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

**God declares us to be just in his sight.**

***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***.

In God’s legal declaration of justification, he specifically declares that we are just ***in his sight.*** This declaration involves two aspects. First, it means that he declares we have no penalty to pay for sin, including past, present, and future sins. (Romans 8:1) In this sense those who are justified have no penalty to pay for sin- this means we are not subject to any charge of guilt. (Romans 8:33-34)

But if God merely declared us to be ***forgiven from our sins***, that would not solve our problems entirely, for it would only make us morally neutral before God- as was Adam and Eve before they had done anything right or wrong in God’s sight. They were not guilty before God, but neither had they earned a record of righteousness before God. In one aspect of justification, God declares our sins are forgiven ***(removing the negative impact of guilt)***, in the other equally important aspect of justification, he attributes Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us ***(attaching the positive impact righteousness)***. Therefore, the second aspect of justification is that God must declare us not merely to be neutral in his sight but actually to be righteous in his sight. In fact, he must declare us to have the merits of perfect righteousness before him. Thus, the questions arise: ***How can God truthfully declare that we have no penalty to pay for sin when we are in fact guilty sinners? How can God truthfully declare us to be not guilty but righteous when in fact we are unrighteous?***

**God Can Declare Us** **To Be Just Because He Imputes Christ’s Righteousness to Us**- When we say God imputes Christ’s righteousness to us it means that God ***thinks*** of Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us or regards it as ***belonging to us***. He “reckons” it to our account. (Romans 4:2-3) This idea of imputing guilt or righteousness to someone else is first mentioned of Adam when he sinned, his guilt was imputed to us- God viewed it as belonging to us, and therefore it did. Second, when Christ suffered and died for our sins, our sin was imputed to Christ- God thought of it as belonging to him, and he paid the penalty for it. (Romans 5:18-19) Now in the doctrine of justification we see imputation for the third and final time, in which Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us and God therefore thinks of it as belonging to us. It is not our righteousness, but Christ’s righteousness that that is freely given to us.

This imputation of guilt and righteousness is a subcomponent of justification called ***atonement***. Atonement is the process of sinful humanity being reconciled to a righteous God. God establishes the concept of atonement in the Old Testament. (Leviticus 16:6-10, 20-22) The process implemented in Leviticus is the foreshadowing of the atoning death of Christ on the cross and the bedrock premise for the doctrine of justification. Because of the insufficiency of any animal to completely atone for humanity’s sin, Jesus becomes the ultimate and final sacrifice for sin. (Hebrews 10:4, 9:23-26)

It is essential to the heart of the gospel to insist that God declares us to be just or righteous not based on our actual condition of righteousness or holiness, but rather based on Christ’s perfect righteousness, which he thinks of as belonging to us.