

What Does it Mean to be

“Justified by Faith”?

Romans 4

The word *justify* means to constitute righteous or “to make right.” It does not mean to forgive or to pardon as if unjust, but to pronounce not guilty, to acquit, or to vindicate. When we repent, God remembers our sin no more.

But that does not necessarily mean that we won’t reap what we have sown.

Most Christians believe that God punishes us for sin. But that is not true. The word *punish* does not appear in the Bible. It has been written in by the translators. The actual word is “visit.” God may “visit” us with good things or bad things. After all, God tells us that, “I make peace and create evil (disaster). I the Lord do all these things.” (Isaiah 45:7)

God does not punish us. He allows us to reap what we have sown in the natural course of life. When we make bad decisions, we will reap the bad results. The consequences are “wrapped into” the bad decisions.

Even after the apostle Paul was converted, he still reaped what he had sown. Up to that time, he had vigorously pursued Christians, persecuting them, imprisoning them, and he was even a willing bystander at Stephen’s death by stoning. After Paul was converted, he was imprisoned, stoned and left for dead, beaten several times, and hounded constantly by the Jews. He received back – AFTER he was converted - the same things he had done to others BEFORE he was converted.

When we repent and are forgiven, God remembers our sin no more. But we still reap the consequences of that sin.

- 1 What then shall we declare that Abraham, our forefather, according to flesh, has found?**
- 2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not toward God.**
- 3 For what is the scripture saying? Now “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.”**
- 4 Now to the worker, the wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as a debt.**

If we have worked for our reward, we deserve to get paid. The employer is “in debt” to us until his “debt” is paid.

But justification is for him who is **not working** but who **is believing**. This distinguishes the true Christian gospel from paganism.

Yet the vast majority of Christians have no idea what it means to **believe**. They *believe* in their **own efforts** (like self-defense) or in the **efforts of other human beings** (like going to the doctor for illness), but they DON'T believe in God, even though Christians would vociferously deny this accusation.

4 Yet to him who is not working, yet is believing on Him Who is justifying the irreverent, his faith is reckoned for righteousness.

5 Even as David also is telling of the blessedness of the man to whom God is reckoning righteousness apart from works, saying:

6 Blessed are they whose iniquities (lawlessnesses) are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will by no means be reckoning sin!

“Only the guilty can be pardoned. Atonement only covers sin from God’s sight. But justification or vindication is a complete acquittal from all guilt, the pronouncing of the verdict ‘not guilty.’ Concordant Commentary p 233

9 This blessedness then, is it for the Circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

10 How then was it reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised: that righteousness might be reckoned unto them also.

12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

Abraham is the “father of **ALL them that believe.**” Abraham’s “offspring” are **spiritual sons and daughters** (NOT the Physical offspring) – those who BELIEVE Jesus and what He has promised to do.

What in the world did God have in mind with the ritual of Circumcision?

Is it still necessary today?
What did it mean in Abraham’s time?
What does it mean now?
Is it Jewish?

“Circumcision was first introduced to God’s people when the Lord came to Abraham to inform him that His covenant would NOT be with Ishmael but solely with Isaac. The timing of this introduction is highly significant and contains spiritual lessons of such immense value that they need to be thoroughly understood and practiced by all Christians.

“This does not mean that we should actually practice the physical rite of circumcision, for it was nailed to the cross along with the other ceremonies from the Old Testament. It is the lesson taught by this rite which must be understood and observed today.” God’s Sabbath Rest, F.T. Wright, pg 326

At the time circumcision was introduced by God to Abraham, Ishmael was already 13 years old. Ishmael had been born as the result of procedures which could NEVER qualify him to be the child of promise, even though up to this time Abraham had fully believed that he had done a great work for God and that God had fully accepted Abraham’s devising.

Abraham had to be brought to the complete understanding of the true nature of the procedures he had followed, he had to be deeply convicted of the error of his ways, and he had to repent of those ways with all his heart, and then covenant with God to follow God’s ways and God’s ways alone.

Until these changes occurred, the true child of promise could not appear. These changes did NOT bring about the fulfillment of God’s promise, but they did clear the way so that God could now do what He had said He would do.

Abraham had to be totally committed to God’s plan, to doing God’s work God’s way, then, and only then, could it happen.

At first Abraham was unable to see beyond the physical limitations resulting from both his and Sarah's ages, so he resisted the Lord's instructions. When God told Abraham he would have a son by Sarah, Abraham pleaded with God to accept Ishmael as the son of promise by saying, "O that Ishmael might live before thee." Gen 17:18

Abraham was asking God to recognize and accept a system, the system wherein men seek to build God's kingdom in their own way. **"But Abraham had to renounce those procedures completely BEFORE he could see the promise fulfilled. There was no place for human devising.** On this point, God would not enter into any concessions or compromises whatsoever, for only in God's ways can true rest be found." Ibid, pg 327

In this confrontation between God and Abraham, God was seeking to effect within Abraham a change in **convictions so profound that it would result in TOTAL renunciation of the procedures by which Ishmael had been given life.** God was seeking to form a covenant between Abraham and His God **confining Abraham and ALL those of his posterity who would remain faithful to the compact, to God's ways ALONE!**

"Abraham finally submitted to the Lord's directions. The great change took place in him and the way was prepared for the birth of Isaac. It was at this point that God introduced the rite of circumcision. Those who truly received this rite were thereby setting their seal to the presence within them of a spirit of ENTIRE SUBMISSION to, and co-operation with, God's ways and purposes. It signified the consecration of the instrument of their flesh to the service of God by cutting away from it all that was unnecessary to those purposes.

"The circumcised were consecrating themselves to follow God's ways in the building of His kingdom while resolutely rejecting any reversions to their own ways." Ibid, 327

The uncircumcised were not allowed to participate in the Passover service just as the uncircumcised in heart can never experience the new birth or participate with God in building His kingdom, because they want to do God's work in THEIR OWN way!

To appreciate the full significance of God's prohibiting the uncircumcised from sharing in the Passover, one must realize that the deliverance from Egypt was an object lesson in redemption. Each step that the Israelites took in their escape from bondage, finds its counterpart in the believer's emancipation from spiritual servitude.

The Passover looked back to their escape from the bondage of Egypt but it also looked forward to the Messiah and their escape from the bondage of sin.

“The choosing of the lamb represented the acceptance of Christ as the Saviour of the world;

“Its execution at the hands of the Israelites typified the crucifixion;

“The sprinkled blood symbolized the imputed righteousness of Christ under which all are protected even before they have been delivered from sin’s bondage;

“The eating of the Passover Lamb finds its counterpart in the feeding on the life in God’s word and in the implantation of Christ’s seed within;

“And the death of the first-born teaches us that our old evil spiritual nature must be crucified to death before freedom from sin’s mastery is obtained.” Ibid pg 328

Each of these steps is necessary for salvation but none of them can be experienced without the first stipulation which is to covenant with God to do His work HIS WAY ONLY, and not introduce our own devising.

Once again, let it be reiterated that this condition is not met by physical circumcision, nor has it ever been. Unfortunately, as the Jews degenerated in spirituality, the outward sign came to be looked upon as the whole requirement. They failed to see that circumcision was empty and valueless unless it physically represented the spiritual heart change wherein they would forsake their own works and accept God’s way of salvation.

Paul discusses this very subject in Romans 2:25-29:

“For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

“Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?

“And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

“But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; **and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.**”

This vital principle is illustrated with great clarity in Abraham's experience. For years he had been seeking the fulfillment of the promise in his own way. During that time, God could not give him the real child of promise. Finally, the Lord told Abraham positively that he had to let go of these procedures and accept God's way. To confirm that Abraham had done so, he was to perform the rite of circumcision on himself and his household.

Satan is highly skilled at luring those who have put their entire trust in God back to leaning on the arm of flesh. Bible history shows that EVERY movement that has ever arisen, has succumbed in this manner. EVERY denomination that has ever arisen has fallen in this way.

Genesis 17 informs us of the state of unbelief in which God found Abraham when He came to him. Then suddenly he caught a vision of God's ability to do what He had promised.

Paul discusses this in Romans 4:16-25. Read this passage.

When Abraham was possessed by the proper faith, he was able to leave God to fulfill His Word. Abraham made the covenant by which he no longer attempted to achieve the promise through his own works.

Faith is believing that God WILL do what He has already promised He WILL do!

Every time a person is confronted with a problem and **chooses to let God be the problem-solver, he is testifying that he has indeed cut away the works of the flesh and is living by faith in his eternal Lord.** Thus he is preparing to be among that company who, having been cleansed of all false doctrine, **"follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."** Revelation 14:4

13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect;

15 Because the law works wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

The "law works wrath." The law causes people to rebel. **It is the "kindness of God that leads us to repentance"** (Romans 2:4), **NOT the threat of punishment or hellfire.**

Laws always result in rebellion. That's why God speaks of the Israelites' time in the wilderness as "the rebellion (provocation)." (Hebrews 3:8) God had given the Law, the Ten Commandments, at Sinai, writing them on tables of stone, but only after the Israelites had refused to let God speak to them directly. They were afraid of God and asked Moses to be their go-between.

By refusing to let God speak to them directly, the Israelites denied themselves the opportunity for God to put His law in their hearts, whereby He would make them new creatures in Christ who would keep the law (do right) because it is right, NOT because they "had to."

A true Christian KEEPS the Law, ALL Ten of the Ten Commandments, but NOT in order to BE saved. He delights in keeping them because he IS saved.

David said, "I DELIGHT to do Thy will, O my God. Yes, Thy LAW is written in my heart." (Psalm 40:8)

16 Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be according to grace: to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.

17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations) before him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead, and calls those things which be not as though they were.

"Abraham believed God when all the evidence was against him. He was, for all practical purposes, as good as dead himself, and Sarah, his wife, was worse, if that could be. He faced the facts. He considered his own condition as well as that of his wife, yet never doubted that God could and would do as He had said. He believed in a God Who was superior to death, and thus made it possible for God to vindicate him." Ibid p 234

18 Who contrary to hope (expectation) believed in hope (expectation), that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, "So shall thy seed be."

19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.

20 He wavered not at the promise of God through unbelief: but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God.

21 And being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was also able to perform.

22 And therefore it was reckoned to him for righteousness.

23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned to him;

24 But because of us also, to whom it is reckoned, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

25 Who was delivered because of our offences and was raised again for our justification.

We, too, are justified by the simple process of believing God.

Many Christian denominations teach that Sabbath-keeping, tithing, and eating properly, taking care of our bodies by not drinking and smoking, are all “works” and therefore not only not necessary for salvation, but actually anti-God. All one has to do, they say, is “believe” that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and was resurrected from the dead - - - and we’re saved. We don’t necessarily even have to change our ways, according to their doctrines.

But if that is true, why does James say,

”Faith (believing) without **works** – is dead”? James 2:26

Why does the Bible tell us that “by their **fruits** (their actions) ye shall know them.” (Matthew 7:20)

Faith - **without** the actions that correspond to that faith – is, indeed, dead!

If someone claims to be a Christian, a true follower of Jesus Christ, then his or her disposition should reveal the disposition of Christ. He or she will be a truth teller. He or she will want to spend daily time with the Lord in Bible study and prayer. He or she will learn to love their enemies and to do good to those who hate us.

Certainly, we all stumble at times but if Christ has changed the direction in our life, it’s not difficult to tell if someone is truly converted. Jesus hated hypocrisy. The Pharisees, scribes and Sadducees thought of themselves as very righteous, but Jesus’ scathing attack laid them bare. (Matthew, Chapter 23) That’s

undoubtedly one of the main reasons they wanted to kill Him. He was exposing their hypocrisy in the eyes of the people.

I have heard many Christians say that we can't judge a person's character, because only God knows their heart. But their "fruits" – their actions – give them away.

How Do I Know If I'm Converted?

- 1) Jesus has become the center of my life. I look to Him, rather than to my husband, wife, children, friends, doctors, ministers, or others, for the answers to my problems.
- 2) I WANT to spend time with Him EVERY DAY in Bible study and prayer
- 3) I seek out and enjoy studying the Bible with others who are also looking for truth.
- 4) I will never say, "Is this information necessary for my salvation?" because I will want to know EVERYTHING I can about Jesus. "To KNOW God is life eternal (eonian)." (John 17:3)
- 5) The salvation of all the other people in the world will be as important to me as my own.
- 6) I would be a Christian even if there were no eternal life or hell.
- 7) I realize that the major issue in life is not MY salvation, but the issue is **God's** reputation and character. Am I representing HIM properly?
- 8) I will delight in keeping God's commandments, not because of any possible punishment or reward, but because I love Jesus, and I know that His ways are always right. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep my commandments." John 14:15
- 9) I will give up my right to myself and give it over to God, letting Him make all my decisions for me instead of revering the "wisdom" of man, because Jesus owns me. He bought me with a price - His death on the Cross.

Justification IS by faith alone. But when we truly believe in God and we exhibit the life of Christ - the Spirit of Christ - in our actions, our works (actions) will tell the world what is in our heart.

That is the real definition of a “Spirit-filled” Christian.