

Small Group Series: Being Transformed – Followers Made New! Jan-May 2009

After each church session you will be encouraged to read an article, a chapter or section of a book to further deal with the passage that is being studied. You will generally have 2 weeks to read over the article and answer the questions included with it. Then when your small group meets again you have an opportunity to discuss it as a group.

From Session #1 Take Home Article (also online at gloryonline.org)

NOTES:

Excerpted from **Justification by Faith** by John MacArthur

Justification by faith was the great truth that dawned on Luther and dramatically altered the church. Because Christians are justified by faith alone, their standing before God is not in any way related to personal merit. Good works and practical holiness do not provide the grounds for acceptance with God. God receives as righteous those who believe, not because of any good thing He sees in them--not even because of His own sanctifying work in their lives--but solely on the basis of *Christ's* righteousness, which is reckoned to their account. "To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). That is justification.

Declared Righteous: What Actually Changes?

In its theological sense, justification is a forensic, or purely legal, term. It describes what God *declares* about the believer, not what He *does to change* the believer. In fact, justification effects no actual change whatsoever in the sinner's nature or character. Justification is a divine judicial edict. It changes our status only, but it carries ramifications that guarantee other changes will follow. Forensic decrees like this are fairly common in everyday life.

When I was married, for example, Patricia and I stood before the minister (my father) and recited our vows. Near the end of the ceremony, my father declared, "By the authority vested in me by the state of California, I now pronounce you man and wife." Instantly we were legally husband and wife. Whereas seconds before we had been an engaged couple, now we were married. Nothing inside us actually changed when those words were spoken. But our status changed before God, the law, and our family and friends. The implications of that simple declaration have been lifelong and life-changing (for which I am grateful). But when my father spoke those words, it was a legal declaration only.

Similarly, when a jury foreman reads the verdict, the defendant is no longer "the accused." Legally and officially he instantly becomes either guilty or innocent--depending on the verdict. Nothing in his actual nature changes, but if he is found not guilty he will walk out of court a free person in the eyes of the law, fully justified.

In biblical terms, justification is a divine verdict of "not guilty--fully righteous." It is the reversal of God's attitude toward the sinner. Whereas He formerly condemned, He now vindicates. Although the sinner once lived under God's wrath, as a believer he or she is now under God's blessing.

Justification is more than simple pardon; pardon alone would still leave the sinner without merit before God. So when God justifies He imputes divine righteousness to the sinner (Romans 4:22-25). Christ's own infinite merit thus becomes the ground on which the believer stands before God (Romans 5:19; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Philippians 3:9). So justification elevates the believer to a realm of full acceptance and divine privilege in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, because of justification, believers not only are perfectly free from any charge of guilt (Romans 8:33) [the penalty of sin] but also have the full merit of Christ reckoned to their personal account (Romans 5:17). Here are the forensic realities that flow out of justification:

- We are adopted as sons and daughters (Romans 8:15)
- We become fellow-heirs with Christ (v. 17)
- We are united with Christ so that we become one with Him (1 Corinthians 6:17)
- We are henceforth "in Christ" (Galatians 3:27) and He in us (Colossians 1:27)

How Justification and Sanctification Differ

Justification is distinct from sanctification because in justification God does not *make* the sinner righteous; He *declares* that person righteous (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16). Notice how justification and sanctification are distinct from one another:

- Justification *imputes* Christ's righteousness to the sinner's account (Romans 4:11b); sanctification *imparts* righteousness to the sinner personally and practically (Romans 6:1-7; 8:11-14).
- Justification takes place outside sinners and changes their standing (Romans 5:1-2), sanctification is internal and changes the believer's state (Romans 6:19).
- Justification is an event, sanctification a process.

Those two must be distinguished but can never be separated. God does not justify whom He does not sanctify, and He does not sanctify whom He does not justify. Both are essential elements of salvation.

Why differentiate between them at all? If justification and sanctification are so closely related that you can't have one without the other, why bother to define them differently? That question was the central issue between Rome and the Reformers in the sixteenth century, and it remains the main front in renewed attacks against justification.

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From Session #1 Take Home Questions for “Justification by Faith” article

After you have read through the article, read through and think about the following questions. The article and these questions will be used as part of your next home meeting.

The goal is to learn and to interact with the content asking God to grow us together as His followers.

1. Was there ever a time in your life when you felt like you needed to win merit with God or “work” your way to heaven? Why would this be appealing to some people? How could it be a problem?

2. What does the author say is the difference between justification and sanctification? (Justification is an _____, sanctification is a _____).

3. What does the author mean when he says justification is a forensic term? Have you ever thought about your salvation as a legal declaration before? How does this change the way you see being justified by faith?

4. MacArthur gave the example of the wedding vows and the vindicated criminal. How were these examples helpful for your understanding of how justification works?

5. In Philippians 3:9 Paul states that he wants to “...be found in him (in Christ), not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” Are you relieved that righteousness is through faith in Christ rather than your works or obedience to the law? Do you ever struggle with giving up control of trying to earn your righteousness?

6. What does it mean that justification “imputes” Christ’ righteousness to our account?

7. Write your own question...