

GOSPEL TEACHING SUMMARY TWO: JUSTIFICATION

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Romans 5:16b, *“but the free gift is of many offences unto justification.”*

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Aims

By the end of this study the reader should be able to: -

- 1) Understand such Biblical truths as justification, righteousness and covenant of grace.
- 2) Accept that justification results from an act of divine favour
- 3) Discern that justification cannot be earned by human effort.
- 4) List the central characteristics of justification.
- 5) Relate justification to Christ's sacrificial death at Calvary.
- 6) Receive justification for themselves, should they want it.
- 7) Appreciate the results of justification.

Definitions

1) JUSTIFICATION, the permanent cancellation of ALL past, present and future sins⁽¹⁾ for all those who believe in Jesus Christ. It is through this cancellation of their sins that people are made *'just'* in God's sight. Once regarded as fallen sinners who were under God's wrath, they are now viewed as adopted children who can enjoy His love, in brief; justification represents the event by which unjustified sinners are made into justified saints. As Appendix One shows, justification is a *'once-and-for-all'* event in which God puts a cross through human sin.

2) RIGHTEOUSNESS, a right relationship (or right status) with God, as a justified saint whose sins have been freely forgiven. Such a relationship cannot be achieved through human effort, rather, it is a freely – offered gift, which derives from the sacrificial death of Jesus. It is a result of justification.

3) THE COVENANT OF GRACE, the solemn binding agreement initiated by Jesus during the final phases of His earthly ministry. In it, the promise was made that all those who believed on Him would receive the benefit of justification. Applicable until Jesus' return, this particular covenant is purely a result of divine grace – that is unmerited favour towards an undeserving humanity.

⁽¹⁾ Presupposed here is TOTAL justification. Indeed, if salvation didn't cover one's future sins (as well as past and present ones) it would be incomplete, and if incomplete it would, in reality be no salvation at all. Also, the implication would remain that Christ's work on the cross wasn't quite sufficient to deal with human evil. However, the example of King David warns that any serious sin committed by true believers can have terrible consequences in this world – even when repented of, (Psalm 51). Moreover, there is the risk of losing out on blessings in the next world too, (1 Corinthians 2.15). Finally, it is possible to point out that anyone who persistently adopts an *"I am saved, therefore I can do what I like"* attitude is in reality only showing that their faith is dead (James 2.26) - if they were really justified, they wouldn't be comfortable going on in sin.

Section One: The Source of Justification

Divine initiative – NOT HUMAN EFFORT – is the SOLE source of justification. Our justification results from a pure act of divine favour, therefore we cannot earn it through 'living a good life' (Titus 3.3), or 'not doing any harm,' (Romans 4.20-24). Any attempt to try and work one's way to heaven is the spiritual equivalent of walking to the moon backwards! It's something, which simply cannot be done, (Appendix Two).

Section Two: The Background of Justification

Justification is a part of the covenant of grace initiated at the last supper (Matthew 26.28). In it God made a solemn, binding agreement to cancel the sins of all the Jews and Gentiles who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Through this covenant the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1-4) and the church was empowered to carry out its mission to take the Gospel to all nations, (Matthew 28.19-20; Acts 1.8).

Section Three: The Characteristics of Justification

Justification involves: -

3.1 A change in attitude on God's part. Through justification He looks at us with different eyes. He no longer beholds us from the viewpoint of a stern judge, but rather as a tender, loving, heavenly father, who hankers after our well being, (Romans 7.12-17).

3.2 A freely chosen decision to accept the sinner now clothed in Christ's righteousness,⁽²⁾ (Zechariah 3.4-5).

3.3 A gracious, legal judicial act pardoning, and declaring righteous a guilty sinner, (Matthew 9.2).

3.4 A once and for all act of total forgiveness (Matthew 7.18-19), pardoning all past, present and future sins (Acts 13.38), (Appendix Three).

3.5 An actual change of status. From being a sinner under divine wrath, the justified person becomes an adopted child under divine love. Their whole life's direction is changed (Galatians 4.3-7), (Appendix Four).

3.6 The adoption of the sinner into God's family as a son or daughter, (Hebrews 12.5-9).

Section Four: The Means of Justification

God can only provide justification because of Christ's vicarious righteousness and bloodletting, (Leviticus 17.11) upon the cross⁽³⁾ Only His substitutionary death⁽⁴⁾ and representative humanity⁽⁵⁾ allowed HIS righteousness to be exchanged for our unrighteousness (Philippians 3.6-9 – see Appendix Five).

Apart from Calvary, justification could not take place. This means that any attempt to obtain justification without reference to Christ's death on the cross is doomed to total failure, (Titus 3.5). In other words, it is a complete waste of time.

⁽²⁾ This statement assumes that Christ was ALWAYS in a right relationship with God.

⁽³⁾ This means that Christ's righteousness could be transferred to people who totally lacked this quality.

⁽⁴⁾ This means that He died in our place, taking the punishment for sin that we deserved.

⁽⁵⁾ This means that He represented the whole of mankind before God as a sacrificial high priest.

Section Five: Human Application

To receive justification, along with all of the other benefits resulting from Christ's death at Calvary, one must: -

5.1 Accept the fact of one's own sin and total inability to please God – no matter what the efforts to lead a moral life (1 Peter 5.5-6).

5.2 Acknowledge that Jesus died on the cross to procure forgiveness of sin, and then rose bodily⁽⁶⁾ from the dead three days later (Romans 10.9).

It is important to note that before we have faith in Jesus, we must first lose faith in ourselves and in our own capacity to please God, (Luke 18.13-14). In addition, it must be recognised that any application of God's grace can only occur through the power of the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4.6). Therefore, people cannot claim the slightest credit for it. A mood of sober realism is needed to guide our approach to this whole matter.

Section Six: The Results of Justification

Whilst marking the starting point of Christian life (Hebrews 6.1), justification results in: -

6.1 A complete forgiveness of sin, (Luke 7.47).

6.2 A life of repentance,⁽⁷⁾ (1 John 1.8-10).

6.3 A sense of humble realism concerning oneself and one's standing with God, (James 4.6-10).

6.4 Assurance of salvation,⁽⁸⁾ (Isaiah 32.17).

6.5 Eternal life, (Titus. 1.2).

6.6 Growth in holiness,⁽⁹⁾ (2 Corinthians 7.1).

6.7 Practical good works, (James 2.14-26).

6.8 Rightly directed praise and worship, (Psalms 103).

6.9 Spiritual gifts and fruit,⁽¹⁰⁾ (1 Corinthians 12).

6.10 Violent or subtle opposition from *'the world,⁽¹¹⁾ the flesh,⁽¹²⁾ and the devil.⁽¹³⁾*

Represented above, are only some of the results of justification. Others include Baptism in the Holy Spirit, (Mark 1.8), answered prayer, (James 5.13-18), active church involvement plus all the other benefits of a rightly directed Christian life. There are too many to number in a document of this size.

⁽⁶⁾ This word serves to distinguish Christianity from spiritualism, which often teaches that Jesus came back from the dead as some ghost-like apparition.

⁽⁷⁾ In other words, a mode of life that's open to continued correction from the Holy Spirit.

⁽⁸⁾ Briefly, this refers to the peaceful, settled conviction that we have been rescued from sin and its ruinous consequences. Such conviction can only arise following an inner work of the Holy Spirit.

⁽⁹⁾ Meaning personal purity and separation from evil.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Especially the fruit of love, (Galatians 5.22).

⁽¹¹⁾ The attitudes, behaviour patterns and cultural forces arising from the world of fallen people.

⁽¹²⁾ This means human nature, when it's not under the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit.

⁽¹³⁾ A totally evil archangel who rebelled against God before being routed by Jesus at Calvary.

Section Seven: Wrong Ideas about Justification

Common errors about justification include: -

7.1 The Causal Fallacy, Justification is purely a result of human effort, which is seen as a means of earning divine grace (Titus 3.7). Sadly, this error tends to: -

7.1-1 Overestimate human strength while simultaneously underestimating God's fierce antagonism to sin.

7.1-2 Generate either despair or a Pharisaic pride in our own (imagined) spiritual achievements.

7.2 The Legalistic Fallacy, Justification is partly a result of human effort working in conjunction with divine grace and not of divine grace ALONE. Believers also need to obey the Mosaic Law, do good works or obey church rules in order to be sure of deserving it, (Galatians 3.1-10). Alternatively, salvation maybe seen as a result of grace, but its preservation is largely dependant upon human effort, hence the beginning of faith is Christ's work but its continuation is a human one. Sadly, this error tends to: -

7.2-1 Encourage a backbiting rivalry as to who can perform the most impressive works, (Galatians 5.15).

7.2-2 Create unnecessary guilt feelings and personal insecurity – any sense of personal peace is destroyed.

7.3 The Libertarian Fallacy, Justification allows one to sin and not worry about consequences, (Romans 6.1-14). Sadly, this error (which is also known as Antinomianism) tends to: -

7.3-1 Overlook the fact that Jesus wants to be Lord in every area of the Christian's life.

7.3-2 Ignore the fact that even for Christians, sin can have serious consequences, both in this life and the next. Persistent sin may even be a sign that those professing belief were never truly regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

7.4 The Nominal Fallacy, Justification automatically comes about through making a nominal decision to '*accept Jesus*' or take Him as saviour, (John 15-16). Sadly, this error tends to: -

7.4-1 Emphasise human will at the expense of '*heartfelt*' faith.

7.4-2 Reduce justification to a magic formula – one where there is no sense of commitment

7.5 The Process Fallacy, Justification is a lifelong process without a definite moment in time, (1 Corinthians 1.30). Sadly, this tends to: -

7.5-1 Confuse justification with sanctification.⁽¹⁴⁾

7.5-2 Destroy any assurance of salvation.

7.6 The Reductionist Fallacy, Justification is '*simply a matter of accepting the fact that we've already been accepted,*' (John 8.24). Sadly, this error tends to: -

7.6-1 Confuse justification with Election.⁽¹⁵⁾

7.6-2 Overlooks its distinctive '*once and for all*' nature.

7.7 The Redundant Fallacy, Justification does not necessarily have to arise through sacrificial death on the cross, (Acts 4.12). Sadly, this error tends to: -

7.7-1 Make the whole of Christ's work appear meaningless.

7.7-2 Encourage a "*we will get to God our way*" mentality.

7.8 The Semantic Fallacy, Justification is simply a matter of God acknowledging that people have earned righteousness through trying their best to lead a good life, (Isaiah 64.6-7). Sadly, this error tends to: -

7.8-1 Ignore the Biblical meaning of justification.

7.8-2 Assume that God can accept human efforts even when blighted by sin.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Sanctification is the life-long process in which the Holy Spirit purifies people and makes them more like Jesus.

⁽¹⁵⁾ The sovereign act by which God the Father selected a portion of humanity to belong to Him through the cancellation of their sins. It is assumed that such an act took place before '*the foundation of the world,*' (Ephesians 1.4). The precise nature of this type of faith will be looked at under the heading of '*saving faith.*'

7.9 The Universalistic Fallacy, Justification applies to all people everywhere, regardless of whether they believe in Jesus or not (Revelations 20.15). Sadly, this error tends to: -

7.9-1 Overlook the role of human application in justification.

7.9-2 Contradicts Jesus' own warnings about the dire consequences of unbelief, (Matthew 7.13-14).

In practice, such wrong ideas about justification often go together. The reason for this is that once one fallacy has been accepted, it becomes a lot easier to accept other fallacies as well.

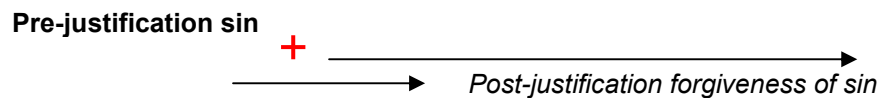
Section Eight: Concluding Comments

No one is ever justified by God because they have achieved righteousness, (or even because they have achieved it in conjunction with help from the Holy Spirit - Romans 3.9-20). Rather, people are justified ONLY BECAUSE of the work Jesus accomplished for them at Calvary (Luke 24.46). It was there that He took the punishment they deserved. However, to receive the benefits of justification it is first of all necessary to believe that this is indeed the case. Should such a belief be lacking, and then one remains an unjustified sinner who is heading for a lost eternity (John 9.41).

In the end, we have discovered that justification is conditional not on effort but on faith, (Acts 13.39).

Appendix One

The Concept of Justification



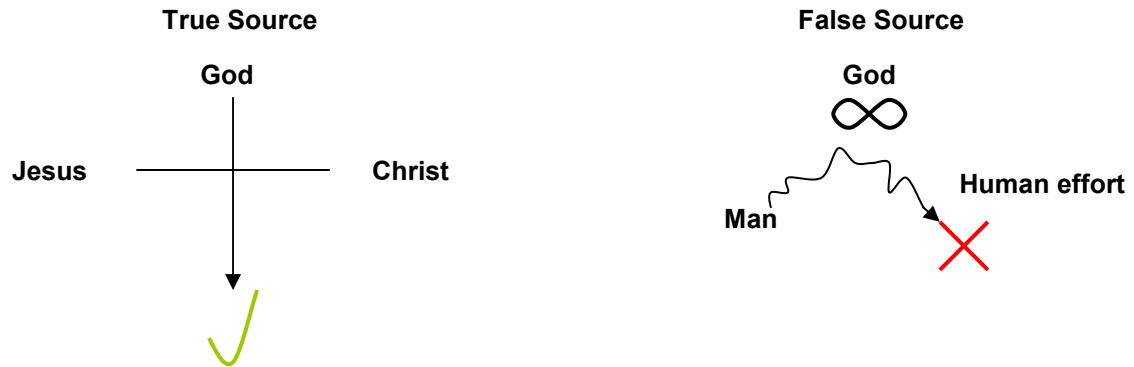
Key

+ = The sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross at Calvary


Comments


Before justification people are still dominated by sin, (Psalms 53.2-3). After justification, sin is cancelled because of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross at Calvary. So, in a very real sense, the cross represents God's '*crossing out*' of human sin, (Acts 3.19).


Appendix Two Two Possible Sources of Justification



Key

 = A correct source of justification.

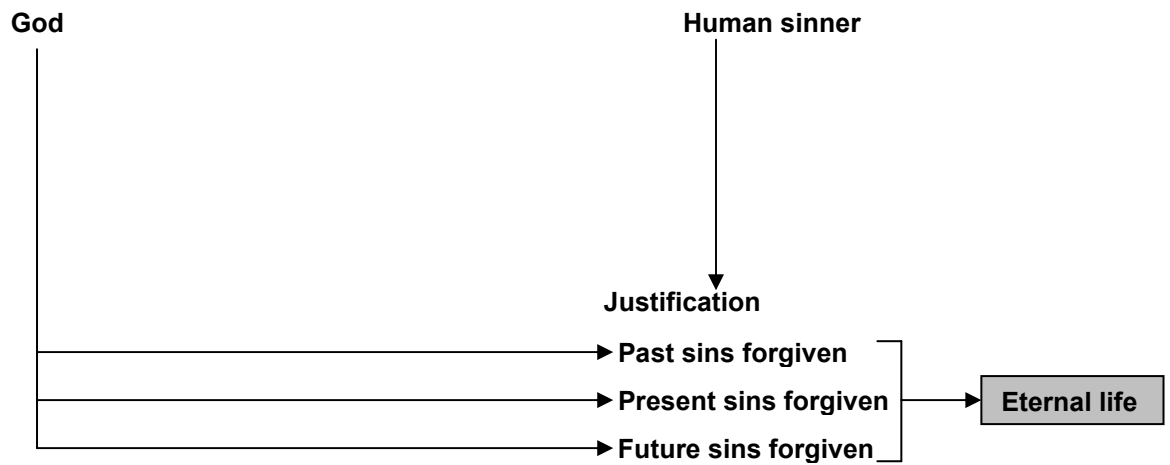
 = An incorrect source of justification.

 = Infinite gulf between man and God.

Comments

These diagrams highlight the fact that God (working through Jesus' death on the cross) is the only correct source of justification, (John 3.16). By way of contrast, man's attempt to procure justification through his own efforts fails miserably to accomplish its objective, (Romans 9.31-33). The gulf between man and God remains infinite. Through looking to his inner resources, man has attempted a wrong way of self-justification by his own works

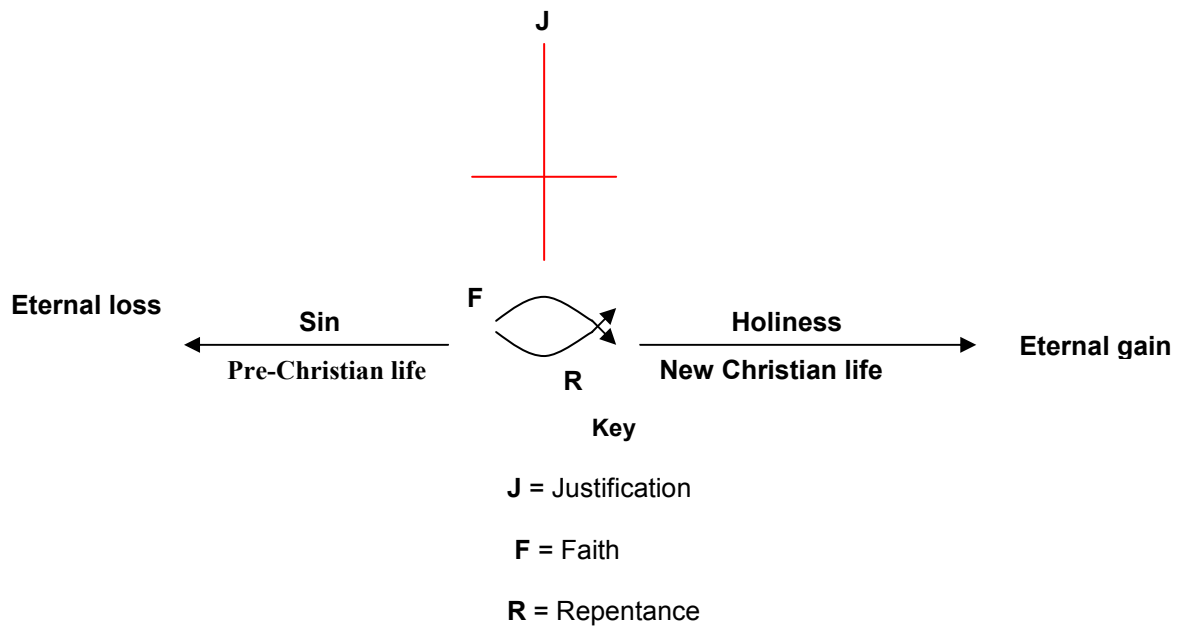
Appendix Three
The Total Nature of a Sinner's Justification



Comments

This diagram highlights the fact that the justification, which God gives, cancels all past, present and future sins, (Psalms 32.1-2). As a result, the human sinner is now beginning to move toward eternal life, rather than eternal death, (John 3.36). The whole direction to their lives has been changed and centred upon Jesus Christ.

Appendix Four
How Justification Changes the Direction of one's Life

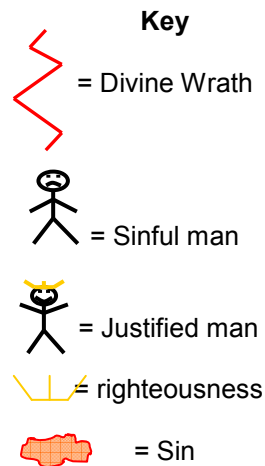
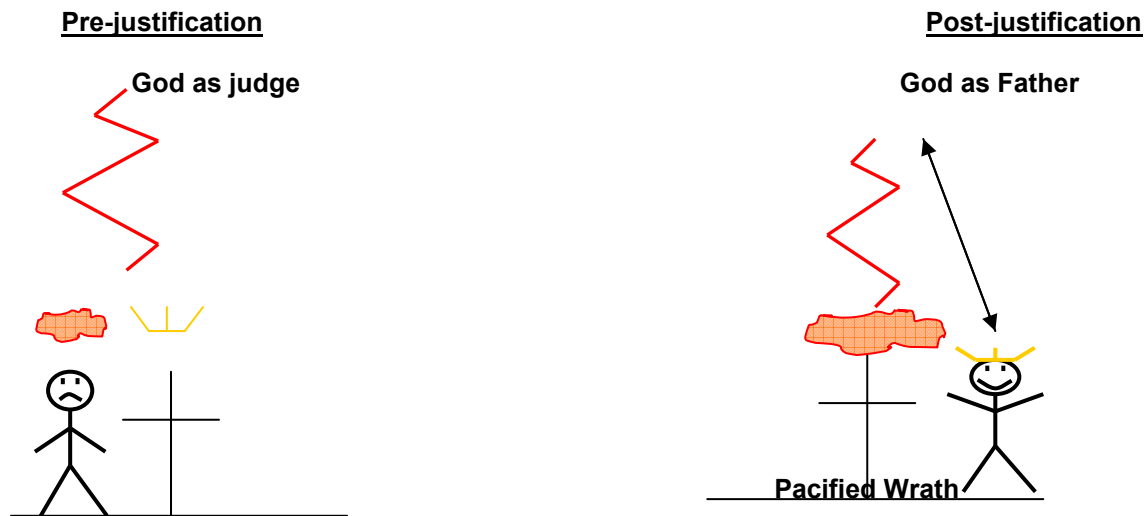


Comments

In this diagram, justification is portrayed as radically changing both the character and direction of one's life, (Ephesians 1.7). Highlighted is the fact that justification can only occur through the cross of Calvary, (Acts 2.38). Both repentance concerning sin and faith in Jesus are necessary to effect a change from the old life to the new.

Appendix Five

The Relationship between Justification and Christ's Death on the Cross



Comments

Before justification, a person is under both the power of sin and the wrath of God, (John 3.36). However, once they put their faith in Jesus a “*wonderful exchange*” takes place. Their sin is swapped over for Christ’s righteousness, and a two-way relationship is established with God. Consequently, the punishment, which should have been theirs, is borne on their behalf by Jesus at Calvary, (Isaiah 53.5). By His sacrificial death He has acted as a substitute for that particular sinner. Also shown is the fact that on the cross Jesus acted as a lightning conductor “*earthing*” God’s wrath, (1 Thessalonians 1.10).