

Are You Justified?

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Our final judgment would be grim if not for a remarkable manifestation of God's grace.

In anticipation of our final Day of Judgment, our heavenly Father demonstrated His justice—His commitment to set things right—in Jesus Christ's death. Consequently, He *justifies* through grace all those who have faith in Christ, demonstrating their trust in God's plan (Romans 3:24-26).

The verb "justify" occurs 39 times in the New Testament, and 29 of these usages are by Paul. The apostle presents Christ as the second Adam whose righteousness and substitutionary death have justified all who place their faith in Him. His death and resurrection provide the basis for the believer's justification and salvation.

1. What does "justify" mean? Romans 8:33.

Comment: The verb *justify* (*dikaiô* in Greek) is a legal term meaning "to acquit, to declare as righteous"; it is the opposite of "condemn." Synonymous terms are "count righteous," "remit sins," and "not count sin" (Romans 4:5-8). Since only a judge can justify the accused or offer pardon, our justification must proceed only from our supreme Judge—God the Father—whereby He makes us acceptable and sets us in a right relationship with Him, vindicated and declared to be in the right.

2. What does God require of a person before being justified? Romans 4:5-13, 23-25.

Comment: Before all else, God requires a person to have faith in order to be justified. Then, he must repent of his sins (Psalm 51; Matthew 3:1-2; Acts 2:37-38; 3:19) and upon baptism, be born from above (or made spiritually alive) by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8). Much more than a simple human decision, justification is God's recognition and acceptance of an individual's repentance and decision to be baptized. At that time, a faithful individual becomes a part of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13) through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit (Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20; I John 3:24).

3. Is justification a one-time action by God? Romans 5:1; I Corinthians 6:11.

Comment: The death of Christ provided—once and for all—the sacrificial blood needed to atone, reconcile, or justify all repentant sinners to God. However, justification is a process that involves prior, current, and future applications to the sinner (Romans 8:33; 2:13; Galatians 5:4-5) and relates to the beginning of conversion, its continuation, and its culmination. Romans 5:1 uses an aorist passive participle to convey the act of justification, indicating an action being performed upon us by someone else (God). Because man continues to sin after his initial justification, to remain properly aligned or reconciled with God, he must continue to repent and overcome so that he might continue to be justified (Hebrews 2:1-3; 9:28; 10:26-27).

4. Did God always intend for justification to be necessary? II Corinthians 5:14-19.

Comment: God always planned for our justification by faith. As for all who lived faithfully before Christ's human life, death, and resurrection, it is applied retroactively (Romans 4). Since God knew Adam and Eve would misuse the freedom of choice He gave them, leading to sin, He made provision for their justification (and ours) through the blood of Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world (Hebrews 9:26; I Peter 3:19-21; Revelation 13:8).

5. How does Christ's justification of a sinner become personal? Romans 10:6-13.

Comment: It becomes personal "by faith" (Romans 5:1). Faith requires our acceptance of the substitutionary sacrifice Christ performed on our behalf to accomplish what we are unable to achieve on our own—reconciliation with God. It is not inherent, but the result of our individual belief—our acceptance and appropriate response to the calling we receive from the Father (Romans 4; 3:22; 10:4, 9-11; Ephesians 1:13, 19; Acts 16:31).

This faith is not some impersonal, abstract phenomenon. Instead, it is a concrete, spiritual manifestation of the will of God, given by God personally and individually through His Son and must also be received personally and individually by the one being reconciled to Him (I Peter 1:7). Nor is it faith in anyone else, but only in Jesus Christ, personally. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God *through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (emphasis ours). Faith in anyone else will not declare a person justified. Our faith must be in the One who bore our sin in His own body, the One in whom the fullness of the divine nature dwelt (Colossians 2:9; Romans 8:3; Galatians 1:4; I Peter 3:18; I John 1:9; 4:10; Revelation 1:5).