

What is justification?

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The doctrine of justification is one of the most important truths we find in God's Word. It is rightly described as the very hinge and pillar of Christianity, since it tells us how people can come into God's presence and find eternal life. However, throughout the centuries, there has been a lot of confusion about this doctrine.

Nobody is righteous

Let's begin with the aspect of being just. The Bible clearly declares that God requires perfect righteousness. God is looking for people who are just, or righteous. But here is the problem – nobody is righteous (Romans 3:9-20). Because of our sin, we deserve God's judgment. Nobody deserves to go to heaven, because if one unrighteous person could enter God's glorious and heavenly presence, He would be unjust to His own holiness and righteousness.

How can anyone come to God?

If you feel the dramatic impact of this problem, the question comes up: “Then who can ascend the hill of the LORD?” (cf. Psalm 15:1; Psalm 24:3) This is where God’s glorious grace comes in. In the Gospel, we discover that God will accept sinners – not because of the righteous deeds they have done, but through faith in Jesus:

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:21-26).

Declaration: You are justified!

Justification, then, means that God does not accept sinners because He makes them righteous, but because He declares them righteous. The Bible explicitly says that no human being will be justified by God because of his own righteous works. A person must be justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ our substitute

But how can God justify sinners? He can do this, because of the work of His Son, Jesus Christ. In justification, God declares two things:

First, you, believer in Jesus, are freed from guilt. You are guilty, because you have sinned. But Christ died for your sins and His death removes your guilt .

Second, you, believer in Jesus, are completely righteous. Not because of your own righteous works, but because of the perfect righteousness of Jesus. Christ has lived a perfect life on earth and this righteousness is counted to you, because by faith you are united with Him.

Not our deeds, but our union with Christ

So, again, let's be very clear – justification does not mean that God will accept people because of their own righteous deeds. Sinners can't be justified, because they lack complete righteousness. God will only accept sinners who are by grace and through faith united to the Christ who is sinless and righteous. The answer to the question: Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? is: Jesus Christ and all who are by faith united with Him.

Keep this truth. Think about it every day of your life, and you will experience the power of God's grace.

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