

JUSTIFIED

Galatians 2:16

The Bible is an inspired book. As an inspired book, it contains many, many words. If you are to understand the teachings of the Bible, you must have a clear understanding of the words that are found in the Bible. Many of us have not given the proper attention to the words that are found in the Bible.

If you are to grasp the message of the Galatian letter, you must understand the word "justify" and its family. It is the key word in this letter, as it is a key word in the Roman letter. Some form of the word occurs in this letter at least nine times. Because it is important that we understand this word, let us just spend our time this morning on this one word. There are three important things about this word as it is used in the New Testament, and especially in this letter.

I. JUSTIFYING IS AN ACT OF THE JUDGE.

The use of this word in the New Testament is based upon some Biblical assumptions. First, this word assumes that God is the great, supreme judge of all the earth. His court is the highest and final court. Second, it assumes that every man has an appointment with this great divine judge. Our name is put on the docket to stand before God in judgment even before we are born. We come into this world with an ultimate accountability to the Creator-Judge. Another safe assumption is that you and I are totally unprepared for this meeting with the judge of all the earth. The only man who is prepared in himself to face the judgment is the man who knows that he is free from guilt concerning any infraction of the law, and is sure that he is in good standing with the Judge.

This is the situation that this word "justify" speaks to. To justify is the legal act whereby the judge declares the condemned man to be righteous. There are really two sides to the act of the judge. On one side he removes any responsibility for the violations of the law, he declares the man to be free from guilt. On the other side he restores the man to the full favor of the law. All rights and privileges that belong to the man who has kept the law perfectly are bestowed upon Him. Only the judge can make such a judgment.

As such then justification is something that is done for the sinner legally. It is not something that God does in the sinner experientially. It is important to understand this. Some have misunderstood their situation with reference to holy God. They have wrongly concluded that what they need is an experience with God.

However, before there can be any experience with God on the part of the sinner, he has a serious legal problem that he must clear up. Outside of Christ he stands already condemned by the law of God if his case were to come up today. It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment. What if God were to

call your case today? Unless your legal requirements at the law of God have been met, you would surely be eternally banished from the presence of God.

It is important then that we understand that justifying the sinner does not involve making any change in the sinner himself. Now those God justifies, He does change. But to justify is to declare to be righteous, to begin to treat them as righteous. It is a declarative act of the judge.

II. JUSTIFYING IS AN ACT OF GOD.

I suppose that a man could "declare himself to be righteous", but the problem is that man is the accused and not the judge. In Paul's letters man is always the object when justification is taking place. God is the one who is acting. Because of the acknowledged guilt of the sinner, he is not in a position to do anything but plead for mercy.

In the Roman letter Foul raised the question, "Who is he that condemneth?" In response to his rhetorical question he answers, "It is God that justifieth." This agrees with everything that we find in the letter that is before us.

Knowing what we know of God, this raises a serious question. Is not God just and righteous? While we know that He is a God of love, how can he still be a just God and declare me indited and convicted sinner to be righteous, and restore such a one to his full favor? Even though He is a sovereign being who is free to do whatever may please Him, even he cannot will to do something that is unjust. He cannot be guilty of treating guilty sinners as though they had never sinned without some justifying basis. While we may explore this in more detail later, the simple answer is that this is why Jesus Christ died upon the Cross. His death for us on the tree provided the basis for a just God declaring us to be righteous. So when God justifies He is acting on the basis of the accomplishment of His Son on the Tree as the Sacrifice for our sins.

But know this---you can never justify yourself. You may repent of your sins, but only the offended God can declare you to be righteous and restore you to His favor.

III. JUSTIFYING IS THE ACT OF SALVATION.

To ask someone, "Have you been saved?" means too often have you had an experience with God. Without discounting the experience, let me remind you that salvation is so much more than an experience with God. Indeed there is something that must go before any experience with God.

Something must be done about the sin question. Justification is that act of God as the supreme Judge of the universe whereby the sin question with reference to

your life is cleared up once and for all. As such it is the heart of the saving act of God for us.

"Salvation" is the broad word that includes all that God does for us in Christ. The activity of God toward us actually began before the foundation of the world when God predestinated us according to His foreknowledge. But justification is that act of God that precedes all of the other divine acts in time. Before God can regenerate a man, or impart to the man the divine life, which includes the divine nature, he must justify Him. God can not give His life to a man who has an unsettled legal matter at the bar of heaven. The sin question must be settled first. Also before God can sanctify a man, the man must be justified. Sanctification is that process by which God makes righteous in a practical way those he has already declared to be righteous legally. Justification is the foundation for sanctification, or maybe better sanctification is the outgrowth of justification. The same is true of glorification. To glorify is that act of God whereby we will be transformed into the likeness of the Son of God perfectly, and will be made ready to abide with God in fellowship forever. But God cannot glorify a man until the legal matter growing out of transgression of the law has been cleared up. Those God justifies, He will in His good time glorify. So it is easy to see that in a real way, justification is the heart of the whole matter. It is where the whole glorious thing of deliverance really begins. As such it is something that God does for the sinner once for all.

So the most important question I could ask you is, "Have you been justified?" Have your sins been taken care of before God? Have you been restored into the divine favor?

CONCLUSION:

From the teaching ministry of our Lord we have a beautiful and helpful example of how this word is used in the Bible and what it means. The word was used by Jesus in the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee just like Paul uses it in the Galatian letter.

The Pharisee was a typical religious man of his day. He was seeking to be just before God on the basis of his religious deeds --- by the works of the law. He would not admit that his religious activities were of no value in gaining the favour of God. He went to the temple to say his prayers. Men took note of him while he prayed so faithfully and beautifully in the temple on earth, but his prayers went unnoticed in heaven. If that man Jesus talked about had died in the midst of his prayers, he would have gone to Hell from a prayer meeting.

But Jesus told of the other man --- he was a tax collector by profession. As a tax collector he was identified with the despised Roman government, and was viewed as a traitor by his own people. Such work lent itself to moral and financial

corruption in that day. All indications are that this man had been enriching himself by unjust practices and oppressive methods. Yet to his credit, the man did go up to the temple with a deep sense of his guilt before God. His sense of guilt was so great that he felt utterly unworthy of even being seen in the temple, so he stood far back from the eyes of the people. In this way he hoped that he would go unnoticed. The weight on his spirit was so great that he dared not even lift up his eyes toward heaven. His heart was so empty that in desperation he beat upon his breast with his hands. His life was one corrupt, soiled mess. In desperation he cried out to God, "God be merciful to me the sinner." The prayer was so simple and direct. The form of the prayer actually indicates the man felt himself to be the chief of sinners. "Be merciful" is really a cry for God to be propitiated toward Him. He knows that his only hope of ever gaining God's favor is for God to accept a sacrifice for his sins.

Do you know what happened? According to the reliable word of the Lord Jesus, this man went down to his house "justified". This happened in contrast to the outwardly righteous Pharisee who sent down to his house still under the burden of his guilt. Literally this means that this self-confessed chief sinner in town went back to his house without any charge against him before God, and assured that he stands in the full favor of God. He has done nothing righteous --- he has not given any alms, prayed any prayers, helped any widows --- yet before God he is treated and received as a righteous man. All he has done is humble himself in the presence of Holy God, and ask for mercy. When he did that God has done what he could never have done --- God has declared him to be a righteous man.

The great message of this letter is that God justifies sinners when they put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you so trusted Him? Then the sin issue is settled forever with reference to your life!