

LESSON ESSENTIALS

UNDERSTANDING SALVATION

LESSON 8: JUSTIFICATION

Contrary to how we may feel sometimes, God sees us as clean and spotless because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The good news is that there is no sin big enough to separate us from the love of God. This lesson will help you see yourself as holy and righteous before God.

Justification is a phenomenon that is unique to our faith. Read on to get better acquainted with it, so that you can effectively communicate this aspect of our salvation as you continue reaching out to others.

Justification is an integral part of our faith. We are not only made right by believing in Jesus, we are also united with God through faith when we receive the forgiveness of our sins. This is what justification is all about – being declared righteous before God.

REFLECT

Jesus is our only source of justification. Romans 3:24 says we are 'justified freely,' not because we deserve it, but because our God is loving and gracious. This is evident in that He commanded His Son to die for our sin.

We all have secrets we would rather not have everyone know. These are the things we regret, the decisions, actions or words we wish we could take back. Have you ever wished you could erase a memory? We all know what regret and guilt feels like. So, who wouldn't want to have their sins forgiven? Many people, even many Christians, carry around a sense of guilt. We ask for forgiveness for our sins – but how can God forgive everything we've done? This is the hope and beauty of the Gospel! Even in our darkest moments, God is there, declaring us righteous.

How can that be? Our mind and heart have a hard time accepting it. When we do something wrong, we know it, and then we hold onto guilt. But we need to understand the foundation of justification: forgiveness. Let's think about this concept. We know that God is just, so the penalty for sin must be paid. Sometimes we might imagine ourselves before God as the righteous judge, and we know that, as the Bible says, we have all sinned and fallen short of His glory (Romans 3:23). But we need to realize the joyful truth: because of Jesus' death on the cross, the 'Judge' lets us go free. That's why Jesus came into the world – to take our penalty upon Himself and clear our offenses before God. The Lord Jesus Christ's sacrifice and resurrection fully satisfied God's justice (Romans 3:21-26). Because we stand justified before the Almighty God, no one can accuse a believer in Christ. Romans 8:33 says, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

Jesus is our only source of justification. Romans 3:24 says we are 'justified freely,' not because we deserve it, but because our God is loving and gracious. This is evident in that He commanded His Son to die for our sin. Romans 5:9 says, "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood." 1 John 1:7 says, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." It is important to note the word 'all' here. There is no sin big enough that can't be forgiven. The Devil may try to trick us into believing that God will forgive almost everyone, except the really bad people. Or that our worst sin is too horrible to be forgiven. But the death of Christ offers forgiveness for not one sin, but all sins. Also, justification doesn't need to be repeated. Once we are saved, we are *forever* justified, always righteous in His eyes.

Even when we accept Christ's forgiveness there's still part of us that says, 'But I'm still not good enough to deserve Christ's love or

friendship.’ That is why we need to understand justification as *more than* forgiveness of sin. Yes, God lets us free from punishment, but more than that, he places the righteousness of Christ onto us and looks upon us with favour. To illustrate this, think of a man who borrows money from a friend. He loses his job and there is no way for him to pay back. His friend and tells him he will forgive the debt. This would be forgiveness. But justification is more than this. The friend says, ‘Also, will you become a partner in my business?’ This is the kind of justification that we receive through God- we are declared righteous, and he looks upon us favourably and accepts us into His family. Romans 5:1-2 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” We know that God forgives our sin. But more than that, God gives us the righteousness of His Son, completes us and looks upon us favourably. Even if we had never sinned, we would still need the full extent of justification to make us right with God.

How do we respond to this amazing gift? Some new Christians may be tempted to continue sinning. After all, we are already declared righteous and forgiven before God. In Romans 6, Paul answers this question, “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin which leads to death or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” Once we’ve been released from slavery to sin, it would be foolish to return to being slaves again. Especially when our sin cost our Saviour His very life! We should respond in joyful adoration, thanksgiving and obedience that God freely extends forgiveness again and again and again, and still counts us as righteous in His Holy Presence.

Justification is a significant part of God’s plan of redemption for us. Romans 8:29-30 says, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Isn’t it amazing to know that we were always a part of God’s plan! And we are glorified along with Christ! Let us celebrate that the love of Christ extends to us so freely and continually, and we will always and forever be declared righteous in His sight!

LOOKING DEEPER

To learn more about justification, read though the first 12 chapters of Romans.

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IN REVIEW

- Justification means 'to be declared righteous' in God's eyes. This means that we are forgiven of all of our sins and given the righteousness of Jesus.
- This justification was made possible by the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for us.
- Justification is irreversible, it makes us right with God, it takes away all condemnation associated with sin and also unites us with God forever.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Do you ever have a hard time seeing yourself as sinless and justified before God? What do you do to remind yourself of God's favour toward you and the freedom that you've received from your sins?
- Given that justification is a concept alien to most worldviews, how can you explain it to your friends from other faiths?
- What is your response to the concept of justification? Are you tempted to be casual about sin or does it encourage you to live in thankful obedience to God?

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