**Biblical Foundations – Justification (Right Legal Standing Before God)**

**How and when do we gain right legal standing before God?**

Previously we discussed the **gospel call** (in which God calls us to trust in Christ for salvation), **regeneration** (in which God imparts new spiritual life to us), and **conversion** (in which we respond to the gospel call in repentance for sin and faith in Christ for salvation). ***But what about the guilt for our sin?*** The *gospel call* invited us to trust in Christ for forgiveness of sins. *Regeneration* made it possible for us to respond to that invitation. In *conversion* we did respond, trusting in Christ for forgiveness of sins. Now the next step in the process of applying redemption to us is that God must respond to our faith and do what he promised, that is, actually declare our sins to be forgiven. This must be a ***legal declaration*** concerning our relationship to God’s laws, stating that we are completely forgiven and no longer liable for punishment.

A correct understanding of justification is absolutely crucial to the whole Christian faith. Once Martin Luther, founder of the protestant religion, realized the truth of justification by faith alone, he spiritually became a born-again Christian and overflowed with the new-found joy of the gospel. If we are to safeguard the truth of the gospel for future generations, we must understand the truth of justification. For it is this truth that is the dividing line between the biblical gospel of salvation by faith alone and all false gospels of salvation based on good works.

When Paul gives an overview of the process by which God applies salvation to us, he mentions justification explicitly. (Romans 8:30) Paul quite clearly teaches that justification comes ***after*** our faith and is ***God’s response*** to our faith. (Romans 3:26, 28) Moreover, a person is NOT justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. (Galatians 2:16)

***Justification can be defined as an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight***.

**Justification Includes** **A Legal Declaration** **By God**- The verb *“**justify”* in the New Testament has a range of meanings, but a very common sense is *“to declare righteous.”* (Romans 4:5, 5:1) The idea that justification is a legal declaration is quite evident also when justification is contrasted with condemnation. (Romans 8:33-34) Some Old Testament examples of the word “justify” add support to this understanding. (Deuteronomy 25:1, Proverbs 17:15) In this sense of “declare to be righteous” or “declare to be not guilty”, Paul frequently uses the word to speak of God’s justification of us, his declaration that we, **THOUGH GUILTY SINNERS**, are nonetheless declared righteous in his sight. It is important that we emphasize that this legal declaration in itself does not change our internal nature or character at all. In this sense of justify, God issues a legal declaration about us.

The theologian John Murray makes an important distinction between regeneration and justification: regeneration is an act of God IN us; justification is an act of God FOR us. The distinction is like that of the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge.