



Romans 3:21-26; Galatians 2:16

Our Perfect Union with Christ

The moment we believed on Christ we were brought into a vital saving relationship with Him. Faith is the means by which this vital union with Christ is established and maintained. Our salvation, life and blessings all come from Christ. They become ours only as we are identified with Him by faith.

The apostle Paul declared Christ who our life (Colossians 3:4a) lives in us and we in Him.

The closeness of relation between Christ and the believer is almost beyond description. Paul pushes language to its limits stressing the closeness of a living relation with Christ. He dwells in us and we in Him. We die to sin in Him. We have been crucified with Him. We have been made alive in Him. We are baptized into Him and into His death. Christ is the head and believers constitute the body. He is the foundation and His people the building. He is the husband and His people the wife. Paul's life is so identified with Christ that his life is a manifestation of the very life of Christ.

Paul describes this vital union with the living Christ as a union with God. The import of this union with Christ is that in Him we come to know God with all that is humanly possible on this earth. It is a decision between knowing God in Christ or not knowing Him personally (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). This union with Christ takes place in the realm of personal spiritual experience (John 3:3). Without spiritual regeneration there is no life in Christ.

Our vital union with Christ centers on the question of how we can be received into God's favor. Is it on the ground of what we do ourselves, or only on the ground of what Jesus Christ does for us? If we expect to have a right relationship with God based on what we do ourselves it is called justification by works. However, if we are seeking a right relationship with God solely on the foundation of what Christ has done for us it is called justification by faith.

Justification by faith means we look to Christ and to Him alone for salvation. We as guilty sinners go pleading Christ's death and righteousness as the only ground of our hope of receiving God's favor and eternal life. We as evangelical Christians believe that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It means pleading the merits of Jesus Christ alone before the throne of grace instead of our own merits of good works, virtue, character, etc.

God has made a perfect provision whereby He can judicially acquit the guilty sinner.

There is no justification for sinful men except by faith. Justification is being pronounced righteous by God. Where can a sinful man get works that are as righteous as God? He definitely cannot from himself. The works, even good works, of a sinful man can lead only to condemnation because all his works are as sinful as

works, even good works, of a sinful man can lead only to condemnation because all his works are as sinful as he is. Sinful man must go out beyond himself to find works that can offer righteousness to God. There is only one place to find such righteousness and that is in the person of Jesus Christ.

"If we are to be justified at all, it must be on the ground of the merits of Another, whose merits can be made ours by faith. And that is the reason why God sent His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have everlasting life. If we do not believe in Him, obviously we must perish. But if we believe in Him, we shall not perish but have everlasting life. That is Justification by Faith. Justification by Faith is nothing other than obtaining everlasting life by believing in Christ. . . And there is none other name under heaven, given among men, wherein we must be saved . . ." (B. B. Warfield).

Everything about us as believers is centered in this great teaching of the Scriptures. Through God's grace we are provided with an open door into the presence of God. We have access into His grace. Only those who have believed in Christ have entered into the door into God's presence. We have access by faith into this grace (Romans 5:2). It gives us standing before God.

The wonderful thing the apostle Paul stresses is that we are not only *saved* by grace, but we now *stand* in grace. This is our new position in Christ. The believer in Christ is ensphered in divine grace. It surrounds us every moment in every situation in life. The same grace that saved us now sustains us.

Because of this legal standing before God we are vitally united to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Because of this vital union with Christ, the believer partakes of all that Christ is. He has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

Among the various ways our vital union with Jesus Christ is illustrated in the Scriptures is in a legal or judicial position in a court of law.

EVERY PERSON IS GUILTY BEFORE GOD.

The Bible confronts us and declares that all mankind has sinned and has come short of the glory of God. The entire world stands guilty before God. No one can answer back to God. There is no individual who is not a sinner and who has not "become accountable to God" (Romans 3:19). The apostle Paul declared " . . . there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . ." (vv. 22b-23). We have all experienced personal sin. We are guilty in the eyes of God and before a watching world.

God infinitely abhors sin. We are all guilty sinners before a righteous and holy God. He is holy and He cannot look upon sin. He cannot tolerate our sin. We stand guilty and condemned in His sight.

God sees the unbelieving sinner as:

God sees the unbelieving sinner as:

- Lost (Matthew 18:11; 2 Corinthians 4:3)
- Guilty (Romans 3:19)
- Spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1)
- Alienated from God (Ephesians 4:18)
- His enemies (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21)
- Children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3)
- Condemned (John 3:18)

Therefore, the age-old question is how we can stand right before God.

NO ONE IS JUSTIFIED BY GOOD WORKS.

The Bible tells us, ". . . by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin" (3:20). Then the apostle Paul tells us the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law (v. 21).

He makes it very clear in Galatians 2:16 where he writes, ". . . a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." He is rather emphatic in his statement. He repeats the negative statement three times just in case we miss the point. He writes, "a man is not justified by the works of the Law," "not by the works of the law," "by the works of the law no flesh will be justified." We can't miss it, can we? The reason why is because "the Scriptures has shut up all men under sin" (Galatians 3:22). It locked us up in prison and threw away the key because we are guilty. It can't set us free. It can't even give us power to overcome sin. All the Law can do is make us more and more conscious of our sin and guilt.

All we sinners can produce is more sinful works. Therefore, we are not right in the sight of God.

Not our merits
Not our character
Not our baptism or sacraments
Not our religious experiences

Not our virtue
Not our faithfulness to the church
Not our church membership

How can a righteous and holy God, therefore, justify the sinner without justifying his sin? How can God save the sinner from the legal penalty and save Himself from compromise? God's own holiness demands the execution of the penalty of sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). "The soul that sins will surely die" (Ezekiel 18:4). God's love and tender mercies longs to rescue sinful, guilty men and at the same time His righteousness demands man's execution because we are guilty.

THE BELIEVING SINNER IS JUSTIFIED AS A GIFT OF GRACE.

A. W. Tozer correctly said, "A real Christian expects to go to Heaven on the virtue of another."

The believing sinner is justified as a gift of God's grace based upon the death of Christ for our sins. We are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith" (Romans 3:24).

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publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith" (Romans 3:24).

God can't just wink His eye and say "boys will be boys, everybody does it." In our day the expression, "we are all sinners" is a popular excuse to go on sinning. For many people there is no contrite conviction in those words. They are nothing more than an excuse for more sinning. Every body does it so why can't I?

In order for God to acquit us of all guilty charges He must first deal with His own righteous standards. He cannot deny Himself and continue to be God. The apostle Paul tells us God can deliver us from the guilt of sin because Jesus Christ paid the debt in full for us on our behalf. Christ is our "propitiation in His blood." It is His bloody sacrifice on the cross that turns away the wrath of God. He bore our death penalty on the cross. The death penalty for our sins was paid in full at the cross. Christ paid it in full by dying on our behalf, and now the wrath of God is completely satisfied against the believing sinner.

The basic idea of salvation by grace through faith in Christ is the substitution of Christ for the sinner before the law of God in His Supreme Court. God sent Jesus Christ, His own Son, to satisfy the penalty of our sins and turn the wrath of God away that we may be justified freely by His grace through faith in His blood.

John R. W. Stott eloquently states: "Jesus Christ came into the world to live and to die. In His life His obedience to the law was perfect. In His death He suffered for our disobedience. On earth He lived the only life of sinless obedience to the law which has ever been lived. On the cross He died for our law-breaking, since the penalty for disobedience to the law was death. All that is required for us to be justified, therefore, is to acknowledge our sin and helplessness, to repent of our years of self-assertion and self-righteousness, and to put our whole trust and confidence in Jesus Christ to save us" (*The Message of Galatians*, p. 62).

The law was fully and completely fulfilled in the perfect obedience of Christ and His vicarious suffering death for our sins. Christ satisfied the just demands of the law of God and the moment the sinner put his faith in Christ God judicially acquitted that sinner. In so doing God does not compromise His holy standard of justice and righteousness. Therefore, Paul says God can remain "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (v. 26). Then he adds, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (v. 28).

Grace repudiates all self-effort in our search for salvation. Grace makes all self-effort foolishness in the sight of God.

How are we declared acquitted? "The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe . . . being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith" (vv. 22-25).

Justification by faith in Christ is our legal *standing* before God. God declares the believing sinner just in His right. The unjust, believing sinner, is accounted and treated as just or righteous before God. Because of the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf on the cross a just and holy God can remain perfectly just and holy and at the same time judicially acquit the believing sinner and give him a right standing before God.

Galatians 2:16 also positively states our justification three times. Paul wrote, "A man is . . . justified . . . through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ . . ."

Faith in Jesus Christ is a personal act of commitment. We have literally believed *into* (*eis*) Christ Jesus.

Justification means to be declared righteous, to be pronounced right in the sight of God. It is the process by

Justification means to be declared righteous, to be pronounced right in the sight of God. It is the process by which a man is brought into a right state in His relationship with God. It is a legal and formal acquittal of all guilt by God who is our Judge. He pronounces and treats, accounts or reckons the guilty, believing sinner as righteous in His relationship with God. God acquits the believer based upon his accepting on his behalf the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:9-20; Galatians 2:16; 3:10-11, 25-26; 5:1, 4).

In fact, over thirty things occurred the very moment we put our faith in Christ including:

- We were born again or regenerated (Titus 3:5; John 3:5, 6; Ephesians 2:1-5).
- We were baptized by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- We were indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).
- We were sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30).
- We received spiritual gifts for ministry (1 Corinthians 12:11).

Because of what Christ has done for us we can now enter into a life-transforming relationship with Him. This vital living union with Christ radically transforms us. We are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). We actually share with the Son of God a unique life.

OUR JUDICIAL ONENESS WITH GOD

Everything in the Christian life depends upon this vital judicial legal union with Christ.

God sees every Christian as being "in Christ." We have this new position in Christ because of our justification by faith. We are in union with Christ and identified with Him in His death, burial, resurrection and exaltation. This new relationship with God applies to all believers.

We are in Christ; He is in us.

- We are crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20).
- We are dead with Christ (Colossians 2:20).
- We are buried with Christ (Romans 6:4).
- Made alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:5).
- We are raised together with Christ (Colossians 3:1).
- We are sufferers together with Christ (Romans 8:17).
- We are glorified together with Christ (Romans 8:17).

Romans chapter six makes it clear that "There has been on the part of every believer, a death unto sin; and a burial with Christ in the sepulchre; and that death and burial are expressed, confessed and symbolized in baptism," write A. T. Pierson. This standing can be understood only in judicial terms.

"We are all of us conscious of no such actual identification with Christ in death and burial. We have never yet really died or been laid in the grave. The only way to interpret these words is to interpret them, not as expressing a historical fact, but a judicial act, something counted or reckoned or imputed to our account by the sovereign mercy and grace of God."

God reckons the believing sinner to be one with Christ and His obedience is imputed to the sinner as his own. God reckons to the believing sinner, as his own the results of the atoning suffering of Christ as the satisfaction for the death penalty for sin.

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Therefore, we have died to the law. By dying *with* Christ, we died under the law's penalty. All of the law's demands were satisfied in Christ. It no longer has a hold on us. The dominating control of the fallen nature has been broken.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

The believer is *in Christ*, in the sight of God and is therefore judged and acquitted as clothed with His righteousness. That is our standing with God based upon the righteousness of Christ.

We have received imputed righteousness on account of faith in Jesus Christ. The ancient Jewish patriarch Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness. Similarly, we believe on Christ and God reckons up righteousness in His sight (Rom. 4:3ff, 22-25).

As a result of justification by faith we have peace with God (Romans 5:1). All controversy between the believing sinner and God is over! Our enmity has been done away with by our acceptance of Christ's death. The verb tense in the original means a once-for-all completed transaction. We have been declared not guilty once and for all.

When God justifies the sinner He actually counts them righteous when they are not. He does not impute sin where sin actually exists, and does impute righteousness where it does not exist.

"He [God] made Him [Jesus Christ] who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

A. T. Pierson wrote, "The believer counts God able to make him alive with His own life and holy with His own holiness. God in turn counts the sinner now dead *in* sin to be dead *to* sin and alive to God, counts him as righteous, and then proceeds to *make* him what he at first only *reckons* him to be (Romans 4:4-8, 17, 21, 22.)"

The old Puritan John Bunyan testified: "Suddenly, this sentence fell upon my soul, *"Thy righteousness is in heaven."* . . . I saw, with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand. . . It was glorious to me to see His exaltation and the worth and prevalency of all His benefits. . . By this also was my faith in Him, as my righteousness the more confirmed in me, for if He and I were one, then His righteousness was mine, His merits mine, His victory also mine. Now I would see myself in heaven and earth at once; in heaven by my Christ, by my head, by my righteousness and life, though on earth by my body or person."

No longer is our life self-centered. The Lord Jesus lives out His life in us day by day as we maintain total dependence on Him by faith.

In summarizing the secret of great Christians who lived Christ-like lives V. Raymond Edman wrote in *They Found the Secret*, p. 152, the following:

Life is not achieved by longing for a better life and lingering at the cross. There must be *appropriation* by faith of the Holy Spirit to fill life with the presence of the Lord Jesus. That obtainment is by faith, and not by works. Inquires the Scripture: "This only would I learn of you, Received the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Galatians 3:2). Just as salvation is by faith, so also is the exchanged life. Just as we accept the Lord Jesus by faith as Savior, so by simple faith we receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Just as we took the Lord as our sin-bearer, we take the Holy Spirit as our burden-bearer. Just as we take the Savior as our penalty for sins that are past, we take the Holy Spirit for power over indwelling sins that are present. The Savior is our atonement; the Holy Spirit is our advocate. In salvation we receive

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present. The Savior is our atonement; the Holy Spirit is our advocate. In salvation we receive newness of life, by the Holy Spirit we find life more abundant. In each case the appropriation is by faith, and by faith alone, wholly apart from any feeling on our part.

Baptism by immersion is the most beautiful symbol of this vital faith-union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection with risen power. We go down into a watery grave, as Christ did, expressing our faith in following Him in His death, burial and resurrection. "God reckons us to have died and been buried when He died and was buried. Judicially it is true, for what happens to our Great Representative is true of all whom He represents," notes Pierson.

All believers in Christ died when Christ died, but the personal appropriation of their death with Christ came later in time when they put their personal trust in Christ. Our baptism is a beautiful picture of our funeral as we are solemnly consigned to our death in Christ. The marvelous message is that we do not remain dead, but we rise with Him from death and even in this world experience the power of His resurrection as men who have already died and risen again.

There are great applications of this great truth to our relationship with God. Faith in Christ makes us one with Him, so that, "in God's sight, what is literally and actually true of Him, becomes judicially, representatively, constructively, true of us. We died when He died; we were buried when He was buried; and as many of us who have been baptized into Christ has been baptized into His death, that is, our baptism was the confession of our identity with Him, and our symbolic putting on of Christ" (Pierson).

Charles G. Trumbull speaks vividly of this new life in Christ: "The resources of the Christian life, my friends, are just –Jesus Christ. . . . I realized for the first time the many references to Christ in you, you in Christ, Christ our life, and abiding in Christ are literal, actual, blessed fact, and not figures of speech. . . . Jesus Christ does not want to be our helper; He wants to be our life. He does not want us to work for Him. He wants us to let Him do His work through us, using us as we use a pencil to write with –better still, using us as one of the fingers of His hand."

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Here are some more studies on justification by faith in Christ. [Romans Series](#)

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