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Justification (Oct 1955)

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Walking the streets of Rome in the year 1510 was a young Augustinian monk. His heart was disturbed because of sin, and it yearned for peace with God. Seeking relief from this inward distress, on his knees he ascended the staircase of Pilate, the staircase that is supposed to have been climbed by the Lord Jesus at His trial. On each step he paused to weep and to pray, longing for release from his heavy burden of guilt. Suddenly, as if by a voice from heaven, came the words, “The just shall live by faith.” The scales fell from the eyes of Martin Luther, and he entered into the blessed truth of justification by faith. The Reformation followed as Luther and his associates preached this soul emancipating message.

Young believer, the Lord wants you to enjoy and to appreciate the blessed fact that you too have been justified by faith. A consideration of the teaching of Scripture on this important subject may help.

What is the meaning of justification? Some have confused it with pardon, but its import is more extensive. Pardon is a negative, but justification is a positive quality. Pardon is the forgiveness of our sins at conversion, and at times during our Christian experience, but justification is never repeated. Before God, man is seen without righteousness; the Divine verdict is, “There is none righteous, no, not one,” (Rom. 3:10). The illusion of earning righteousness by good works is dispelled by the Word of God, “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags,” (Isa. 64:6). Human

righteousness deceives its possessor and fills him with pride, so that he refuses to submit himself unto the righteousness of God, (Rom. 1:3).

Man was tried, under the law, but he failed to produce a righteousness satisfactory to the claims of God; consequently, “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight,” (Rom. 3:20). The righteousness needed by man must come from a source outside himself, that is from God.

We must be clear as to the distinction between imputed righteousness and imparted righteousness. Imputed righteousness has to do with our standing; imparted righteousness with out state. Imputed righteousness is given instantaneously the moment one believes on Christ; imparted righteousness is progressive during the believer’s life. The outcome of righteousness imputed by God is justification; the outcome of righteousness imparted by the Spirit is sanctification.

Before God could declare you justified, young believer, He had first of all to impute righteousness to you, and this He did through the Lord Jesus Christ, “Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us… righteousness,” (1 Cor. 1:30). The believer being in Christ, is now seen as clothed with His righteousness. When God imputed sin to Christ, He stood so identified with it that it is written, “He hath made Him to be sin for us,” (2 Cor. 5:21), and when God imputes righteousness to the believing sinner, he stands so identified with it that God declares he is made, “The righteousness of God in Him,” (2 Cor. 5:21). Personally, Christ had no sin, yet He was reckoned, “to be sin;” personally, the believer has no righteousness, yet he is reckoned righteous in

Christ. He is, “The man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,” (Rom 4:6).

There is an illustration in the epistle to Philemon, verses 17 and 18. Onesimus had been an unrighteous servant, but Paul, writing to Philemon on his behalf, says, “Receive him as myself.” In other words, Paul suggests that Philemon impute Paul’s righteousness to this unprofitable servant, and he even adds more, “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account.” Paul, in effect, enjoins that Philemon impute to him the unrighteousness of Onesimus.

Justification! this is the state in which God places the one to whom righteousness has been imputed through Christ. Justification is the official acknowledgment of God as to the righteousness of the person who believes in Christ. Young believer, because you have received the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, God therefore reckons you to be clothed in the righteousness of His Son.

As you read through your New Testament, you will notice that this subject is dealt with under a number of different aspects: ITS SOURCE, “It is God that justifieth,” (Rom. 8:33). Through the work of Christ accomplished on the cross, God can be just and the justifier of the believing sinner. Justification is of God. ITS CHANNEL, “Being justified freely by His grace,” (Rom. 3:24). Man is seen as undeserving, guilty, and condemned, but justification is freely offered in spite of what the sinner is. It is entirely through the grace of God. ITS GROUND, “Much more then, being justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him,” (Rom. 5:9). Before God could count one who had sinned as righteous, the penalty against that

sin had to be endured. “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,” (1 Pet. 3:18). It was not the innocent dying for the guilty, but the Just One charged with the sins of the unjust. The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the witness that His death met in full the demands of justice. “Jesus our Lord… Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification,” (Rom. 4:25). Dr. Moule writes concerning this verse, “We sinned, therefore He suffered; we were justified, therefore He rose.” The resurrection is God’s seal of acceptance upon the work of Christ. THE MEANS, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Rom. 5:1). Justification is entered into by faith, “By Him all that believe are justified,” (Acts 13:39).

Perhaps, you have been troubled, young believer, by the expression in the epistle of James (2:24), “Justified by works.” Paul says that we are justified by faith, but James says that we are justified by works. How are these two apparently contradictory statements to be reconciled? You will notice that James speaks of two events in the life of Abraham. The first of these is recorded in Genesis 15. In verse 6 of this chapter we read, “He believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.” This is the account of how Abraham was justified by faith. The second event is recorded in chapter 22, where we read that Abraham offered Isaac upon the altar, and this act illustrates how he was justified by works. God said, “Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me.” The believer is justified by faith, but by works he manifests his position.

When you consider the truth of your justification do not think of it as a dry formal doctrine, but rather as the accomplishment of God's purpose in the believer before his final glorification. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified," (Rom. 8:29-30).

You, as a believer, have been justified. May the Lord enable you to enjoy this wonderful position, to appreciate all that it cost, and to manifest it daily by good works.

Dead to Sin (Jan 1961)

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Donald Moffatt

This article by Donald Moffatt, a new contributor to our pages, formed the basis of a broadcast over The Family Bible Hour. It may be of further blessing in this more permanent form.

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:1-2).

It is noticeable here that the Apostle Paul answers one question by asking another. The first question is, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” This is asked because some of the enemies of the Gospel were contending that since man’s sin was the cause for the display of God’s grace, then, the more man sinned the greater would be the manifestation of the grace of God.

But this thought is abhorent to the Apostle Paul and to all who love righteousness. Paul’s first reaction was of the emotions. He exclaims, “God forbid!” Or, this might be translated more literally, “Away with the thought!” It is not worth considering.

Paul’s second reaction was of reason. He asks, “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” He says, in effect, that this is an absolute impossibility. Just as impossible as for a person to be physically dead and physically alive at the same time.

The force of the expression is not, “we that are dead,” but rather,… “we who died.” This looks back to an actual event when the believer is said to have died to sin.

We did this in the person of the Lord Jesus. For while the truth of chapters three to five of Romans is that Christ died for us, here in chapter six it is that Christ died as us. The pronoun … “we”, in the expression, “we that are dead to sin,” speaks of quality. We might read it “people like us who died to sin.” The believer is looked at as one who has passed through death to sin.

Now, when we speak of the believer having died to sin, we find there are three major errors taught about this death.

First, some deny it to be true. They say that since we still have our old sinful body this is proof that we are not dead to sin.

Second, there are some who will say it is true as to theory, but cannot be enjoyed practically.

The third is the teaching that we ought to be dead to sin, and the Christian is exhorted to strive to bring this about in the life.

There are other errors which could be added to these. This death to sin is not the death of sin as a power or principle in the heart. To hold this would lead to a life of self-deception. There is a vast difference between the expressions “death to sin” and “death of sin.”

It is not a resolution to imitate the Lord Jesus in taking up the cross. A person does not die by an act of the will, nor through an act of faith.

The fact is that the death of Christ was also the believer’s death. This is clearly seen in H Corinthians

5:14 where we read, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all then were all dead.” It is also taught in 1 Peter 2:24, “Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.” Here we learn that we were perfectly identified with the Lord Jesus in His death to sin.

The Christian is so united to Christ that God views him as though he had actually died and actually entered upon a new life, just as His Son had actually died and had actually entered upon a new life.

This is true of every child of God whether he realizes it or not. The thought behind the words, “We who died to sin,” is literally, “we who have done the act of dying to sin.” And this is not viewed as related to the experience of the believer, but as an event that took place in the past. It took place at the cross. For eleven times, in the first eleven verses of Romans six, the verb in the past tense is used with reference to our identification with the death, burial and ressurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At Calvary, not only did Christ die, but the believer died there also. The death of Christ is reckoned to be the death of the believer. When he died, God reckoned that the believer died. This is the way God wants us to look at this wonderful truth. As definitely as Christ died by an act, and by an act was raised from the dead, so in His death every believer died to sin and rose again to walk in newness of life.

There are three ways we may look at this great fact of our having died with Christ.

First, we may look at it representatively, and see that Christ's act of dying unto sin is reckoned to be ours. Second, we may look at it legally, and see that our relation to sin has been altered.

Third, we may look at it potentially, and see that power has been given the believer to overcome sin. Before we were saved, we were under the dominion of sin, but our death with Christ has delivered us from this. It means that we have been released from all the power and authority of sin, in just the same way that a slave is, by death, released from the power of his master.

Is it not true that as believers we are often more occupied with the fact that Christ died for us than we are with the fact that we died with Him? Christ's death for us has procured our acquittal from the guilt of our sins. But our death with Him has severed us from our former position. This state is described in Psalm 51 as being "in sin", and in Romans 3:19, as being "under sin." Because the believer has died judicially with Christ, he is forever freed from the oppression of sin and from its claims to control his life.

Now, what is to be the effect of this upon our daily life? For the truth of the Word of God is only of immediate blessing in the measure that it is applied and produces spiritual fruit in the life of the believer.

Let us read our verse again. It says, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" To live in sin is absolutely inconsistent with our having died to it. To "live in sin" means more than to "continue in sin." It is to have sin for the element in which we live. And the question, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" implies, not a physical impossibility, but

a moral contradiction. To live “therein” does not mean sympathy with sin only, but union and oneness with it. You will note that the question here is not about “continuing to sin,” but about continuance “in sin”, in its power.