

50 POSITIONAL TRUTHS

#29: Justified

“Justified” is a legal term which takes us to the courtroom. Justification is the opposite of condemnation (Rom. 5:18; 8:34), and both are verdict of a judge who pronounces the accused either guilty or not guilty. Justification should never be confused with forgiveness. Forgiveness remits our debts and cancels our liability to punishment; justification bestows on us a righteous standing before God.

It was the sixteenth century Reformers, whom the Holy Spirit enlightened to rediscover the biblical gospel of justification by faith. This became their principal article of all Christian doctrine. Justification by faith became the bloody battleground between the Reformers and the Roman Catholics.

It is unfortunate that many Protestants today neglect the doctrine of justification by faith because of existential and emotional reasons. Their antipathy to the doctrine of justification is because it represents God as Judge and not as Father. They don't like the doctrine of justification because it represents “heartless” juridical language. They don't like the forensic nuances of justification. Because justification is all about justice and not love or emotions, they have apathy or aversion to it. How unfortunate! Don't they realize that Jesus Christ taught justification and that Isaiah predicted the great work of justification accomplished by the Messiah (cf. Luke 18:14; Isa. 53:11)? No, justification was not a Pauline idiosyncrasy. The rejection or neglect of the doctrine of justification demonstrates just how dangerous it is for any believer to view all Truth from an emotional or existential perspective. They so emphasize the mercy and love of God that they simply cannot stomach the marvelous *forensic* doctrine of justification.

But why did the Roman Catholics reject the Refomer's teaching on justification by faith? Let's note what the Roman Catholics taught about justification as expressed in the Council of Trent. First, the Council taught that justification takes place at baptism and includes forgiveness and renewal. The baptized person is cleansed from all original and actual sins, and is simultaneously infused with a new and supernatural righteousness. Second, before baptism God's prevenient grace disposes people 'to convert themselves to their own justification by freely assenting to and co-operating with that grace.' Third, post-baptismal sins (if 'mortal' causing the loss of grace) are not included within the scope of justification. They have to be purged by contrition, confession, and penance (also, if any remain at death, by purgatory), so that these and other postbaptismal good works may be said to 'merit' eternal life. Why do you think the Catholics rejected justification by faith? The Protestants had good reason to reject all of this “religious stuff.”

Justification is a positional truth, and like all positional truths they have nothing to do with a person's experiential status. Justification occurs at the moment of salvation and cannot be altered in any way. At the instant someone accepts Christ as Savior, God immediately and completely confers *legal/forensic* righteousness on that person. The moment a person believes in

Jesus Christ God declares that person to be in righteous standing because of Jesus Christ. That's grace!

Justification does not mean to make alive or make new (that's regeneration). Justification is not experiential though one may enjoy wonderful experiences from its reality. Justification is the gavel of God coming down as He declares a person righteous. Again, this righteousness is a declaration and not something *inside* a person. It does not translate into a person *having* righteousness in them in any intrinsic or ontological sense; rather, it refers to God's declaration that a believer is righteous because of the work and person of Jesus Christ. Justification must never be confused with sanctification (which is a continuous, lifelong process). Failure to make the distinction between justification and sanctification most assuredly leads to all kinds of doctrinal errors.

Apostle Paul uses four key phrases in his defense of divine justification which cover the source, ground, means, and effects.

1) The *source* of justification, *justified by His grace*, Rom. 3:24. Since no one is righteous, not even one, justification had to come by grace. Self-justification is a sheer impossibility, Rom. 3:20. God justifies by His grace, Rom. 3:24; 8:33.

2) The *ground* of justification, *justified by His blood*, Rom. 5:9. Justification is not a synonym for an amnesty that can be given willy-nilly out of a good or capricious heart. When God justifies sinners, He is not declaring bad people to be good, or saying that they are not sinners after all; He is pronouncing them *legally* righteous free from any liability to the broken law, *because* Jesus Christ has born the penalty of their law-breaking. Man can be justified *only* because Jesus Christ bore the sins and provides them with His own righteousness.

3) The *means* of justification, *justified by faith*, Rom. 3:28. Grace and faith belong indissolubly to one another, since faith's only function is to receive what grace freely offers. We are not, therefore, justified by *our* faith, we are justified *by* God's grace and *by* Christ's death. God's grace is the source and Christ's death is the ground of our justification; faith is *only* the means by which we are united to Christ.

4) The *effect* of justification is, among many other things, peace with God, Rom 5:1. What grace! What a deal! There is nothing like it!

Positional truth #29: Justified

Romans 5:1 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 3:24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

Titus 3:7 that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

In Christ,

Pastor Don