

WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION

The vast majority of professing Christians have a very limited understanding of the true meaning of the word justification, and how critical it is to their salvation. If we lack knowledge of such an important part of what forms the foundation of our belief, how can we be sure that what we are doing is right and will qualify us for salvation by God? So what then is the meaning of justification and why is it so critical to get justification right from the very beginning?

The process of salvation is like building a house. The strength of that house depends on its foundation. Justification is that foundation. It must be built according to the instructions of the author: the Lord our God. With this foundation, the rest of the process of salvation will be able to withstand whatever is thrown at it. But, if it is built according to the commandments and precepts of men, then the rest of the process of salvation will be like building on quick sand, and therefore likely to crumble in times of trials.

Justification is a step-by-step process, through which we can become just in the eyes of God. It is achieved through faith, rather than through specific actions. In other words, no amount of law and commandment keeping or good works can render any one of us just, that is, blameless before God. Once we have been rendered blameless by God, it is then that we must start doing the works of righteousness which is keeping the laws and commandments of God.

We can diligently start keeping all the commandments and laws of God from a given period of time in our lives but still not become blameless before God. To be just before God, all of our past sins have to be blotted out first. Without this, the process of justification is a non-starter. It is only after the removal of past sins that we can become blameless before God. Once this has occurred, only then will keeping the laws and commandments of God be significant in His sight.

Nothing but the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, can wash away our sins. Some follow the commandments and precepts of men, in the hope that their sins will be washed away. These are all vain practices. The Lord Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth, and was blameless before God the Father which qualified him as the Lamb of God. He took our place in God's judgement - all judgement towards us was passed onto Him. The process of justification starts with a calling that leads to repentance. Following repentance, we must be

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converted and baptised. Conversion and baptism can be inter-changeable in terms of the order in which they are performed.

THE CALLING

The process of justification starts by answering the call to repent. We currently live in a period of time called the 'acceptable year of the Lord':

Luke 4:18-20 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,

To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." ²⁰ Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

This period of time known as 'the acceptable year of the Lord', has been set aside by the Lord our God, in which all men everywhere have been called to repent. The apostle Paul was inspired to preach this sermon in Athens, in which he expounded on the days we currently live in:

Acts 17:22-31 New King James Version (NKJV)

²² Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; ²³ for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: ²⁴ "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each

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one of us;²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'²⁹ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,³¹ because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

The calling has already gone out to all, but who is able to hear this calling? Some will perceive this calling and take the required steps to repent, but they may get caught up in the religions of this world. They may lack the knowledge and understanding of the requirements of repentance which will prevent them from achieving justification and they will therefore miss the opportunity of this calling. Only if this calling is properly followed through will the requirements of repentance be met.

REPENTANCE

As stated earlier, justification is a step-by-step process which begins with a calling that leads to repentance. What exactly is the meaning of the word repentance? We must understand that repentance is something private between an individual and the God of creation. God sees and hears all that we think, do and say, including when we transgress His laws and commandments. To repent is to go to God privately and confess our sins to Him and ask for forgiveness. But first, before we go to God, we must forgive all those who have done us any wrong, regardless of the gravity of the wrong doing. For us to be forgiven by God we have to first forgive others. This is actually beneficial to us, because in the process of forgiving others, we set ourselves free from bondage.

Repentance must be sincere and from the heart, with a willingness to change from the sinful ways of the world, by turning into the path of obedience to the laws and commandments of God. Upon witnessing this sincerity from the heart, God will then reward our faithfulness with righteousness and the blood of the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ - will wash away all of

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our past sins. It is important to note the change in path that one aligns with when one repents; does one abstain from transgression after repenting or does one start walking in obedience of the laws and commandments of God as one grows in knowledge of the requirements? Is transgression not the root cause for repentance?

As you can see it is not what we do physically that leads to justification, it is purely by faith. What underpins repentance is the belief that, when we forgive, God will in turn forgive us. When we admit our sins and repent to God, whose laws and commandments we have transgressed, He who sees the sincerity of our hearts and our willingness to amend our ways, will in turn forgive our sins. If we believe that the blood of Jesus Christ has washed away our past sins, then the blood of Christ will indeed wash us clean of all past sins.

It is of paramount importance to stress that, no amount of good works of righteousness can replace the process of repentance. That is why the Lord said:

Matthew 5:20 New King James Version (NKJV)

²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Pharisees were self-righteous and were adamant they had no reason to repent, because they believed that they had not transgressed any of the laws and commandments of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ started His ministry with a call to repentance:

Mark 1:14-15 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹⁴ Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

The Lord then set the standard for all of us when He added to this statement:

Luke 13:2-5 New King James Version (NKJV)

² And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? ³ I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

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This call by the Lord was further expounded by the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost, when the promise of the Spirit of God was freely given to mankind for the very first time.

Acts 2:38-39 New King James Version (NKJV)

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Peter was speaking to devout Jews who were at Jerusalem keeping the feast of week, also known as Pentecost, as the Lord had commanded in the books of the law and prophets. These men had to repent in order for their sins to be blotted out. The Lord Jesus Christ had just opened the new and only path to salvation, which begins with answering the call to repent.

It is crystal clear for us to see here that, it is God who calls us to repent and when we repent, we are given the free gift of the Holy Spirit - which is the Spirit of God, also known as the Spirit of Christ.

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD

When we come to the knowledge that we have transgressed the laws and commandments of God we must then answer the call to repentance, by going to God the Father privately to confess our sins in the belief that God will wipe away our past sins. If there is sincerity in our hearts and the willingness to change from our sinful ways, God will reward our faith by rendering us just in His eyes and the blood of Christ will wash away our past sins.

It is imperative that we realise we are still capable of transgressing the laws and commandments of God and can therefore still sin against God - even after repentance. Therefore there must be the willingness on our part to change. When we repent, God renders us just in His eyes after the blood of Christ has washed away our past sins. God then gives us the free gift of the Holy Spirit, which empowers us to be able to do the will of God. The Holy Spirit is only given to those with the willingness to obey the commandments of God.

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Acts 5:31-32 New King James Version (NKJV)

³¹ *Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”*

We must understand that a mind that is occupied by carnal desires and pursuits is opposed to God and is not subject to the laws of God:

Romans 8:6-8 New King James Version (NKJV)

⁶ *For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Therefore, only those who have answered the call to repentance will be rewarded by God with the gift of His Spirit. With this they can start walking along a path that is in accordance with His laws and commandments.

1 Peter 1:1-2 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹ *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.*

It is the Spirit of God that sets all those who have repented apart. After they have been washed by the blood of Christ of their sins, they are then empowered by His Spirit to live according to the laws and commandments of God. It is a process that lasts a lifetime. There are many other reasons why God rewards our faith with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The most important reason is that, without the spirit of God, it is impossible to please God, because the faith that is pleasing to God comes from the Spirit of God:

Hebrews 11:5-6 New King James Version (NKJV)

⁵ *By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. ⁶ But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

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It is also important to note that if we have not been given the free gift of the Spirit of God, we cannot be part of His family:

Romans 8:9 New King James Version (NKJV)

⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

Additionally, those who receive the Spirit of God will experience everlasting life:

John 4:13-14 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

There is another part of justification that many today have not realised:

Acts 3:19-21 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹⁹ Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, ²⁰ and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

There is so much we can take hold of from this passage of Scripture but for the purpose of this study, we have to keep it to the point. Once we have repented, we then have to be converted into the kingdom of God.

CONVERSION INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

To be converted, as per the meaning of the word, one has to change; to transform from one state into another. When we are converted into the kingdom of God, there should be a distinct change in our character, our mannerisms and our mind-set. These are all the outward signs of the Spirit of God working inside of us, transforming us into a new person. Through faith this is what one should expect.

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Mark 1:14-15 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹⁴ Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

We have to repent and believe in the gospel. If we are not converted into the kingdom of God, we will not be able to believe in the gospel. The Lord said to His disciples and to us - that only when we are converted and become like a little child, will we enter the kingdom of God:

Matthew 18:2-4 New King James Version (NKJV)

² Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, ³ and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

This passage serves as a blueprint on how to enter the kingdom of heaven. We have to be converted and humble ourselves as little children. We must be in obedience to the laws and commandments of God. Only then can we enter the kingdom of heaven. Little children listen and learn from their parents with untainted faith. It is in this same manner that we are to receive the kingdom of God.

There is one such conversion detailed in the Scriptures that highlights the whole process of justification: the apostle Paul being called by the Lord on his way to Damascus. Paul was a Pharisee and a high ranking official in the Sanhedrin. To be made part of the Body of Christ, the household of God, he had to repent. The calling of Paul by the Lord, as described in the Scriptures, covers every stage of the process of justification we have just discussed.

The calling:

Acts 9:3-6 New King James Version (NKJV)

³ As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

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⁵And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." ⁶So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

This is the moment the apostle Paul was called by the Lord. Not every calling is as dramatic as Paul's, but there comes a certain point in our lives when we receive a call to repentance from the Lord. You can see from this passage of Scripture that it was hard for Paul to resist the call to repentance. That is why the Lord said to him: it is hard to kick against the pricks of the call.

Repentance:

Acts 9:9-12 New King James Version (NKJV)

⁹And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.¹⁰ Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

¹¹So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. ¹²And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

The apostle Paul spent three days and nights fasting and praying to the Lord for forgiveness. The Lord forgave him, rendered him just in His sight and then sent His disciple Ananias to go and lay hands on him, so that he would receive the Holy Spirit.

The free gift of the Holy Spirit:

Acts 9:15-18 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹⁵But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

¹⁷And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me

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that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

The conversion:

Acts 9:19-22 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹⁹So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

²¹Then all who heard were amazed, and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?”

²²But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

When we repent and are converted into the house of God, we must then abide by the laws, commandments and customs of the house of God.

Ephesians 2:11-22 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹¹Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—¹²that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

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¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

When we are converted and admitted into the household of God, He will reside within us through His Spirit. We must grow in the Spirit, in our character and become like God - through a process called sanctification.