

## **OUR JUSTIFICATION IN CHRIST**

*Being Justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*  
Rom. 3:24

The book of Romans captures the essence of what it means to be “justified” in the eyes of God. Paul writes of a threefold justification: by grace--3:24, by faith—5:1 and by blood—5:9. Today discussion abounds concerning the right and proper meaning of the term. *Justification*, for many, must be described with a language that is exact and permanent. I have no quibbles with all that because coherent phrases do give evidence of coherent reasoning.

But all too often the defenders of certain views rely on the opinions of men whose writings they (themselves) cannot read in the author’s original tongue, like Latin for example. In this regard some appeal should be made to the Apostle Paul since he had so much to say on this issue. Yet it seems that Paul’s message is typically relegated to a background summary for specialist students of the Reformation.

Justification has been popularized by the motto “just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned”. The schoolboy has heard it over time if he has ever attended church regularly and it does have its merit. Unfortunately, there is no one born of woman who knows what it is to have never committed an error or a transgression. Thus there is no basis of reality to it. My own thoughts on the issue are now given. I’ll use the English word, “*justification*” rather than taking the time to unpack the extended definitions of the Greek term, “*dikaiosis*”.

If we are going to use little catch phrases to describe something as weighty as the subject of justification maybe we should use as a lead in, “just-as-if-I’ve-been-forgiven”. It makes more sense to the believer and is certainly more helpful as an apt description of what genuinely has resulted from God’s gracious act toward us, and it resonates well because all Christians have experienced forgiveness.

You might ask, what does forgiveness have to do with all this? Well, that is a good question and reasonable since most people know that forgiveness is normally linked to the release of or freeing of a person from guilt to one degree or another. I think the best way I can illustrate the answer is to tell you a story. Back during the days of the Great Depression there was a man, Fiorello H. La Guardia (1882-1947), who served at various times in the municipal court--he also served three terms as governor of New York and was responsible for imprisoning Lucky Luciano. There was one occasion where a male, who was guilty of stealing a loaf of bread to feed his family, was brought before him.

The story was touching and even heart-wrenching as the fellow told of the crying children and of their nagging hunger pains. Judge La Guardia had no choice but to find the man guilty. After all, the grocer was on the other side of the courtroom with his lawyer. And after finding the guy guilty, La Guardia then asked if anyone had a hat in the courtroom and then proceeded to pass the hat around telling the crowd that no one should have to steal to feed his family. \$47.50 came in, which covered his court fees and provided more groceries for the family during the depression era.

The whole story is one of grace on the part of an Episcopalian judge. A guilty man entered the court and left justified, not excused of his sinful deed, but graciously helped by the mercies of the man on the bench. So you can see that this man went home with a different *status*—as can be seen by the way all the courtroom attendees gave monies to him—and with a *heartfelt change* toward the judge, the judicial process and the people who paid his debt for him.

Only in this way can we find symbolism in the above story: God's law-court is where we find true justification in Christ. All have sinned—as written in Rom 3:23. However, in Christ, guilty men have been (forgiven-released from the guilt of sin) justified. In one sense your status as a forgiven fellow has given you a new lease on life and in another sense you have been transformed by a "*righteousness*", which you were unacquainted with until you stood before Almighty God (Rom 4:22-25). This righteousness was reckoned to your account merely from believing in God's process of clearing a man or woman from his or her sin. It is a real and true God-righteousness which to the believer is *inwrought* (to use the language of the theologian John Gerstner). It is by God's great mercies that we have been *acquitted*--guilty sinners that we are--when he laid the penalty for our sin upon His only begotten Son more 2000 years ago. And how quick we are to forget what marvelous things the Lord has done on our behalf!

The current battles in print over justification will not cease anytime soon. There is such a contentious spirit among scholars that it must be so. But let's remember that perfect knowledge of a doctrine does not bring salvation, one must believe with the heart (Rom. 10:10) and at that moment a guilty person becomes an innocent person in the eyes of the Lord. Not on account of anything that he or she has done in the flesh but because the whole process of redemption was brought to its fruitful end through one's trust in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. He secured a valid salvation for everyone who believes. Now since you have read this little sermon nugget, do you/will you believe?

Darrell Sutton, Pastor