

# JUSTIFICATION

## Background

### What is 'justification'?

It is judicial acquittal – being found not guilty. Wherever the word 'justification' is found in the New Testament, the substitution of the word 'acquittal' can be a precise alternative. The word is used in the Old Testament in relation to human justice – e.g. Isaiah 5:23 and Proverbs 17:15, although here again some modern translations use the word 'acquit'. Justification is the gracious *finding innocent* of the true believer. It is a free gift from God given to those who believe in Jesus – it is the Judge himself who declares the believer not guilty. In Christianity a true believer is found not guilty because the penalty for their sins has been borne by Jesus.

### Justification means more than forgiveness

It is a term which belongs in a court of law. An accused person is either condemned or justified – enquiries into his actions lead to him being found either *not guilty* or *guilty* of having broken the law. An innocent person is a just person, and the judge who proves a person 'just' is said to justify him. Another modern word that gives a similar sense is *vindication*. Justification does not make the sinner any different: it declares him just in the eyes of the law. The sinner certainly needs to be made good, and the Holy Spirit will go on helping to achieve that in the lives of believers, in what is known as 'sanctification'. Justification has to do not with our state but with our standing – it refers to our position before God. Apart from Christ we have no standing at all; we are guilty and condemned. But with Christ as our Saviour and substitute we are justified and acquitted – for Jesus has borne our sin himself.

Isaiah 50:8; John 5:24; Romans 3:19, 20, 25, 26; 4:5, 8; 8:31–34; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21

### Believers are justified because Jesus Christ has borne their sins on the cross.

God, as Judge, declares that those who believe in Christ as their Saviour are justified and righteous.

Romans 4:25; 5:9; 8:1

### Justification is entirely a work of grace

It is unmerited and, in the words of the apostle Paul, not by any *works of righteousness* which we have done. Good works, pleading, self-sacrifice and giving all one's goods are of no eternal value. John 3:17–18; Romans 3:24, 28–30; 5:16–18; Galatians 2:16; 3:8, 11, 24; 5:4; Luke 18:14

### We must admit our guilt before the completely righteous judge

Only then can we be justified by faith. Afterwards our lives must bear witness to our faith.

Ephesians 2:8–10; Titus 3:4, 5, 7; James 2:21–24; 1 John 1:9

### Conclusion

Justification and righteousness have a similar meaning in many instances in scripture. Romans 5:1–11 is a good summary of the joyful effect of justification (or acquittal) before God.

The concept of 'justification' should be considered alongside the meaning of 'righteousness'. We need to consider especially the complete and holy righteousness of God.