

Justification explained**The Gospel under attack**

• **Justification means being reckoned as righteous in God's eyes – a status**

• **Justification is not the same as new birth**

• **Justification is not the same as personal holiness**

We are not justified by any part of the Mosaic law**3. Paul has the whole law in mind****4. The whole law also remains excluded for sanctification**

A person *'is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ'* ^{□1}. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is always being attacked. Satan does not like the gospel! There is always the danger in the Christian church that someone will get through to us with the idea that we should change the gospel into something else! It was happening in Galatia and Paul is having to remind the Christians about the gospel.

What does it mean to be 'justified'? In Paul's thinking the word refers to our righteousness in the eyes of God. When God 'justifies' us, He says, 'I pronounce you righteous in my sight – for the sake of Jesus. I **reckon** you righteous in Christ.' 'Justification' is the righteous **status** we have when Christ becomes our Saviour. We might still have many weaknesses. We are far from being perfect. We are a long way from being like Jesus. But we are **reckoned** as being as righteous as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We are 'justified' in the sight of God.

'Justification' is not the same as new birth. 'New birth' is something that takes place within us. 'Justification' does not take place within us at all; it takes place in the decisions of God. God declares us 'Not guilty'. God declares us 'righteous' in Christ. No matter what our personal state may be, God declares that He accepts us as a righteous person because he counts Christ's righteousness as being ours. God accepts us before He gives us newness of life. He accepts us because we are righteous in Christ.

Justification is not the same as our personal holiness. Our personal holiness is imperfect. We still are growing in grace. We still have much to learn. There are weaknesses that we have not yet repented of because we have not yet seen them. But people with faith in Christ are still perfectly righteous in the sight of God, because we are righteous in Christ. This is our 'justification' in the eyes of God.

We are not justified by any part of the Mosaic law. I am still arguing the point (following Paul) that no one is justified by any part of the Mosaic system of worship and godliness at all!

(i) We have noticed how Paul does **not** reply.¹

(ii) His positive statement does not mention the law.²

There are some additional points we must notice.

(iii) **Paul makes it clear he constantly has the whole law in mind.** 'I bear witness again' – he says – 'to every man who lets himself be circumcised, that he is obliged to keep the whole law'^{□1}.

When he refers to being justified by 'the law' in the next verse he has quite explicitly been referring to the whole law. Paul is concerned about the entire Mosaic covenant with its entire body of legislation. When he says we have died to the law, he cannot be thinking only of ceremonial legislation or Jewish 'boundary-markers' marking out the borders of Jewish culture. True, the Judaizers mainly had Jewish culture in mind, but Paul answers by asserting Christian freedom from the entire Mosaic system.

(iv) **The development of the letter makes this plain.** Consider Galatians 5:12 – 6:18. At this point Paul deals with the life of godliness that arises out of our faith in Christ. But what does he say? Does he say, 'You were justified without circumcision and the law (that is, without Jewish culture). but now you **need** the law in order to live the life of

□1 2:16

^{1 & 2} See Part 11

□1 5:3

godliness'? At any point in his letter does he throw out 'boundary-markers' but then bring the moral aspects of the law back in? No, he does no such thing. He is not throwing out simply marks of Jewish culture; he is throwing out the entire law as a means of justification, and even as a means of sanctification, as we shall see.

5. Romans and Ephesians make the same point

(v) **Paul's teaching elsewhere makes the same point.** The Galatians did not have the advantage of reading their letter alongside Romans. For much of the time we should be reading Galatians without consulting Romans. But we can surely take a glance at Romans to see whether it is likely we have read Galatians aright. Paul makes it quite clear that justification is without any 'good works' of any kind (consider Romans 3:28; 4:5, for example). And think of Ephesians 2:8–10. Nowadays many of those who think that Paul is only dealing with culture **also** deny that Ephesians was written by Paul. So they do not feel obliged to reconcile their teaching with Ephesians 2:8–10. But for those of us who feel that Galatians and Ephesians were both written by Paul, Ephesians 2:8–10 confirms that we have read Galatians aright. And surely even those who doubt whether Ephesians was written by Paul (despite Ephesians 1:1!) must surely agree that its author was a superb interpreter of Paul – at the very least. Do we think our interpretation of Paul is better?

6. Jesus teaching on righteousness fits with what Paul wrote



(vi) **Consider the teaching of Jesus.** The 'ceremonial law' view of Galatians 2:15–16 can only be maintained by ignoring the teaching of Jesus. In Luke 18 we find that Jesus used the word 'justified' ^{□1} or its Aramaic equivalent. Jesus told a parable to people 'who trusted in themselves that they were righteous' ^{□2}. One man told God about his own righteousness. 'I thank you that I am not like other people, thieves, unjust people, adulterers' ^{□3}. Obviously his 'righteousness' is more than Jewish culture. The Pharisee thought he was keeping the ten commandments. The sinner, however, prayed, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner'. He was disclaiming any righteousness at all. Jesus comment is: 'This man went down to his house justified rather than the other' ^{□4}. Surely we must reckon that Paul's view of 'justification' did not contradict Jesus' view of the same subject. We are justified through faith in Christ. We are not justified by anything in the law of God. We are not justified by any 'good works' at all. Christ is our Saviour. We need no one else; we need nothing else.

□1 Luke 18:14

□2 Luke 18:9

□3 Luke 18:11

□4 Luke 18:14

		<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p> 
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