

# Justification by Faith

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The biblical doctrine of justification by faith is a fundamental truth of God's Word that should be understood by every Christian believer. The word "justification" is a legal term that means that a person is forgiven of one's sins, declared "not guilty" in God's sight and given the legal status of righteousness - or being "in the right" with God. Biblically, the *ground* for a believer's justification is the sacrificial death and then resurrection of Christ by which he paid the price for the sins of all mankind. The *means* by which a person receives this justification is personal faith in Jesus Christ. The Book of Romans sets forth these truths clearly:

*But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.*

*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe. There is no difference,*

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

*God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished -*

*He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:21-26).*

To be justified in God's sight means that the verdict of the final judgment has *already* taken place for the believer in Christ. Why? Because when someone believes in Christ he receives the gift of God's Spirit and is at that moment incorporated into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-13). As a result, the believer is said to be "in Christ" and thus identifies in all that Christ accomplished for the believer by means of his

sacrificial death, resurrection, etc. In short, through the Spirit the believer is "created in Christ Jesus" and receives by grace the spiritual benefits of this new relationship with God. Look at I Corinthians:

*It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption (I Cor. 1:30).*

The Bible clearly teaches that man's relationship with God is entered into and maintained by faith. Biblically, faith is not a meritorious work but a humble acceptance and dependence on the words of God. This is made clear in Romans:

*Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness (Rom. 4:4-5)*

Biblically, faith always takes place in the heart. Since God is a God who "looks on the heart" he cannot be fooled. Thus the humble acceptance of Christ by any individual always results in God's acceptance and the cleansing power and witness of his Spirit. Look at the following verses:

*'Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith' (Acts 15:7-9).*

Faith, of course, is not simply mental assent but is a commitment of mind or heart to the truth of a statement or to a being, such as God. In short, it is a *decision* to humbly accept something as being true and then to hold to it within one's life. Because of this, *true* faith conditions a person's understanding, outlook and actions. The following New Testament examples illustrate this:

*And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as*

*the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe (I Thess. 2:13).*

*But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Gal. 5:5-6).*

These verses are important in regards to understanding God's gift of salvation and man's proper response to it. Justification and, therefore, salvation is a gift from God to man made possible by God's gracious action in Christ for the redemption of mankind. Through faith in Christ a person receives God's gift of the Spirit and is thus acquitted from all sin, declared "not guilty" in God's sight and brought into a right relationship with God. As a result, the justified believer has "peace with God" and is able to bring forth the spiritual fruit of that relationship with God in his daily life. Again, the Book of Romans makes this clear:

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:1-2).*

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the Law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4).*

The New Testament stresses these same truths throughout. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. The gift of the Spirit is the "firstfruits" of this salvation imparting God's own nature into the heart and life of an individual. The result is a new creation of God's own making which is then manifested to the world through a life of good works. As Paul states:

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:8-10).*