

JUSTIFICATION and the book of JAMES

The book of Romans declares that a man is justified “*by faith without the deeds of the law.*” The book of James says that “*by works a man is justified, but not by faith only.*” In one denominational corner is ‘faith only’ as the means of salvation, and in the other corner is ‘faith plus works.’ Each viewpoint can be supported by its own collection of passages. Does the Scripture teach two opposing views? It cannot be true that a man is saved by faith only and also by faith plus works. According to the following verse, no mixture is possible. “*And if by grace then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work*” (Romans 11:6). How then do we determine the truth of the matter?

One’s personal opinion (or the particular traditional one inherited) is of no importance. If one blindly adheres to a view without personally

investigating all Scripture, he is a candidate for deception. We should be careful not to make creeds or respected men our final authority. When we allow someone else to interpret God's word for us, they become our final authority and we are trusting our eternal soul's destiny to them.

The common approach is to emphasize the Scripture that supports one's own view and to discredit any verses that support the opposing view. No belief should be accepted without considering all Scripture. I encourage each student to do his own personal investigation of what God has said. What follows is a record of my study. Every step by which I reach my conclusion is fully documented. If I have erred, you should be able to follow the path I took to reach my conclusion, and then to point out my fallacious reasoning. I believe that I am open to correction. I trust you are willing to be honest with your own spirit and reason. May the Holy Spirit guide us into all truth. "*What saith the Scripture?*"

METHOD OF STUDY

The smallest common denominator in understanding a book or passage is the definition of its individual key words. Since the issue before us is *justification*, we will examine every Biblical usage of the word *justify*. The word *justify* (in its various forms) appears 43 times in the Holy Bible.

As is true with any book, the Bible is its own best dictionary. So we will examine every time the word *justify* is used so we can make an accurate determination of how the writers defined the words they were using. Most people would skip this step because they assume they already know what it means. What you are going to discover is that the word *justify* is not a synonym for the

new birth. It is not just a theological word. Let us look at every verse on the subject. Remember, our primary objective is to discover the Biblical definition of the word. We don't care how theologians or writers have defined it.

WISDOM JUSTIFIED

Matthew 11:19 - “...*wisdom is justified of her children.*” Did you know that wisdom needed to be justified? Wisdom is set over against foolishness every day. Men are ever choosing between the two. The fruit of those who have lived by wisdom (the children of wisdom) justifies wisdom over foolishness.

Luke 7:35 - “*But wisdom is justified of all her children.*” These two verses serve to reinforce the obvious truth that the word *justified* has a broader meaning than its theological use—that of God justifying the sinner.

MAN JUSTIFYING GOD

Luke 7:29 - “... *and the publicans justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.*” God said that men were guilty and needed repentance. When men obeyed John in baptism, they were agreeing with God about their sinful condition. The act of obedience thereby justified God in his assessment of them (“...*the ax is laid at the root of the tree.*”).

Psalms 51:4 - “*Against thee...have I...done this evil...that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest...*” David made a confession in order that God would be seen as guiltless in his chastisement of David. David was publicly saying, “*God is righteous in all things.*”

Romans 3:4 - “...*let God be true, but every*

man a liar; ...That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings....” If man and God disagree, let us demonstrate, as Paul did, that God is true and every man is a liar. God is thereby justified in all he has said. If God can be justified, then we will have to come up with a broader definition than one that is just a synonym for the new birth.

MAN SEEKS TO JUSTIFY (OR DOES JUSTIFY) HIMSELF BEFORE GOD OR HIS FELLOW MAN

Isaiah 43:9 - *“[W]ho among them can declare this, and shew us former things? let them bring forth witnesses, that they may be justified.”* God challenges a supposed prophet to justify his claim to have prophetic ability by bringing forth witnesses to validate his prophecy and its fulfillment.

Job 11:2 - *“...and should a man full of talk be justified?”* Job’s friends were trying to prove that his trials were a result of his sin. Job answered their charges by proving his innocence. They responded to his defense with the above proverb. *“Should a man who talks in his own defense be justified [proven right] by his words?”*

Job 13:18 - *“I know that I shall be justified.”* Job, knowing that he had no secret sin which would cause such judgment from God, believed that in time he would be justified [vindicated] before the public regarding his innocence.

Job 32:2 - *“...because he justified himself rather than God.”* Job’s friend became angry because Job did not accept the blame for his apparent chastisement from God. If Job had testified that he was suffering the just reward of his sins, his friend would have considered Job to have justified God rather than himself.

Isaiah 5:23 - "...which justify the wicked for reward." Woe to the drunks who, for purposes of reward, try to cover and defend the sins of the wicked. He is not claiming that a drunk who is properly paid has special powers to forgive a wicked person. (Sounds like a priest, doesn't it?)

Jeremiah 3:11 - "...backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah." Though Israel was also wicked and unrepentant so as to merit the severe judgment of God, the prophet said that, in comparison to treacherous Judah, Israel had justified herself. Her self-justification didn't forgive her sins or stop the judgment of God.

Ezekiel 16:51 - 52 - "...and hath justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done." This is an interesting use of the word justified. God said to Judah that because his sin was so much worse than Sodom's, whom God had long since destroyed, that by comparison, Judah had justified Sodom. In contrast to the greater sins of Judah, Sodom was vindicated. Remember that "*justified Sodom*" was nonetheless already in Hell.

Luke 10:29 - "*But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?*" Jesus had told this lawyer that he must love his neighbor in order to be saved. To escape his accusing conscience, the lawyer asked, "*Who is my neighbour?*" If he could limit the circle of those he called *neighbor*, he felt that he would be vindicated (justified) in his record of having loved his neighbor.

Luke 16:15 - "*Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts.*" Just as the lawyer (above) sought

to justify himself before men, so does Jesus' audience. One justifies himself before men by living so as to always look good to his fellow man.

Matthew 12:37 - *“For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”* On judgment day, we will give an account for every spoken word. Based on those words alone, we will be vindicated or accused. Again, the issue here is not God justifying the sinner from all things, but the sinner justifying himself. Based on his words, no man will ever be justified before God. Every man's words are sufficient to condemn him. Unless he is under the provisions of grace, he will be condemned.

1 Corinthians 4:4 - *“For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified....”* Paul's faithfulness as a steward of the mysteries of God had been called into question. Yet he believed that his record of faithfulness justified his claim to apostleship.

James 2:21 - *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered....”* Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). In this act of obedience he justified his claim to faith. Abraham did not impute righteousness to himself; that had occurred forty years earlier based on faith alone. His claim to faith was justified by his works. It looks altogether different in light of a Scriptural definition, doesn't it?

James 2:24 - *“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”* This passage does not say that God justifies a man based on faith and works, but that the man by his works justifies himself in his claim to having