

Justified through Faith

In the last few weeks, we have heard a lot about justice. There are those whose signs and chant tell us “No justice No peace.” While it is not my intent to deal with the matters of social or civil unrest in these times, I do believe that we need to understand the concept from the Bible of justice and justification.

The words justice and justified have as their common origin the word just. Merriam-Webster defines the word just as 1a) having a basis in or conforming to fact or reason (reasonable); 1b) conforming to a standard of correctness (proper or faithful to an original); 2a) acting or being in conformity with what is morally upright or good (righteous); 2b) being what is merited (deserved or lawful).

Therefore, justice means the maintenance or administration of what is just especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments.

Justified means having or shown to have a just, right, or reasonable basis. Thus, when we speak of being justified within the context of the Bible, it means that we have a just right based on reasoned logic. The idea that we are entitled to entrance into heaven, eternal life in the presence of God; may cause us to feel slightly uneasy. For people with any integrity, there must be an acknowledgement that at some point, we have sinned. Sin separates us from God. Isaiah tells us that it is not God’s inadequacies that separates us but our sins (iniquities).

Behold, the LORD’S hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear. (Isaiah 59:1-2 NASB)

So, sin separates us from God and Paul tells us in Romans 3:23: **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23 NASB)**

This brings us back to the question of the day; how can we stand in front of God and claim a just right to be in His presence? There was a fiery preacher from the 1700’s names Jonathan Edwards that took Romans 3:19 and built a sermon titled: “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners.” In that verse, Paul writes: **Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God.** Jonathan Edwards presents the case that our turning away from God make our place in hell totally justified and we are without any argument to the contrary. In fact, one sentence from that sermon goes: *If God should forever cast you off, it would be exactly agreeable to your treatment of him. (Jonathan Edwards: The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners)*

The days of fiery preaching are over. The thought is that scaring people into following God is not a real conversion. It becomes an avoidance of unpleasant punishment. However, the modern zeal for avoiding the unpleasant side effects of sin have left many with a belief that there is no punishment. Neither extreme is true. Most assuredly there is a hell for those banned from the presence of God but that should not be the message to lead people away from sin.

From the verse cited above on which Jonathan Edwards built his sermon, we may drop down just a few lines and read the following reason of hope.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:23-26 NASB)

Yes, we have all sinned and deserve the punishment for sin. The story does not end here. We become justified as a gift. This is by nature the very definition of grace. How was it brought about? God sent Jesus the Christ to be the substitute sacrifice (propitiation) for us. By substituting Jesus in our place, the penalty for our sin has been paid. That sacrifice allows God to be a just God and justify us through that sacrifice of Jesus. It is a limited payment. It is solely for **the one who has faith in Jesus.**

To fully appreciate what God has done for us through Jesus, we need to understand the nature of sin. Daniel was taken into captivity when the Babylonians gained control over the nation of Judah. The fall of Judah had been predicted and could have been avoided if the nation had returned to serving God. In the 9th chapter of Daniel, Daniel prays for forgiveness yet realizes that the failure rested on the shoulders of the nation of Judah.

I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, “Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land. (Daniel 9:4-6 NASB)

Turning aside from God is sin. Sin is a rebellion against God. Saint Augustus suggest that all sin is rooted in pride. For whatever reason we choose to turn to our path rather than follow God. It becomes an act of rebellion.

In 1 John 3:4, John calls sin lawlessness. Then in the 8th verse, we are told: **the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.** In that same verse, John tells us the reason Jesus came to earth. **The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.**

Sin separates us from God. This separation is the second death which is total banishment from the presence of God for all eternity. God has provided a means for the death penalty may be paid by a proxy. That proxy is Jesus the Messiah.

Here's where our faith comes into the picture. According to the first verse of Hebrews the 11th chapter, faith is our belief in things we cannot see. We must allow that faith to spur us to follow the path that God has provided. Consider the 6th verse of the same chapter of Hebrews.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6 NASB)

Through much of his writings, Paul admits that Christians are not perfect people. We all have a past that may well have contained very ungodly behavior. In his letter to Titus, Paul shares the fact that God (because of His love for us) freely gives us His mercy in Jesus.

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3-7 NASB)

This justification is a gift from God-grace. What is our part in all of this? We are not saved **on the basis of deeds**. In fact, based on our sins, we have never been in a strong bargaining position with God. Paul answers that question about our part in the 5th chapter of Romans.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:1-8 NASB)

Our faith is the key that unlocks the door of our justification. Our ability to trust God to do what He has promised. Our belief that God has done the things we read in the Bible and that He will continue to do those things which He has promised. Paul tells us again in his letter to the Ephesians: **For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB)**

Does your faith allow you to step out into the unknown? Do you embrace this Jesus who died in your place to pay for your sins?