

## Justification

I have a confession to make. I'm in trouble, deep trouble. God told me to do some things and I didn't do them. He told me not to do stuff and I did it anyway. He said, "Don't lie," and I lied. He said, "Honour your mother and your father," and I didn't.

In fact, He gave me ten clear commands and I disobeyed them all.

So when I stand before the Judge of all the earth, I'm not hoping that I'll get what I deserve.

I'm looking for something else.

This is the second message in our series called Great Doctrines of the Bible, and our topic is Justification.

### 1. What is righteousness?

Righteous and righteousness: what do these words actually mean?

They are not words that are actually used much today.

When was last time you heard someone outside of church describe someone as righteous?

Or talk about someone's righteousness?

When people hear these words, they don't really understand their meaning.

Righteousness means always to do what is right, and never what is wrong.

It applies not only to our actions, but our words, thoughts and intentions.

To be righteous, we must always have right actions, right words, right thoughts and right intentions.

There can't even be any mixed motives.

For instance, just suppose I hear of a friend who's having money problems, and I say, "Here's \$50." God sees my love, but also sees when I'm looking for a pat on the back which clouds my motives.

So who is righteous?

Romans 3:10 says, "There is none righteous, no, not one."

So now we have a problem, because righteousness is what gives us right standing or right relationship with God.

Because He Himself is righteous.

And since nobody is righteous, nobody has right standing with God.

As Paul says in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

### 2. Common ideas of getting right with God

One common idea of getting right with God is that He'll weigh my good deeds up against my bad deeds.

So this is the idea: God takes my good deeds, puts them on one side of scales. Then He takes my bad deeds and sets them on the other side. And He'll see that I've done lots more good than bad.

So let's think about the logic of that. Someone you love is brutally murdered. They catch the killer, find him guilty, and just when they're about to be sentenced, the killer says, "Wait a minute judge. You should know that I've sold all my possessions, and given them to the poor. In fact, I've pledged my ongoing support for

humanitarian causes.” The judge replies, “Why didn’t you say so in the first place? We could have saved the cost of a trial. Let’s see. Two good deeds, and one bad. You’re free to go.”

Wouldn’t you be horrified?

That’s not what you’d expect of a fair judge; you do the crime, you do the time.

Evangelist Ray Comfort illustrates how irrational it is to expect that a good judge would weigh good deeds against bad deeds: Imagine you’re found guilty of crime and the judge is about to pass sentence. He says, “Have you got anything to say for yourself?” You reply, “Yes, judge, this morning I washed and polished your car.” The judge says, “Well, thank you. But you need to understand two things. 1) I still have to sentence you for what you’ve done wrong, 2) I’m rather insulted you thought you could bribe me into overlooking your crime.”

Another common idea of getting right with God is similar to the first: I’ll just bring my righteousness to Him.

This is different from the first idea in that God just completely ignores the bad deeds.

And God will see that I’m a good guy.

Problem: if righteousness is always having right actions, words, thoughts, motives, what exactly am I bringing to Him?

### **Isaiah 64:6**

But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.

My son has a friend. When he was a teenager and into his early twenties, he couldn’t be bothered taking his washing to the washing basket. He just chucked it in the bottom of his wardrobe. When he ran out of clothes, he grabbed something and just gave it the sniff test. “That’ll do.”

That’s what people do with God.

They do some good deeds and say, “There You are God. That’ll do. You should be happy with that.”

And God says, “Phew! Filthy rags, man. Filthy rags!”

If I wore the same clothes day in and day out, I’d smell, but guess what? I’d get used to it. Everyone else would smell me coming. The only person who couldn’t smell me is ME!

That’s how the brain works with the sense of smell. You put on some perfume or aftershave, and two minutes later you can’t smell it. Why is that? It’s because of a process called olfactory accommodation. The brain filters out a smell that’s constantly there and starts looking for further stimulation.

We also get used to the way we smell wearing our filthy rags of righteousness.

Living with that smell our whole lives means that we filter it out.

We simply don’t notice the smell and how far short we fall of God’s standard.

And unless we smell worse than the next guy, he doesn’t notice it either.

But God still smells us.

### **3. What is justification?**

You might be wondering why talking about righteousness when this message is on justification.

That’s because in English, we don’t see the relationship between righteousness and justification.

But it’s a different story in Greek; it’s easy to see that both words are closely related, because they have the same root.

What makes it even more difficult to understand the word “justification” in the Bible, is that it’s used completely differently in common English.

In English, it means to give a good reason.

For example, you go to court charged with murder and say to the judge, “I was in fear for my life. I had no option but to shoot him.” The judge finds your actions justified; you had a good reason.

But that’s not what it means in the Bible.

We don’t have one word to translate the one Greek word.

Justified means to make righteous.

One theologian came up with, “righteousise” as an accurate translation of “justify”.

Don’t worry, it’s not like being neutralised or vapourised.

God has righteousised us, made us righteous.

He’s seen our filthy rags and said, “I’ll take those. Here, wear these.”

And then He clothes us in His righteousness.

### **Isaiah 61:10**

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.

God takes away the filthy, reeking rags of our own righteousness, & clothes us with His own righteousness.

### **4. How do we become justified?**

There are certain things we have to understand.

1. Our justification came at a price.

### **2 Corinthians 5:21**

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The cost of our justification was paid for by Jesus Christ with His life.

2. The righteousness we now have is the righteousness of God Himself.

### **Ephesians 3:12**

in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

Because our righteousness is the righteousness of God Himself, we have confidence and boldness in accessing the very presence of the Father.

3. It’s not something we do for ourselves.

God clothes us in His righteousness when we put our faith in the sacrificial death of Christ, believe that He rose from the dead, and yield our lives to Him as our Lord and Master.