

BCC Policy: Justification and Sanctification

Approved May 2008

The important truth that we are justified by faith alone is stated as a foundational basis of our statement of faith at Berean¹ but is worth investigating in more detail because it can be a point of misunderstanding between our beliefs and those of other religious traditions.

Romans 4:5 says "...to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." This tells us that God receives us as righteous based solely on Christ's righteousness, not on anything we have done. (See also Rom. 5:1 and II Cor. 5:21.)

Scripture teaches us that the faith that saves is not a meritorious work. Faith is the heart's response of trusting Christ. It is simply the uniting with, joining with, becoming one with, the Lord Jesus Christ. By being married to Christ, all that is His becomes His bride's – the believer's – just as a wife becomes a co-heir of all that belongs to her husband simply by being his wife, by her union with him in marriage. This is the fact: she is his wife. There is no virtue or merit in that. She simply possesses what now belongs to her by that relationship. Marriage is not a virtue that deserves a reward, but a relationship that brings the husband's possessions along with him.

So justification is what God *declares* about us as believers, not what He *does* to change us. It is the Lord saying – declaring – that our status in His eyes has changed.

Another way to think about it is in terms of a legal proceeding. When the judge hands down a verdict of "not guilty", nothing in the actual nature of the accused person changes, but they will walk out of the court a free person in the eyes of the law – fully justified.

Some realities that are a result of justification:

- we are adopted as sons and daughters (Rom. 8:15)
- we become fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17)
- we are united with Christ so we become one with Him (I Cor. 6:17)
- we are "in Christ" (Gal. 3:27) and He is in us (Col. 1:27)

Some religious traditions confuse (or combine) justification with sanctification.

In justification, God does not *make* a person righteous; He *declares* the believing sinner to be forgiven and fully accepted because of their having received Christ's righteousness (Rom 3:28, Gal. 2:16).

Sanctification also begins at the moment of conversion, but in contrast to justification, which is a one time act/declaration by God, sanctification is the ongoing, never-ending process by which we, as believers in Christ, become more like Him as we yield to the Holy Spirit's leading in our lives.

¹ Article 6: "We believe we are saved solely by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone. This salvation was purchased by the substitutionary death and shed blood of Jesus Christ for sinners and is offered to everyone as a free gift."

Justification must lead to the process of sanctification or it is not true justification. Justifying, or saving faith, must produce good works – that is, it leads to a progressive life of obedience to Jesus Christ. (See James 2: 21-24.) Conversely, a person cannot be in the process of sanctification without first having been justified.

| <u>Justification</u> | <u>Sanctification</u> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> takes place outside sinners and changes their standing before God (Rom. 5:1-2) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> takes place inside a believer and changes his or her state (Rom. 6:19) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> imputes Christ's righteousness to the sinner's account (Rom. 4:11) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> imparts righteousness to the sinner personally and practically (Rom. 6:1-7, Rom. 8:11-14) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is an event | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is a process |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is entirely God's work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is a work in which we must cooperate with God |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is the same for all believers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is more complete in some believers than others |

Why is this such an important distinction to make?

If justification were a process rather than an event, then our standing before God would be based on subjective experience, not secured by an objective declaration. The basis of justification would become our present virtue, as sinners, rather than Christ's perfect righteousness and His atoning work.

We must be very careful not to make the basis of justification something good within us – we must not substitute our righteousness for the righteousness of Christ.

References:

Rom. 3:28 "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."

Rom. 4:11 "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them."

Jas. 2:21-24 "Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."

Rom. 5:1-2 "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."

Rom. 6:19 "Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness."

Rom. 8:15 "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship."

Rom. 8:17 "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

I Cor. 6:17 "But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit."

II Cor. 5:21 "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Gal. 2:16 "... know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."

Gal. 3:27 "... for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."
Col. 1:27 "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."