declaration of innocence. If you’re justified, you’re declared just.

According to the Bible, every human (except Jesus) who has ever lived has sinned and is guilty for crimes punishable by death. Therefore, to be justified by Christ means that the Lord declares you to be forgiven, untainted by the crimes you have committed against Him.

Yet who has the right to be declared justified without the grace of God, especially when even just one sin disqualifies a person from eternal life? In the book *Steps to Christ*, we’re told that “if you give yourself to Him and accept Him as your Savior, then sinful as your life may have been for His sake you are accounted righteousness” (p. 65). The author then goes on to say how justification really works: “Christ’s character stands in place of your character and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”

One evangelist put it this way: “Justification means God looks upon you *just as if*, ‘like

just-as-if-ication.’ He looks upon you just as if you had never sinned.” Instead of seeing your filthy rags, God sees the righteousness of His Son in your place, and you are accounted righteousness.

CHAPTER THREE

Obtaining Justification

This sounds like a pretty good deal for fallen humanity, especially since most of it continues to live in open rebellion against God. But for those who are still interested, how are we to obtain that justification? If you ask each individual in the church, you’re likely to get several answers—from faith to works, and some will even say both. Well, it’s irrelevant how many people you ask. All that matters is what the Bible has to say about it, so that’s what we’re going to concentrate on.

“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15). According to this verse, salvation is a gift. Romans 6:23 underscores this idea when it says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is

eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Justification is apparently not something for which we work.

Imagine that you go to the office on Friday and your boss hands you an envelope. He smiles brightly and says, “Here’s your gift!” That’s really exciting to you, so you walk out, get into your car (because you don’t want to look too eager), and open the envelope. You dig and dig through it, yet all you find in there is your regular paycheck that amounts to covering your regular hours. Most likely you’d resent your boss calling it a gift. Why? Because you earned it.

Well, salvation is a gift, and thus by definition you cannot earn it. Have you ever received a gift that you earned? If so, it wasn’t a gift, because anything ceases to be a gift if you’ve done something to earn it. If you can only take possession of something with a payment—whether it’s money, a trade, or service—even after the fact, it’s not really a gift.

Romans 5:17, 18 says, “For if by one man’s [Adam] offence death reigned by one; much

more they which receive abundance of grace and of the *gift of righteousness* shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [Jesus] the *free gift* came upon all men unto justification of life” (emphasis added). This free gift results in justification.

According to the Bible, are we justified by works or by a gift that comes in response to faith? The answer seems clear by what we have already read from Scripture, but let’s get more information from Jesus.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jesus Explains Justification

Luke was a gentile who really understood the teachings of Jesus, especially when it concerned justification through faith as a gift. If you want to understand the science of justification, the parable found in Luke 18 is one of the best ways to learn it. I want to quote the entire text here, and then we’ll look at it more closely:

“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:9–14).

One of the problems in the time of Christ was that many of the religious leaders

believed they were made righteous by their good deeds. They trusted in their own righteousness while they looked down on others as worthless sinners.

The two men in Jesus' parable offer greatly contrasting figures. The Pharisee was a part of a sect of Judaism known for its rigid stance of obeying the law, while tax collectors (publicans) were associated with a very loose and scandalous lifestyle. Pharisees might have been considered the obvious choice for eternal life by most people of Jesus' day, but Jesus had different ideas.

Notice that the Pharisee is said to pray "thus with himself." In other words, he's praying to himself and not so much to God. He goes on to thank God that he's not like the worst sinners of the world, and more than that, he reminds God that he tithes and fasts regularly. It's probably an honest resume, and technically it's a good one. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the ... Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). But

instead of thanking God for His goodness in humility, he's thanking God for his resume as a point of pride.

The tax collector, however, doesn't even feel worthy to approach the front of the temple; instead, he stands back and cowers before the altar. His feelings of guilt and shame cause him to bow his head and beat on his breast, a sign of repentance—a genuine display of his sorrow for sin. He pleads to God to be merciful on him, a lowly sinner. Where the Pharisee has so much to offer God, the publican has nothing good to offer. Thus, also unlike the Pharisee, he's appealing solely to God's mercy.

Here's the point: According to Christ, the one who went home justified that day was the reviled tax collector, which means the respected Pharisee did not, even though he was paying his tithe, fasting twice a week, and most likely living an exemplary religious life of obedience.

CHAPTER FIVE

It's Not Complicated

Luke's parable is extremely important, and it is big. How did the tax collector obtain justification? By his own admission, we know he didn't earn it. He also didn't say, "Lord, I'm a sinner, but look at all the good things I've done." No, he simply asked for mercy. Nor did he make any demands like, "Lord, I'm a sinner, now give me mercy." It took faith for him to ask for God's mercy, because he has no tangible evidence that he'll have it. Grace must be asked for and received in faith.

At the end of this parable, Christ promised that "for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The tax collector smites his breast, repents, even humbly bows his eyes because he's too ashamed to look up to heaven. So according to Jesus, if we come to God humbling ourselves, truly repenting of our sinful deeds—confessing our sinfulness—and pleading for His mercy, we will go home from the house of God justified.

That's good news. That means if you, whoever you are and with whatever sins you carry today, do what this publican did, you can rest assured that before God, Christ's character is accounted to you. You are forgiven; you have been given the gift.

Is that complicated?

CHAPTER SIX

The Power(lessness) of Money

Acts 8:18–20 tells a very interesting story that has a lot of insight regarding justification:

“Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.”

Peter is addressing a man named Simon, who appears to be some kind of sorcerer for hire. He witnessed Peter and Philip laying hands on the people of Samaria. As the power of the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and miracles occurred, Simon thought, *Wow! Just think how my business would profit if I had that power!* So Simon offered them money, hoping that they could sell the power of the Holy Spirit to him.

Peter's response was quick and to the point, even harsh. His response basically boils down to saying, "To hades with your request!" For Peter, it was outrageous to think that the gifts of God could be purchased for money.

Yet many people believe and insist that salvation can be earned the same way—by purchase. This theology is not any different than what Simon tried to do, even though the Bible has such a severe response to those claiming they can pay for what God gives!

Why does the Lord react so strongly to the notion that His gifts can be purchased? "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Luke 18:21, 22).

Go back to the beginning of this book and read the amazing fact about the former slave. He wanted to give money to Lincoln as payment for his freedom. But for Lincoln the price was already paid in blood, and to take money for it would be an insult.

What has been paid for our freedom from Satan’s bondage? The blood of Christ. Do you think offering money to God, who gave the life of His only Son, makes much sense at all? Might it be insulting to God to be paid for the gift He has offered freely to you?

The saying goes that “freedom isn’t free.” Christ paid your debt because you couldn’t pay it. How silly then would it be to give God money, or works, to obtain your salvation in light of the work Christ already did on your behalf? Ephesians 2:8 confirms, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Another Good Example

I now want to go to the story found in Luke 23. The story of the two thieves who died on crosses next to Jesus gives us a stirring picture of the extremities to which justification can reach.

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (vs. 39–43).

In another gospel, we also learn that these thieves, one hanging on Jesus’ right

side, the other on His left side, were guilty of the same sins. They're both guilty of sedition against their government, perhaps even of murder, and to support their activities they stole.

The interesting thing is that even though they have identical records as sinners, one is saved and one is lost by the end of the story. They also find themselves in the same helpless position, unable to do anything to save themselves from their suffering and death. Neither one has anything to offer to secure their liberation from the cross on which they hang.

We also read in Matthew 27:39–44 that both mock Christ at one point. However, as the hours go by, apparently one of them begins to notice Christ's behavior and begins to rethink his attitude. Indeed, they both are witnesses to Christ's suffering, yet only one of them has a change of heart. We don't really know how the Holy Spirit illuminated his mind. I suspect he heard someone talking about Jesus' miracles, or

perhaps he heard someone reading from Isaiah 53 or a messianic Psalm about the sufferings of the Messiah. He then could have seen the soldiers gambling for His clothes at the foot of the cross, and heard Christ cry out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Then the other thief, unchanged by the condition he’s in, decides to raise his voice against Jesus again. “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” This thief’s lack of faith is readily apparent in his choice of words: “*If*.” You need faith to be saved. But the other thief steps in to rebuke him. “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.” In other words, “Even now, don’t you fear God? Don’t give Jesus a hard time, because we’re dying for the same things. But the difference is, we deserve what we’re getting.”

Do you know what this is called? Repentance. He’s confessing his guilt. He’s

admitting that he's getting the just reward for his deeds. Heaven forbid we should get the just rewards for our deeds against God and our fellow man. It makes me shudder to even think about it. I don't want my reward; I want Jesus' reward!

The thief then offers a short prayer to Jesus. "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." It's like the publican in the temple who said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." It's the same outcry as Peter's, who cried out, "Lord, save me." It's short because that's all the time he has left in the world. Yet it is powerfully effective.

Amazingly, in the midst of all His agony, the betrayal of Judas, the crushing weight of the sins of the world on His soul, the abandonment of His disciples, the separation from the Father, and all the physical pain He was experiencing, Jesus didn't say, "Look, don't bother me now. Can't you see I'm having a hard time?"

No. He says to the thief, "Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise"

(NKJV). How does God offer us salvation? Does He say, “Maybe. There’s a possibility”? Not at all. Right then and there, Christ gave the man His assurance of salvation. We can know that this thief is going to be in the first resurrection, the resurrection of the saints. He was justified by faith.

We don’t hear from the thief again, so we can only assume that he had to hang his faith that he was forgiven solely on the words of Christ. But that must have brought great comfort to him as he faded into the darkness of death.

You can have that same comfort right now. Jesus says, “Assuredly.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

What a Free Gift Might Buy

Proverbs 18:16 teaches, “A man’s gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.” Have you ever noticed how a gift can change an attitude? It’s pretty hard to be unkind to someone who has just given you a gift.

Lobbyists who want to get the attention of politicians are constantly sending them gifts, and if those gifts are received it means the lawmaker needs to give these special interests his or her time. After all, if someone gives you an all-expense-paid vacation and you won't even take their phone call ... well, that would be really rude!

This principle, though much purer than politics, holds true when God gives us the incredible gift of justification. This is the point where the controversy between works and faith comes in. It shouldn't be confusing or controversial though. It's really quite simple: We are justified by faith. It is a free gift, and you can put that on the books. Case closed.

CHAPTER NINE

What about James?

But aren't works connected with justification? Absolutely. But the operative word is "connected." Justification does not depend on works. No. Never. This is very, very important

to understand, so I want to give you an illustration that makes it clearer.

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?” (James 2:21). Wait a second. Is James contradicting Paul’s message in Romans 3:26: “To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Is the Bible contradicting itself?

In our study of justification, we’ve made a strong case that we’re saved by grace through faith. How then can we deal with James? If you’re confused right now, that’s okay. The apostles and early church leaders were also confused. But we have a clear answer from the Bible. We know that the Holy Spirit inspired both writers, and that both of these passages are Holy Scripture. Is the Bible still trustworthy? Yes, it is.

We need to go one more verse in James to understand this perplexing passage: “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?”

(NKJV). Faith, then, works together with works. How? When we read the word “perfect” in this sentence, it means complete. When used in the sentence, it means Abraham’s works by faith were made manifest, that is, they gave evidence to his faith. In other words, his works proved he was justified!

The problem stems from the fact that Paul and James are talking to two different groups of believers. It happens all the time: Some Christians need a different message than others to draw them close to God’s will. Let me explain: When I am in a room full of legalists, I talk about grace. When I am in a room full of people who believe in righteousness by presumption, I talk about surrender and obedience. It’s not a contradiction, but complementary teachings that form complete picture of justification.

In the Bible, Paul was dealing with Jewish believers who were trying to force gentile converts to keep all of the law of Moses in order to be justified. Paul responded to this by saying that people can’t earn salvation;

rather, it comes as a free gift of God. However, James is dealing with new converts who have come into the church believing that since they're justified by faith, obedience doesn't really matter.

Let's go back to the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector once more. When the tax collector repented and asked God for mercy, Jesus said he went home justified. Here are some good questions to ask ourselves: Did the publican *know* he was justified when he went home? Likewise, should a person know when they're justified?

To answer these questions, I want to ask you another set of questions: If we're saved by faith, should we know it? Should the publican have asked for mercy not expecting to receive it? We should readily acknowledge that the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts to give us the peace that God has heard our prayers. I have prayed about certain problems, agonizing over them, but then later felt a sudden peace flood my soul. It's that feeling that your prayer got through to God, and it's all in His very capable hands.

I believe the tax collector went home knowing he was justified in the eyes of His God.

CHAPTER TEN

Here's the Rub

God says, “You’re forgiven” to the tax collector. Is he therefore a different man? In one way, he certainly is. He came as a sinner to stand humbly before God, and now he goes home covered with Christ’s righteousness. But the bigger question is, will he behave differently now that he knows he’s been justified?

I strongly believe that if you’re truly saved you will show a definite change in behavior. The fruit of the Spirit will be made manifest in you.

So just imagine that for whatever reason, Pilate told his soldiers, “I want to let one of those thieves go.” So his soldiers choose the one who Christ guaranteed access to heaven on resurrection day, and they remove the nails and bind his hands and feet so that he will heal. He’s scarred for life, of course, but he lives.

Do you think he would have been different? Would he have returned to the sins that put him in bondage before the moment Christ freely gave him forgiveness? If he did willingly return to the sins of his past, do you think he was a true believer on the cross? I'm only asking because, to me, real justification can be witnessed by the attitude and behavior of the one who has been saved.

Don't fall for the lie that Christians are never to talk about good works because that makes them legalists. The Bible is filled with apostles and prophets talking about how important good works are in this world. It's not a sin to do good—it's not wrong to stop sinning. "Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid" (1 Timothy 5:25). This passage shows us that the works of the saved are evident because they are good. You'll know a saved person by their fruit! First Timothy 6:18 reiterates, "That they do good, that they be rich in good works."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Moving the Wagon

It's a primitive and imperfect illustration, but I think it will help make some sense of all this. You've got a wagon called works, and you have a horse that's called grace—a free gift from God. You want to move the wagon out of a ditch, and you have several options. You've got the horse, you can push, or you can just leave the wagon in the ditch, which symbolizes eternal damnation.

Picture yourself pushing the wagon while the horse is tied to the back of the wagon. Does that make any sense? Why deny the free gift exists and try to get out of the ditch with your own effort? After all, it's not possible to push the wagon out of the ditch by your own effort. Now imagine that you just cut the wagon loose and say, "I'm just going to ride off to the Promised Land without the wagon." It seems to me that wherever you end up, you're going to have nothing.

Having that horse sure makes a big difference, especially when you put it in front

of the wagon. The horse, justification, has to come first. When you do that, the wagon, good works, ensures that you have something to show for the end of your journey.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). The person who wrote this passage in the Bible is the same person who wrote that we are saved by faith in Romans. It’s the same person who said righteousness is received as a gift.

But here in Ephesians, Paul says that we should care about our works, that they make a difference in the end. He says that if we are justified, we have been remade to do good works. “In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, [and] sincerity” (Titus 2:7).

Christians shouldn’t treat the phrase “good works” like they are dirty words. It’s a wonder to me why people get upset when we talk about the fruit of good works. How will the hosts of the universe and the people on

earth know that you really are for Christ unless you have something to show for it?

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Real Work of Every Believer

When you're saved in Christ, a new power is given you to live a new life. This is what James is talking about when he says, "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God" (James 2:23). That's how a man is justified by works: Abraham *believed*; that was his "works." He *believed* enough to offer up his son.

Jesus supports this interpretation. John 6:28, 29 is an extremely important passage about works and faith. "Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

Are we saved by works? Yes! What are those works? *Belief!* Read that passage again. "This is the work ... that ye believe." Does

it take effort to believe? Yes. Sometimes you don't feel like believing, and you need to pray that God will give you the courage and strength to believe in His Word.

There is an effort involved in trusting God, because our whole nature has been driven to believe in the lies of the devil. He makes us doubt by twisting the evidence, and we doubt those things we cannot see. So God knows it takes effort to believe, that we must choose it. But if you pray, He will gladly help you believe.

Here's a passage by a brilliant writer who makes great sense of works and faith.

“By His perfect obedience He has satisfied the claims of the law and my only hope is found in looking to Him as my substitute and surety Who obeyed the law perfectly for me. By faith in His merits I am free from the condemnation of the law. He clothes me with His righteousness which answers all the demands of the law. I am complete in Him Who brings an everlasting

righteousness. He presents me to God in the spotless garments of which no thread was woven by any human agent. All is of Christ and all the glory, honor and majesty are to be given to the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (*1 Selected Messages*, 396).

Believing is sometimes a challenge because it's so hard not to give ourselves credit and say, “Lord, I'll help you make me a good person.” Or “Lord, I thank you that I am not like other sinners, and here is my list of good things I've done for you.” It can be hard to lay aside all of our filthy rags disguised as righteousness, to let go of our pride, and to confess that He gets all the glory for our righteousness. We are justified as a gift, through no action of our own except believing in that gift. The Bible says that if we will humble ourselves to this truth, God will lift us up. Don't let your lowly pride get in the way; rather, let God exalt you as His good and faithful servant by believing in His gospel.

And the good news is a very simple truth. Thank God for that. We can come before God and say, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.” We can pray, “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” We can ask, “Lord, please see Jesus’ righteous raiment and not my filthy rags.” Yet we can also say, “Lord, help me show others your grace in my life.” We can pray, “Lord, use me as your instrument of good works.” We can say, “I believe, and so I will obey if you help me, Lord.”

And to each prayerful request, Jesus will answer, “Assuredly.”



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