

The Brown Street Beacon

"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,

holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)



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How Is Justification Attained?

The word *justified* means to declare one to be just, righteous, or not guilty. There are two ways for one to be justified in the eyes of God. First, if one lives a perfect life apart from sin, God would view this person as being just. However, no one, except our Lord Jesus Christ, has ever been justified on that basis because we all have sinned (Romans 3:9-23). Because of this sin, the New Testament clearly teaches that man is not justified by law, that is, by the perfect and flawless keeping of any law (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; 3:10-11). Second, one can be justified by God. God is in the business of imputing righteousness or justification to man's account. The important question is on what basis does God do this? How is justification attained?

There are many factors involved in justification. The one truth that can be concluded about justification is that it is not earned by our own greatness or strength. Abraham was justified, but it was something that God did and not something he did on his own. Paul wrote, "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God" (Romans 4:1-2). As we have already seen, to justify ourselves would necessitate perfection. Unfortunately, we all, just like Abraham before us, fall short of that mark. So then, the justifying takes place by God. But again, upon what basis is this justification attained? Let's look at some of the factors involved in being justified.

We are justified by faith

In Romans 5:1, Paul said, "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Personal faith, that is, the belief that Jesus is the Son of God, is one of the requirements of justification. A person, no matter how many good works he may accomplish during the course of his life, is dead in sin apart from faith in Christ. Jesus said, "*I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins*" (John 8:24). Remember, living a decent life isn't enough. Apart from faith in Christ, only a perfect life will do. Cornelius was a man who lived a good life (Acts 10:1-6); however, he had to hear the gospel and develop faith in Christ if he was to be saved. "*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law*" (Romans 3:28).

We are justified by grace

Grace refers to the divine favor of God bestowed on man apart from merit or worth. That God is a God of grace and mercy is abundantly revealed to us in the scriptures. The Lord God is "*merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth*" (Exodus 34:6). That grace of God has been demonstrated to man in a variety of ways, but the greatest expression of it is seen in the sending of His Son to die in our place. Jesus was a gift given to mankind in order that man might be saved (John 3:16). That gift, Jesus Christ, lived a perfect life and died on Calvary's cross so that we might be

made right in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). From that standpoint, justification comes by grace, for without God's mercy and divine favor, as expressed through and by Christ, justification would be altogether impossible. And make no mistake about it, this grace demonstrated by God was completely undeserved. It was a gift. Paul wrote, *"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 3:24). In another place Paul said, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"* (Ephesians 2:8). We ought to all be thankful beyond measure for the grace of God that made justification possible.

We are justified by the blood of Christ

God sending His Son was not enough to secure justification for man. The penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). Blood had to be shed in order for our sins to be remitted. Jesus did this for us and thus His blood is another factor involved in our attaining justification. Listen to Paul once again on the subject of being justified. *"Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him"* (Romans 5:9). This allow God to remain just while justifying us (Romans 3:25-26). God did not ignore our sins. His own righteousness would not allow Him to do so. So, by grace Jesus paid the price for us, redeeming us by His blood (1 Peter 1:18-19).

We are justified by works

Here is where a lot of people have a problem. Many in the religious world believe that we are justified by faith only. They contend that works have nothing to do with our salvation. Well, what does God's word teach? We all believe that faith, grace, and the blood of Christ play a role in our justification, don't we? The reason we believe that is because the word of God clearly states that such is the case. Does the word of God just as plainly teach that we are justify by works? And if so, should we accept it? The answer to the first question is yes, and the answer to the second question should be yes as well. We put ourselves in a precarious position when we try to pick and choose which portion of scripture we will accept and which part we reject. Either all of the Bible is right or none of it is. Therefore, we should accept all of it or none of it. Anything in between will not do. With that in mind, let's see what the Bible says about works and justification: *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And 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. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only"* (James 2:21-24).

There you have it. Instead of teaching that we are justified or saved by faith only, the word of God says that we are not justified by faith only. Now, the works that James talks about are works of faith as opposed to meritorious works. Meritorious works, that is, living a perfect, sinless life and therefore earning our salvation, is what Paul says we are not saved by (Ephesians 2:9). But works of faith (acts of obedience to God's divine will) are, without question, a part of being justified (Hebrews 8:5). In order to attain justification, one must obey the gospel (Romans 1:16). That involves faith, but it involves more than that. It also involves repentance (Acts 17:30), confession (Romans 10:9-10), and being baptized (Acts 2:38). So, while God justifies freely, He does expect something from us (Philippians 2:12). God has done His part, now man must do his.

To say that one thing justifies man is unscriptural. The truth is there are many factors involved in our justification. Many things, in other words, make it possible for us to be justified. Our faith is a factor. God's grace is a factor. The shed blood of our Savior is a factor, and doing God's will is a factor (Matthew 7:21). To exclude any of these is to fall short of attaining justification from God.