



The Just and the Unjust

Many centuries ago a man named Job posed a question that every religion has sought to answer. “*How can a man be just before God?*” Its answer will never be found in a religion because all religion is of man and severs to flatter his fallen heart. It is a question that only God can answer, because it is *His* holiness that determines the judicial standard required for our justification before Him. Our purpose is to examine Job’s question and declare God’s singular answer to it. We will consider the *principle* underlying Job’s question; the *plight* of Job that gave occasion to it and the implication this has for man, as well as the *provision* and *privileges* bestowed by God in the light of it. Finally, we note the *punishment* in store for all who ignore God’s answer as to how a person can be just before Him.

The principle facing Job - Justification

Job desired to know how a person can stand before God and be declared “just,” that is, be justified. “Justification” is a legal term which means that no charge of guilt can be brought against a person. It goes beyond “forgiveness.” Though we may forgive a wrongful act, the guilt of having committed that wrongful act remains. Furthermore, when we consider the principle of justification in the context of the Bible, we discover the deeper and marvelous meaning of it. To be justified means to be put into a place or position where God is *forever unable* to bring a charge of guilt against a person. This place is one of eternal righteousness which was purchased for everyone by the Son of God when He died on the cross. In His death, He bore the infinite wrath of God against sin that had offended a Holy God. The infinite value of this work was demonstrated by His resurrection and ascension to God’s right hand. Christ “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom 4:25). Because of this, God is able to offer everyone the opportunity to enter that place which Christ has purchased by His shed blood.

The plight of Job

There are three things that prompted Job’s inquiry. First we have Job’s *degradation in sin*. Job realized that he was an “unjust” person in the sight of a holy God. His very question reveals this to be so. Second, his question reveals that he knew he was under God’s *condemnation in sin*, i.e., he had a responsibility to deal with his guilt due to his sin. He needed to become “just” before God. Third, Job’s question betrays the reality of his *incapacitation in sin*. Sin not only degraded and condemned Job, it rendered him helpless. There was nothing that he could do to alter his guilty standing before God. These three conditions prevented Job having peace with God and they were an obstacle to him coming into the presence of God. Justification enables peace with God and permits a guilty sinner to enter His presence and glory.

The plight of mankind

The Bible informs us that we all share the plight of Job. We are all under the degradation of sin. We are all born in sin and shapen in iniquity. “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps 51:5). “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa 64:6). Paul confirms the ruin of man under sin. “As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10). Because we are all guilty in sin we come under the condemnation of God. “Wherefore, as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). “Therefore as by the offence of one [Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (Rom 5:18). We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). Finally, we have all been rendered helpless to save ourselves because we are morally corrupted by sin and our natural thoughts are not according to the holy mind of God. As noted above, all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags before God. Paul confirms this truth when he writes to Titus. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit 3:5). The message of Scripture is clear and solemn – one of man’s universal **degradation, condemnation** and **incapacitation** in sin. How then can a person be just before God? We need to look to God and to His grace to provide the way for a guilty person to be able to stand justified before Him.

The provision of God

In the light of man's *universal* guilt and helplessness in sin and the propitiating work that His Son did in bearing God's wrath against sin, God has provided *the* way by which man can be just before Him. It is a provision made through divine grace. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to declare the universal nature of that grace. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Tit 2:11). This provision, we observed, was a place – a standing in eternal righteousness that was purchased by the shed blood of His Son at Calvary. It is a place offered to all, for all have sinned. We enter it upon faith in Christ, because it is on the principle of faith that God **imputes** righteousness to us. It is not that I become righteous in *myself* or that Christ's righteousness is *imparted* to me; but that when God looks upon me He no longer sees a guilty sinner in Adam, but one who *stands* in the righteousness of Christ – therefore I am without guilt and charge - forever. "For He [God] hath made Him [Christ] to be sin [a sin offering] for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). It is, we note, an infinitely blessed provision because it is never my righteousness, but the "righteousness of God" which, being of God, it can never fail. Along with everyone else who has placed faith in Christ as his or her personal Saviour, I am "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6). How blessed! Why, then, if you are relying on your righteous works to gain a just standing before God – do you persist with it? "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom 10:3).

The imputation of righteousness by God (its reckoning) upon faith is a glorious principle of justification found in the Old and New Testaments. Abraham "believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:6). "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom 4:5).

The privileges of justification

God offers peace. But it must be on His terms - **righteousness**. There can be no peace without righteousness and there can be no righteousness without God. It is a lesson that the world has yet to learn. It will learn it during the coming millennial reign of Christ – the Sun of Righteousness, even the Priest-King after the order of Melkizedec, the king of righteousness and peace. Peace is the divine promise that a guilty sinner can only appropriate through **repentance**. And what is repentance? It is acknowledging our sin and guilt before God and accepting by faith the provision that He has made for the removal of it – justification through faith. "Therefore being justified [standing in the righteousness of Christ] by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom 5:1-2). The justified are also privileged in that they are able to enter the **presence** of God and worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Only those who are justified – righteous before God, are able to come boldly into His presence, because they are purged worshippers, perfected forever having no more conscience of sins (Heb 10:14; Heb 10:2).

The punishment of God

Here then is the solemn finale to Job's question. If I am "unjust," I stand in the place of unrighteousness. I stand guilty in sin before God because I have rejected His gracious provision. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Pet 3:18). Because He is righteous and holy, God *must* judge unrighteousness wherever He finds it. He will *never* find it in the believer in Christ who, because of his or her faith, stands forever in the righteousness of His Beloved Son – accepted in Him – as we have noted. However, God will see the unrighteousness in all who are outside of Christ. Righteous is the infinite divide between the "just" and the "unjust." There will be "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust," the latter unto eternal punishment (Acts 24:15). How can a man be just before God? By accepting through faith His way of salvation provided freely in His Son. "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17; Heb 10:38; Hab 2:4). God is "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom 3:26).

"O Joy of the justified, joy of the free!
I'm washed in that crimson tide opened for me;
In Christ my Redeemer, rejoicing I stand,
And point to the prints of the nails in His hand" (F Bottome)