



**THE TWO SIDES**

**OF**

**JUSTIFICATION**

Joe W. Gresham

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## *THE TWO SIDES OF JUSTIFICATION*

With the recent release of the movie *The Passion of the Christ* the attention of many have been turned to the suffering and death of Jesus. As the emotions have swelled into oceans of tears at the portrayal of the physical pain and agony endured by the Son of God, few have truly understood the depth of what was accomplished at the cross or what motivated such a selfless sacrifice.

Although many believe there is unanimity among Christians pertaining to the justification that came through the shedding of the precious blood of God's Son, in reality there is much diversity concerning who has been justified, as well as how and when justification takes place.

The Apostle Paul deals in depth with justification in the fifth chapter of Romans. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time *Christ died for the ungodly*. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet

peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* Much more then, *being now justified* by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, *when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life*" (Romans 5:6-10).

Notice, Paul refers to the fact that "Christ died for us" and then says it is "much more" than this. In other words it doesn't end here, it keeps getting better. He not only died, He lives, and having been "justified by his blood" and "reconciled to God" by His death, we "shall be saved by His life." It is clear we were reconciled "when we were enemies," not after we accepted or even believed. Therefore, "through our Lord Jesus Christ... *we have now received the atonement*" (Romans

6:11).

In verses 12-21 the apostle proceeds to inform us exactly how, when, where, and who have received the atonement and been justified. He begins by first explaining exactly what our situation is in Adam. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so *death passed upon all men*, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come" (Romans 5:12-14).

There are three important points to notice in this passage:

1. Sin entered the world through Adam.
2. Adam was condemned to death because of this sin.
3. This condemnation spread to all

mankind “for all have sinned.”

Does Paul mean that all die because “all have sinned” personally as Adam did, or because “all have sinned” in Adam. Upon close examination it becomes clear that what Paul is saying is all mankind was in Adam when he sinned; therefore, the condemnation of death was automatically passed upon all mankind.

Four things help clarify this position:

1. The Greek verb, sinned (vs. 12), is in the aorist tense. Thus it refers to an act that took place at a single point of time in the past. In other words, it was Adam's sin, not the continuing sins of his descendants.
2. Verses 13-14 explain what he meant in verse 12. That they had “not sinned after the similitude (likeness) of Adam's” sin. This stands in contradiction to the notion that all die

because they have sinned as he did.

3. Four times in verses 15-18, Paul declares it was Adam's sin (not ours) that brought judgment, condemnation, and death upon the whole human race.
4. Paul continues his argument by stating that all that has happened to us in Adam is undone for us in Christ.

Observe how clearly Paul declares the “free gift” of justification came upon “all men” through Christ, just as condemnation came upon all through Adam.

“But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For *if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of*



*many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Romans 5:15-18).*

It must also be understood if we reject Paul's position that all sinned in Adam and insist that all die because all have sinned as Adam sinned, then consistency demands we must also insist that all live and are justified because they have obeyed as Christ obeyed. Such a position is not only absurd, but heretical.

Notice that verses 13-17 are in parenthesis indicating Paul is interjecting a thought between verses 12 and 18 to illustrate the contrast between our condition in Adam and

our condition in Christ. We can, therefore, read verses 12 and 18 in conjunction without deviating from the apostle's main thought. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned... Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."

Here we see that as surely as condemnation came upon all men through Adam, just as surely justification also came upon all men. Can this be true? Did Paul really mean what he said? This statement has caused controversy within the Christian church for centuries and has been interpreted in at least four different ways.

1. The Calvinist View - The word "all" does not really mean all, but refers only to the "elect" or those whom God has

“predestined” to be saved. Everyone else has been predestined to be lost, and as such, they never had nor ever will have any hope of eternal life.

2. The Universalist View - God will not permit anyone to be lost regardless if he or she rejects Him. Thus “all” will be saved, even if they do not want to be. God will drag them kicking and screaming into heaven whether they want to go or not; they have no choice in the matter.
3. The Armenian View - The “free gift” of justification did not truly come “upon all men,” only a provision was made whereby it might be possible to be justified, if they in turn would do something in order to activate it.
4. The New Testament View - All have been legally justified by the sacrifice of Jesus for “the sin

of the world."

Notice how consistent this position is throughout the New Testament.

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." (Hebrews 2:9).

"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2).

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6).

"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, (This is His desire, but what will we do with what

He has given us?) and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (1 Timothy 2:3-6).

"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:19).

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15).

The sentence pronounced on Adam was the second death and this was passed to all mankind in Adam. The entire race legally belonged on death row. In Adam we were all lost,

but in Christ we have all been justified. He not only redeemed us from the results of Adam's sin, but "much more," He has also canceled our personal sins "many offenses" (Romans 5:16) and brought the free gift "upon all men unto justification of life" (vs. 18). He has already placed this gift in our hands. The real issue is not whether we will do something that we might acquire it or activate it, but rather how shall we respond to what he has already given to us.

This death sentence was not only deferred, it was totally inflicted on Christ. There is no reason any will experience the second death except their own willful, persistent unbelief and their refusal to accept what Christ has already accomplished for them on the cross. This is what Paul meant when he said Christ tasted "death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9).

In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve were told that if they sinned

(disobeyed Him and ate of the fruit), there would be serious repercussions. "The LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Genesis 2:16, 17). Did they die "in the day" they ate of the fruit? Why not? Christians often look at this and immediately feel they must devise some theory to prevent God from appearing to be a liar. They must "help God out." Therefore, some have speculated that God only meant they would "begin to die." But is this what God said? Of course not! He clearly said, "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Others have proposed God meant they would "die spiritually." Is that what God said though? Most definitely not! So how dare anyone put words in God's mouth? God does not need man

messing with His word to get Him out of a “fix.” All we need to do is let His word interpret itself.

His word explicitly declares that God “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:” (2 Timothy 1:9, 10).

Jesus did all of this and “abolished death” “before the world began” because the moment there was sin, there was a Saviour. If Jesus had not stepped into Adam's place in the garden, Adam would have died and the entire human race would have perished, but Jesus became the substitute for “the whole world” and remained on “death row” for four



thousand years. Being God for four millennium, Jesus knew all the pain, sorrow, suffering, and rejection He would have to endure, but because of His love for us, He “endured the cross, despising the shame” and is again “set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). This, dear reader, is why Jesus is called “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

In Adam, in the garden, was the entire human race. Every person on this planet is a descendant of his. If he had died, we all would have died. He paid the price for all of us; he took the place of all mankind and thereby “the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (Romans 5:18). Now we are all called upon to “trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, *specially of those that believe*” (1 Timothy 4:10).

Recently a very dear friend of mine brought me a devotional article, which

contained a statement that many Christians are confused "because they know the Bible says Christ died for 'all' and He offers salvation to everybody... but (and it's a great big BUT) they say that the sacrifice of Christ doesn't do anybody any good unless he first believes. Or, in other words, no one really realizes any 'benefits' from His sacrifice on the cross unless he believes." My friend was among those who were confused and also of the belief that mankind could receive no "benefit" without first believing.

Curious as to how far-reaching this concept was, the following week-end, while conducting a seminar in another state, I asked: "How many believe that we received no benefit from Christ's death on the cross until we first believed and accepted Him as Savior?" It was amazing to see more than two-thirds of the congregation raise their hands. This is shocking in the light of the fact that (as we have seen)

we would not even be alive today if it was not for the sacrifice of Jesus.

Although many do not realize it: "To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring." *The Desire of Ages*, p. 660

This justification, however, should not be confused with the doctrine of justification by faith. This is a legal justification without which none, saint or sinner, would be able to live even now. Every person on the earth owes his or her physical life, his very existence, to the sacrifice of the Son of God. God has taken the initiative, how do we respond to His love? Or, as Paul put it: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation" (Hebrews 2:3).

If we are truly honest with ourselves, most of us would have to admit we accepted Jesus for rather selfish reasons - either from fear of hell or a desire to be in heaven or to acquire the good and avoid the bad. Little or no thought was given to what impact our decisions would have upon God. Whereas this may not be bad as a starting point in our Christian experience, I would submit it is impossible to remain a true Christian for selfish reasons. True Christianity is based on a love relationship, upon our loving response to the greatest exhibition of love the world has ever seen. God's "love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour." *The Desire of Ages*, p. 176

Notice: "It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour's

matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary's cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They hear His voice and they follow Him." *The Desire of Ages*, p. 480

When an individual sees the unconditional love of God as revealed in this Bible truth and believes, his heart is changed; he abhors his sins, which placed the Son of God on the cross; he repents and accepts the Supreme Sacrifice in his behalf. This, then, is justification by faith! Not just a legal declaration, but also a life-changing experience, which enables him "both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). And "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

"True justification by faith in Christ will be made manifest in transformation of character." "No man can cover his

soul with the garments of Christ's righteousness while practicing known sins, or neglecting known duties. God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul." *E.G. White, Letter 83, 1890; Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 480*

True justification by faith will expel the prevalent philosophy of "how much can I get away with and still get into heaven." The great desire of many to "squeak by the pearly gates" can only be revealed and eliminated in the blazing light of the cross of Christ. Remember, "God's forgiveness is not *merely* a judicial act [legal justification] by which He sets us free from condemnation. (It is this plus more.) It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the

heart [justification by faith]." *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 114.

This, dear reader, is what God has done for you. He has already placed this free gift in your hands and He did it "while we were yet sinners." (Romans 5:18) The precious Son of God has "abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Timothy 1:10) He died for us all - everyone of us - that we might live. And His desire is: "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." (2 Corinthians 5:15) Therefore, it is left for each of us individually to answer the following questions: "What shall I do with this precious gift Jesus has so freely given me? Shall I cherish it or discard it?" This is not a choice another can make for you. We must each make our own decision for time and eternity and do so without delay. Won't you allow what Jesus has accomplished for you on the

cross to be worked out in your life by  
the power of the Holy Spirit?



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