

Understanding Justification By Faith**Joshua C. Hicks**

Salvation, has been studied over and over again and we understand the essentials/the steps in the process of Salvation that are necessary in order to be saved from sin. However, let me for a moment take your attention to the above picture. So many times we view salvation as we view our T.V. or Computer monitor. We know how to turn it on, how to turn up the volume and how to adjust the picture quality. Likewise when it comes to our salvation we understand what it takes to be saved. However when it comes to understanding how these things are even possible, we don't have a clue.

You see, so many of us know how to be a Christian but we have left our knowledge at that. When we begin to dive deeper we fall into something that's over our heads and sadly this one moment of being in over our heads is enough to scare us and to fry every wire in our brains. And because of this one moment we decide to leave all of this "deep thinking" to the theologians. However, when we do this, we withhold from ourselves some of the greatest things that God wants us to know. You know, the things worth having are not going to be easily grasped. It is going to take time, it is going to take moments where you just want to pull your hair out. But, in the end it will be worth it!

As we read scripture, we read the Bible in the English version. However what we fail to realize is that the Bible wasn't written in English. Instead it was written in Greek and Hebrew. And it is within this language that Paul chose specific words to draw images within the mind of his readers. You see, the authors of the N.T. constantly took images from their modern day culture and applied them to the Christian faith. Thus, for us to understand fully what these things mean we must understand the culture. Should you doubt this, then just look in Ephesians 6 where Paul clearly uses the Roman soldiers armor in a symbolic manner for the Christian's armor. In short, if we don't study the Roman soldiers armor, and if we don't understand what each piece was used for by the soldier, then we will fail to see how the same armor is to be used by the Christian.

So, with this said, it is important to know words, because they have a purpose and a meaning. One of these words, or concepts that we must not skip over is the word or concept of being "justified by faith". Some have seen this in scripture, however they fail to recognize the significance, and the power behind it because they pass or read right over it. Or because they think, man that's hard and they intend to go back and look at it but never do. It is here and now that I want you and I to take out the pick ax, and to begin picking away bit by bit in order to find the rubies, diamonds and the gold that are in the world of theology.

The first thing that must be understood is sin. Some doubt the significance of this approach, but this is a vital place to begin. As I have stated many times in my own teaching at the Lebanon Christian Church, in order to understand what salvation means we must understand what we are being saved from.

Without this knowledge a respect and attitude of awe will be lacking among those who are saved. So, what is sin?

Sin, it is a bad word among many churches and among many Christians today, however without the understanding of sin there cannot be an understanding of the need for a savior. Sin according to scripture is lawlessness. In the Scriptures John states that “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4) But how is sin lawlessness? Sin is breaking the law of God whether it be deliberate or by accident. But why

“... is ‘being in trouble with the law’ such a serious matter? Because any law involves not only commands to be obeyed, but also penalties to be paid if the law is broken. God’s law is no different. It prescribes the penalty of death upon the guilty (Rom. 1:32; 6:23). This includes the dreaded second death, which is eternal existence in the fiery lake of hell (Rev. 21:8).

The Bible uses a whole cluster of terms in this connection: judgment, condemnation, damnation, penalty, punishment, wrath. Like the word *guilt*, these are all legal terms and refer to the legal consequences of sin. They are the inevitable, bitter fruit of transgression of the law.”¹

You see, we have all sinned, and fallen short of the standard, the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). But the problem now is that this sin has put us in a wrong relationship, and in a bad position with the Law and with God the Judge. You see, when it comes to being judged based upon the law of God we are in trouble, we are GUILTY! However, Sin not only puts us in a bad relationship with God, and His law. Sin also makes us spiritually sick.

This sin sickness comes to us not as babies, but instead it comes to us when we reach the “age of accountability”, which is when we know what is right and wrong (morally). As we grow and mature the more we sin the more and more sick we become and the more symptoms that will result. What many people fail to recognize is how serious sin is in the eyes of a Holy and Righteous God. God cannot and will not put up with it. His being, character, and person cannot and will not put up with sin, because it is opposed to who God is.

A person who is living in sin is viewed by God in this way:

Ephesians 2:

Vs. 1 – “dead in your transgressions”

Vs. 2 – “followed the ways of this world, and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air”

Vs. 3 – “gratifying the craving of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts”

Vs. 3 – “objects of wrath”

Vs. 12 - “separate from Christ”

Vs. 12 – “excluded from citizenship in Israel”

Vs. 12 – “foreigners to the covenants of the promise”

Vs. 12 – “without hope”

Vs. 12 - “without God”

It is in this position that every person in this world, who is not an Obedient Christian is standing. They are headed for destruction, and for Hell. Keep in mind, that when we are living this type of a lifestyle whose side are we on? God’s or Satan’s? We are not on God’s side for we are rebelling against Him and His law. Instead when a person lives in a lifestyle of sin they are siding themselves with Satan

¹ Dr. Jack Cottrell, 13 Lessons on Grace (Joplin: College Press, 1988), 41

and they are spurning the blood and spitting on the sacrifice of Christ. Thus they stand condemned to Hell as Satan and the angels are.

Let me stop and ask you, to stop and think about your life B.C. (Before Christ). And listen, before I get started don't think I haven't done this to myself. But brothers and sisters, we are dirty, filthy, wretched sinners, and we deserve to be in Hell, we do not deserve Grace in the least amount. We have by our own choice spurned a HOLY, LOVING, AND JUST GOD! Do you realize this? Do you realize that our "good works" have been so tainted by sin that God sees them as "filthy rags", which is what would be used by a woman during her period to clean up herself? This is how bad SIN is!

So, we are guilty, and we are sin sick. At this time, I want us to focus on being "guilty". With this being the focal point let me ask you, "How can we get right with God and the Law?" The way we can get right is through Jesus Christ, and Jesus alone though a combination of things, one of them being by Justification. Justification seems to be a big word, but it really isn't, it's a simply easy to understand concept from the days of Rome. Before we go any further, let's examine the word "justification".

Dr. Jack Cottrell states in his book "The Faith Once For All" that

Robert Horn (18-19) has rightly said, "Justification means something God does. Indeed it means a very specific thing God does." It is true that God also regenerates, sanctifies, and glorifies; but these are not the same as justification. "Justification has a distinct meaning." What is this meaning? A brief look at some Greek terminology will put us on the proper track. The noun usually translated "justification" is *dikaiosis*; the verb "to justify" is *dikaioo*. These terms are from the same word family as 'righteous' (*dikaios*) and "righteousness" (*dikaiosyne*), which suggests that justification has something to do with righteousness. The problem is to identify the proper connection between them."²

Dr. Cottrell goes on to state that "'To justify' means not to make righteous, but to **declare** righteous, to **count** or **accept** as righteous. The state of justification is not an ever-increasing holiness of character, but a complete **right legal standing** before the law of God and a freedom from the law's penalty."³ But, how is it possible that we can have a "right legal standing" before God? This is possible only because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. You see, when Jesus died on the Cross he took our sin upon himself.

Paul states:

**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
(2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV.)**

**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written,
"Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"--
(Galatians 3:13 ESV.)**

²Dr. Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once For All: Bible Doctrine For Today* (Joplin: College Press, 2002), 319

³Ibid, 319

You see, there is more going on, on the cross than what we often realize. On the cross Jesus took all the sins of the world, from Creation, to the last day. Not only did He take them, but He literally endured the punishment for them which was the equivalent of Hell, while hanging on the cross. But He didn't just take our sin, instead He also gave us something in return, His Righteousness. Let me lay this out in simple terms:

1. You were born pure and without Sin
2. Your first sin, and all sin was an act of lawlessness which put you in the category of a Criminal who deserved Hell.
3. Jesus seeing the problem that His creation faced came to earth bore the sins of the entire world and went to the cross.
4. While on the cross he bore the sin and felt and endured the equivalent of Hell both physically in the sense that the cat of 9 tails was used on him which commonly laid open the bowels. And also spiritually: keep in mind that Jesus never sinned, never tasted, thought or committed any act of it, and immediately all at one moment all the sins of the world are laid upon a pure spotless, sinless being.

But getting to the point of justification, Jesus took our sin and clothed us in his righteousness. Thus, when we are immersed, we contact the blood of Jesus, and by being covered in the blood God sees that the payment for our sin (the blood) has been applied to our account. Thus we are declared "not guilty." This is why Jesus cried out in John 19:30 "it is finished" meaning "paid in full". What Jesus was saying is that our sin debt was paid in full, however, for this payment to be applied to our account we must

". . . put our 'faith in his blood' (Rom. 3:25). This is how we are justified by faith. It is not a general vague faith in God's love and goodness. It is faith in Jesus Christ, faith that he has indeed "paid it all" through His suffering and death.

One very important point should not be overlooked. Even though we are justified *by* faith, we are not justified as soon as we have faith. Such a view, though held by many, is a very serious error. It confuses *means* with *occasion*. Faith is the means of justification, but according to the Bible, baptism is the occasion during which justification is given. Jesus has promised to meet us in Christian baptism and at that moment apply His blood to us for remission of Sins (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:4-6; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27). If we believe this promise, then we will meet Him there and be justified."⁴

Thus, by having the blood, the payment for our sin applied to our account, God looks upon us and declares us "not guilty", We are saved (justified by faith) because our faith was placed in the **WORK OF Christ on the cross.**

⁴ Jack Cottrell, 13 Lessons on Grace (Joplin: College Press, 1988), 13-14