

The Wednesday Word, September 6, 2003: Is There a Difference?

There may well be many counted righteous before God who are far from having a crystal-clear understanding of the great and excellent doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Some people get very confused about Justification. However, it is not by believing various doctrinal truths that we are saved. Doctrine, although necessary and vital for growth in the Christian life, does not bring salvation. Salvation comes by believing in and on the Lord Jesus. It is by trusting Jesus that a sinner is saved.

Take, the simple example of Justification and Pardon. A believer may confuse these terms and yet be saved. Of course, there are some who say that pardon, and justification, mean one and the same thing, and that these terms may be used as interchangeable expressions. But the truth is, pardon and justification convey entirely different meanings. Let's look at this for a moment.

Pardon. When someone is pardoned, they remain guilty of the crimes they committed. However, the Judge has declared that the punishment due to the criminal has been remitted and cancelled. A pardon pays neither for the crimes committed nor declares that they were not carried out. Concerning pardon the scriptures ask, *"Who is a God like unto thee, that **pardoneth** iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.* (Micha 7:18). When it comes to pardon, transgressions are passed by ... not wiped out.

In the New Covenant, it is interesting to note there are no instances where God issues a pardon. Pardon for crimes is an Old Covenant idea. In the New Covenant, however, there is a much better way of dealing with sin and sins.

Justification. When someone is justified it means much more than pardon. It means that they are declared to be not guilty of the crimes with which they have been charged. They are acquitted! In addition, they are counted righteous, not merely innocent, for the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to them through faith.

The Lord Jesus bore their punishment as the full and final offering for sins.

Sin had to be paid for.

Why?

Because God is a Just God.

Sin could not be left unpunished. As the substitute for His people, therefore, Jesus was punished with the punishment we deserve ... death. He fulfilled all the righteous demands of heaven on our behalf. He was the substitute, and now His believing people are justified. We are declared not guilty, which means we didn't do the crimes in the first place.

Because of this, we have an undivided dependence on Jesus for salvation. As believers, we place our entire trust in Him. All dependence on works, whether ceremonial or moral, for justification has been abolished as a deadly error. To those who trust in their works and righteousness, no hope of salvation is given by the Bible. As Spurgeon said, "One has a better chance of crossing the Ocean in a paper boat than of getting to heaven by our works and good deeds."

God never taught anyone, either by His Word or by His Spirit, to trust in anything other than the Lord Jesus for acceptance in Heaven.

One old-time gospel preacher put it like this:

“When I shall be summoned to the great tribunal, what will be my plea, what my dependence? Nothing but Christ! Christ, I would say, has been wounded for my sins, therefore they will not be punished in me. Christ has fulfilled all righteousness in my stead, therefore I trust to be justified when I am judged. I am a poor unworthy sinner; but worthy is the Lamb that was slain, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, for whose sake I shall receive both mercy, and everlasting glory. This is my only hope....”

James Hervey, 1714 – 1758.

And that’s the Gospel Truth!