

THE DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE: SOTERIOLOGY 8: JUSTIFICATION



According to Thiessen (Thiessen, 1949) justification is the Biblical doctrine of God declaring the person who has given their life to Jesus Christ righteous.

DEFINITION

Once a person has been reborn, he receives a new life and nature. Justification takes place whereby the person is now seen as if he has never sinned. Justification is not something the new believer can do, but which is declared by God.

By default, all men have sinned and as such cannot share in the glory of God:

²³For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; ²⁶To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. – **Romans 3:23-26**

Usually, commentators and Bible teachers will only show Romans 3:23 but we need to read further to get the full picture:

- Verse 23 states two things: we have all sinned; and we cannot attain the glory of God.
- Verse 24 confirms that once we have been reborn, we are justified because of the redemption that Jesus Christ has made possible.
- Verse 25 declares that God sent Jesus Christ to be a propitiation for us. Propitiation is the act of pleasing or appeasing an angry person, in this case God the Father. It also addresses the righteousness for the sins of the past.
- Verse 26 states that Jesus Christ is the righteous one who now justifies the one who believes in Jesus Christ.

Paul continues this, two chapters later:

⁶For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. ⁸But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. ¹⁰For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. – **Romans 5:6-10**

- Verse 6 shows that we were without strength – without the ability to do something about our lost state. Jesus Christ came to the rescue and died in our place.
- Verse 7 elaborates on this and explains that to die in the place of someone else would require a decision way above what we are capable of.
- Verse 8 shows that since no man could do this, God shows how much He loves us by allowing Jesus Christ to become the sacrifice.
- Verse 9 is our blessed hope (See also Titus 2:13) that we will escape the coming wrath of God because we have been justified.

- Verse 10 demonstrates the nature of God’s love for us that when we were still enemies of God, we were reconciled and saved.

The act of justification includes a number of aspects.

1. The remission of the penalty

Because the penalty for our sins should naturally be death, as already stated, in the state that we are in, there is no way we can get out of this ourselves. The death that we deserve is on the physical and spiritual level, and it is eternal.

Many people are deceived to think that just because they do not believe in God, none of this applies to them. Many hold the mistaken belief that at death, the body simply ceases to exist and as such, the soul and spirit also die. This is known as annihilationism. It is described thus:

In Christianity, annihilationism (also known as extinctionism or destructionism) is the belief that those who are wicked will perish or cease to exist. It states that after the final judgment, all unsaved human beings, all fallen angels (all of the damned) and Satan himself will be totally destroyed so as to not exist, or that their consciousness will be extinguished rather than suffer everlasting torment in hell (often synonymized with the lake of fire) (Wikipedia, 2020).

While the article states “In Christianity,...”, there is nothing Christian about this way of thinking.

The only way that man can be saved from eternal punishment is through the blood of Jesus Christ and this was planned and prepared for a long time ago:

⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. – **Isaiah 53:5**

While only the fifth verse in this chapter is quoted here, readers are encouraged to read the entire 53rd chapter of Isaiah.

If we try to see this in human terms, in other words the way human law works, we see that human law falls short in one critical aspect: If you have committed a crime and then pay the penalty, whatever that penalty is, you are set free. However, you will now have a criminal record. This is simply how human law works.

Now let us have a look at it the way God planned it: We committed a crime. Firstly, there is no penalty that we can possibly pay to counter the sin or make up for it. The only way is the death of Jesus Christ as a substitution for what we cannot pay. Secondly, whereas in human law we will forever have a criminal record even if we have paid the penalty, in God’s plan, we are justified through Jesus Christ as if we have never sinned. David summed it up long before Jesus walked on the Earth:

¹Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ²Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. – **Psalms 32:1-2**

2. The restoration to favour

Because of our sin, we have fallen out of favour with God and the result is wrath:

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ¹⁹Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. – **Romans 1:18-19**

Since we have been restored, we are now once again favoured:

²³And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. – **James 2:23**

Imagine being called a friend of God.

3. The imputation of righteousness

If we were to be in God's presence, then not only should our sins be forgiven and we be justified, but there must also be a process of being reckoned as righteous. To impute means to reckon with, and both words are used, or inferred, in the Bible.

David says that the man to whom God does not impute iniquity, is blessed.

²Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. – **Psalms 32:2**

Paul speaks to Philemon and asks him to put Onesimus' debt on his (Paul's) account:

¹⁸If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; ¹⁹I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. – **Philemon 1:18-19**

God restores us to favour by imputing us to the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Because He is righteous, we are made righteous.

METHOD

How does justification take place in the life of the believer? We need to understand that righteousness and justification already applied in the Old Testament, else there would be no hope for Old Testament saints.

Job asked the question how a man can be justified with God:

⁴How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? – **Job 25:4**

Abraham was justified by faith:

¹What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? ²For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. ³For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. – Romans 4:1-3

David asks the Lord not to judge him:

²And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. –
Psalm 143:2

For us today, the method is seen in the following:

1. It is not through the works of the law. Paul is adamant of this:

²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. – **Romans 3:20**

2. It is by the grace of God. He is the source of our justification. In the words of Titus:

⁷That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. – **Titus 3:7**

3. It is by the blood of Jesus Christ. The believer is not only justified by grace but by the blood of Jesus Christ as the grace of God allowed Jesus to be killed and His blood is a remission for the sins of many:

²⁵Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; – **Romans 3:25**

4. It is by faith

¹Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: ²By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. – **Romans 5:1-2**

RESULTS

What are the results of justification?

1. The remission of the penalty of death

We are no longer condemned, and we now have peace with God:

¹There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. – **Romans 8:1**

2. The imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ

⁵But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. – **Romans 4:5**

3. The restoration of the favour of God

⁶Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, ⁷Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. ⁸Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.
– **Romans 4:6-8**

4. Inheritance

⁷That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. – **Titus 4:7**

5. There is a change in the way we live

⁷Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. – **1 John 3:7**

6. Assurance that you are saved from God's wrath

¹⁰And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. – **1 Thessalonians 1:10**

This is a verse that is often not referred to when we discuss the Coming of Jesus Christ, the rapture to take place soon. The text is very clear: we wait with expectation for Jesus to return from heaven, who will save us from the wrath to come upon the Earth.

7. Assurance of glorification

³⁰Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. – **Romans 8:30**

CONCLUSION

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of your life, then you have been justified. No one can take this away from you.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Thiessen, H. C., 1949. Lectures in Systematic Theology. 3rd Edition ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Wikipedia, 2020. Wikipedia. [Online]
Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annihilationism>
[Accessed 9 January 2021].