

The concept of Redemption in the Bible comes from the slave-markets. This is such an important idea that we should first define clearly what slavery is. Webster's dictionary defines slavery in this way: "Bondage; the state of entire subjection of one person to the will of another. Slavery is the obligation to labor for the benefit of the master, without the contract of consent of the servant."¹

A slave was the personal possession of His slave-owner. The slave-owner owned him in exactly the same way that he might own a donkey or a piece of land. It is important to understand that the slave was a possession, and had no rights or privileges except whatever the slave-owner might grant to him. He was not free to leave his owner. Everything the slave may have, such as clothing, shelter or food belonged to the slave-owner. Should someone give the slave a gift of some sort, that also belonged to his master. Even the slave's wife or children belonged to the slave-owner. The slave could be sold at a slave-market, but his family remained the possession of the slave-owner, and remained slaves. The slave had no rights and no freedom. The only way he could gain freedom is for someone to pay a ransom price for him and set him free.

It is this hopeless condition that we find ourselves in, and which Redemption addresses. Redemption is defined as "setting free from slavery by the payment of a ransom price." As we saw in our study on Sin, we are all in slavery to sin (see John 8:34, Rom 6:16, 2Pet 2:19). We are also in bondage (slavery) to the fear of death (see Heb 2:15), and to the devil (see 2Tim 2:26). There are no exceptions. Every single human being (with the exception of Jesus Christ) is born in a state of slavery to sin, lives in slavery to sin, and unless God intervenes to save him, will die in slavery to sin and face the consequences of God's righteous judgment on sin.

CHAPTER 13 - REDEMPTION

1. When did you first realise that you were in slavery to sin, and how did that make you feel?

For some people, this realisation occurs at salvation. If you were saved out of a deeply sinful lifestyle, such as drugs, crime,

¹ Webster's Dictionary, as found in The Word Bible software

prostitution, etc, you may have experienced deep conviction of sin at the time of your conversion.

Some who grew up in religious families may have reached the point of despair in their efforts to be moral, obey all the necessary rules and rituals that they believed were needed for salvation, and recognized their slavery at that point.

Others grow up in Christian homes and churches, hearing the gospel regularly, until one day they get the revelation of their bondage, and turning to Christ in that moment.

You may have even been a Christian for decades, and never thought about it until you read about sin in chapter 7 of Bitesize Theology.

There are as many variations on this as there are believers. My own personal experience was one of receiving deep conviction and a sense of brokenness before God during worship in church, after many years as a believer. This conviction was not condemnation, however. The two are not identical. I had a sense of just how lost I had been before Christ saved me, and how much my rebellion had cost Him. But it was accompanied by a sense of great joy and overwhelming gratitude that He would choose to love me and save me in spite of my sinfulness. There are no words in human languages to adequately describe the experience, but I'm sure many of you know it for yourselves.

2. Gal 3:13 says that we are redeemed from the curse of the law. What is this curse? (Check Deut 27:26, Deut 21:23).

The law demands perfection. Not obeying the whole Law of God perfectly brings deserved punishment, and in this case, that punishment is death. Crucifixion was a sign that a person had been rejected by man and cut off from the earth, and also abandoned by God and therefore cut off from heaven. "They that see him thus hanging between heaven and earth, will conclude him abandoned of both, and unworthy of either."² You will recall Jesus' words on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). For Jesus, crucifixion really did represent abandonment. Even His friends betrayed Him, denied Him, and fled.

² *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, as found in The Word Bible software

To the Jewish mind, being hanged on a tree was the greatest curse and greatest shame, and the greatest sign of rejection that anyone could experience.

When Jesus' lifeless body was taken down from the Cross, it was a sign that the requirements of the Law had been fully satisfied, and that the punishment was complete, and no more punishment was required to satisfy the justice of God.

3. Describe some of the benefits of redemption as found in Ex 6:6, Ex 15:13, Ps 34:22, 130:7-8, Is 43:1-2, Is 44:21-22, Is 62:11-12, Rom 3:23-25, Gal 4:4-5, Heb 9:11-12, and any other Scriptures you may find.

Ex 6:6 Freedom from slavery; genuine freedom

Ex 15:13 Guided and led with love

Ps 34:22 Safety, refuge, acceptance, freedom from condemnation

Ps 130:7-8 Abundant redemption and removal of sin; unfailing

Is 43:1-2 Removal of fear, personal relationship and protection

Is 44:21-22 Belong to God who will not forget them, sins removed and God's call to return

Is 62:11-12 Sought out by God, separated from the world and never forsaken; salvation; together with other people

Hos 13:14 Ransomed from death and with no fear of death (compare 1Cor 15:55)

Luke 21:25-28 Confidence to stand before the Lord when He returns

Rom 3:23-25 Justification, at no cost to us but without money (compare Isa 52:3)

Rom 8:23 Adoption as sons and redeemed (renewed) bodies

1Cor 1:30 United to Christ, with wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification

Gal 3:13 Set free from the curse of the Law

Gal 4:4-5 Set free from the Law and adopted as sons; full rights as sons

Eph 1:7-8 Forgiveness of sins, and grace lavished on us

Eph 4:30 Sealed by the Holy Spirit

Col 1:13-14 Forgiveness of sins

Tit 2:13-14 Set free from lawlessness, purified for God, and zealous to serve Him with good works

Heb 9:11-15 Eternal redemption from sin at a cost to Christ, and a clean conscience before God; Christ as our high priest; freedom from slavery to dead works and zealous to do good works

Rev 14:3-4 Eternity in the presence of God

When God chose to redeem, He did not do it on the basis of a wishy-washy "love" for people, as if He would choose to redeem them while ignoring their sins and turning a blind eye to them. Were an earthly judge to behave in this way towards a guilty criminal just because he loved him, we would be outraged at the injustice of it, and demand he be removed from his position.

Rather, He did it at enormous cost to Himself. He did not ignore sin, but dealt with it by offering His own Son as the sacrifice in our place. This, then, became the basis for His act of redemption towards us. We have been redeemed without cost to ourselves (see Isa 52:3 and Rom 3:24).

Redemption is based on the historical fact of the death of Jesus Christ, which made atonement to God for sin. We will see more of the significance and importance of this in the answer to question 3 in the Justification study.

Two passages in Ephesians help to throw more light in this subject. Eph 4:30 tells us that we have been "sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption." Eph 1:11-14 reminds us that we have obtained an inheritance in Christ, and we have been "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance." In another picture from Bible times, a merchant may import a load of timber from another country. When the ship arrived in port, a servant would go down to the docks and mark it with his master's seal. This then guaranteed that the goods would be set aside for the merchant to come and collect at a later time. No one else could claim the goods, no one else could take them away, and no one else could pretend to be the merchant. The merchant would identify himself by matching the seal put on the goods by the servant and could then redeem his purchase.

What a wonderful picture this is of how God has purchased us, sealed us for Himself, and will guarantee our collection at the right time. What comfort, what security, what confidence and peace this should bring to the believer. Our inheritance is guaranteed, because of the seal of Holy Spirit placed on us. Think of this also in terms of Rom 8:32 "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" If God gave the most precious thing in all the universe for us, how will He withhold anything from us?

CHAPTER 14 - JUSTIFICATION

We now come to what may be the most important theological concept of all. Justification is a legal term, which means to declare someone just or not guilty. All sin is law-breaking (see 1Jn 3:4). So, we all incur guilt that has to be forgiven, and wrath that has to be propitiated.³

Easton's Bible Dictionary describes Justification like this: "... it is the judicial act of God, by which he pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ, and accounts, accepts, and treats them as righteous in the eye of the law, i.e., as conformed to all its demands. In addition to the pardon of sin, justification declares that all the claims of the law are satisfied in respect of the justified. It is the act of a judge and not of a sovereign. The law is not relaxed or set aside, but is declared to be fulfilled in the strictest sense; and so the person justified is declared to be entitled to all the advantages and rewards arising from perfect obedience to the law (see Rom 5:1-10)."⁴

The Westminster Shorter Catechism explains Justification in this way: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone."⁵

The doctrine of Justification by faith is of particular importance to the apostle Paul. The verb and noun form of the word 'justify' occur forty-one times in the New Testament, thirty-one of them in Paul's writings. JI Packer explains justification as "God's act of remitting the sins of, and reckoning righteousness to, ungodly sinners freely, by His grace, through faith in Christ, on the ground, not of their own works, but of the representative righteousness and redemptive, propitiatory, substitutionary blood-shedding of Jesus Christ on their behalf."⁶ Every phrase in that definition is important and carefully thought out. I would recommend that you read it again, slowly and carefully, and then read it again.

³ You will remember that Propitiation is the act of turning away wrath, and making the offended party "favourably disposed" towards the one who caused the offense.

⁴ *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, as found in The Word Bible software

⁵ *Westminster Shorter Catechism of 1647*, as found in The Word Bible software

⁶ From JI Packer, *18 Words – The most important words you will ever know*. For the parts of that definition, see Rom 3:23-26; 4:5-8; 5:18-19

Before going any further, we should note that the words 'just, justify, justification, righteous and righteousness' all come from the same root word in the original Greek. So when we read about righteousness, we are reading about the result of justification. And when we read about someone who is justified, we are reading about someone whom God had declared righteous.

The greatest thinkers and theologians since Bible times have agreed with Paul on the importance of the doctrine of Justification by faith. Martin Luther said, "The article of Justification is the master and prince, the lord and ruler, the judge over all other kinds of doctrines... This doctrine alone begets, nourishes, builds and preserves and defends the Church of God and without it the Church cannot endure, not even for one hour." Thomas Watson said, "Justification is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. An error about justification is dangerous, like a defect in a foundation. Justification by Christ is a spring of the water of life."

Packer says of the doctrine of Justification by faith, "The entire evangelical knowledge of saving grace, a right view of all of these things, is not possible without a right view of Justification." Larry Danner says, "Getting the doctrine of Justification wrong is not just a matter of being right or wrong. It is more important than that. It's not just an issue of right and wrong, it's an issue of heaven and hell."

If these men are right, and I believe they are, we would do well then to make the study of this doctrine a priority.

1. Pronouncing sinners righteous seems to fly in the face of Scripture (see Gen 18:25, Deut 25:1, Prov 17:15, 18:5). How, then, can God punish the innocent Jesus for our sins, and set us free from guilt and condemnation? (Check out Rom 3:20-28, Rom 4:22-25, Rom 5:12-21).

This question will be answered more fully when we come to Chapter 16—Union with Christ, and I don't want to preempt that study, but a few comments here will be helpful. You will recall from Chapter 10—Regeneration that "... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation..." (2Cor 5:17). The process of Regeneration actually and really places us in Christ. We become united to Him in such a way that when the Father looks at us, He sees Christ, and when He looks at Christ, He sees us (see Gal 3:27, Phil 3:9, Isa 61:10 and Rev 21:2). In essence, we are connected with Christ (by faith) in such a way that we are one with Him.

Just as believers are connected with Christ, all of humanity is connected with Adam. This raises another important theological concept: "Federal Headship."⁷ Adam is not just our natural head, in the sense that we have all descended from him. He is the federal head of all humanity. As our federal head, he represents all of us, and his act of sin is justly considered our act of sin, and we are held responsible for this. This is the doctrine of Original Sin, which Scripture gives abundant evidence of, as we saw in Chapter 7-Sin. We have been born with Adam's corrupted nature, and with all the penalties due to us for our sinfulness.

Federal headship is a strange sounding term, but not such a strange idea. We experience this in everyday life. For instance, a team-leader at work may agree to have certain tasks completed by a set time. As a consequence, he has put his whole team under obligation to do the necessary work to meet the deadline. He is their representative, their federal head, and they are responsible to fulfill the act and commitment of their representative.

Or to give another example, our country's leader could declare war on another nation. This declaration of war by one man sets the whole population against the other nation, and makes them enemies. Everyone suffers the consequences to some degree of the decision of the federal head of their nation to go to war. For some, it will mean armed conflict and death, for others it may merely be changed economic circumstances as the cost of the war takes its toll on society, or restrictions on travel. But everyone is affected somehow by the choices and acts of their federal head, even those who did not vote for him. And if your nation loses the war, the potential consequences could be wholesale slaughter of some of the population, and slavery for all.

Some may object that the idea of federal headship is unfair. Why should we be held responsible for Adam's sin? Firstly, because this is the way God has designed it. As the potter, He has the right to do whatever He likes with the clay (see Rom 9:20-22). But secondly, because it is a pattern, an example of how He intends to save. The principle of federal headship applies to those who place their trust in

⁷ Federal Headship means that one person stands as leader and representative of a certain group of people. Adam's federal headship means that Adam represents all of the human race, and therefore we all inherit Adam's qualities, his advantages and his disadvantages (in this case, his sinful nature). In the same way, Jesus Christ is the federal head of all those who would believe, so that we might inherit His qualities and advantages (obviously, there can be no disadvantages with the Lord).

Jesus Christ to be set free from their sins. Jesus Christ is the federal head of all who would believe in Him. The only way to be saved is for Jesus Christ to become your federal head, replacing Adam. Thus, Jesus Christ becomes our representative, and our substitute.

When Jesus Christ becomes our federal head, all the penalties that were due to us as partakers of Adam's sin are replaced by all the blessings that are given to us as partaker's of Christ's righteousness. This is extremely important. If we reject the federal headship of Jesus Christ as the basis for salvation, we are left only with our own works to please God and gain acceptance with Him. And we have seen only too well in previous studies that we are unable to meet God's standards. We will instead earn the just reward for our labours: death. (Rom 6:23) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This introduces another concept that is important to Justification, one that comes from the field of banking and accountancy. This is the idea of crediting, or accounting, or imputing righteousness.⁸ When we are born again and justified, our sins are credited to Jesus Christ, and He bears the punishment for them on our behalf. At the same time, His righteousness is credited to us. This is the Great Exchange: our sins for His righteousness. (2Co 5:21, 1Pet 3:18) "For our sake he made him to be sin (that's the embodiment of everything evil and opposed to God) who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (that's everything good and pure and acceptable to God)."

It was God who appointed His own Son to stand in the place of sinners (see Acts 2:23, 4:27-28 and Isa 53:10). Be careful that you don't misunderstand this. God made Christ to be sin; He did not make Him to be a sinner. Jesus Christ lived and died sinless in thought, word and deed. Instead, He was made sin on our behalf. Our sin was imputed, accounted, reckoned, credited to Him.

Imagine a rich uncle leaving you a small fortune in his will. That money would be deposited in your bank account, crediting your account with money that you didn't have before. This is exactly what God does when He credits Christ's righteousness to us. It is not as if this is a mere fiction, as if an accountant has "cooked the books," to make it look like there is money where there is really none. Rather, it is a reality. The perfect righteousness of Christ is

⁸ The Greek word *logizomai* is variously translated as "account, reckon, record, impute, keep account of, charge," all terms drawn from to banking and accountancy.

credited to us. We are then accounted as having perfectly kept the Law of God in all its points on the basis of a real union with Christ. Justification is always "in Christ" (Gal 2: 17).

John MacArthur says, "On the Cross, God treated Christ as if He had committed all the sins of every sinner who would ever believe, so that He could treat believers as if they had lived Christ's perfect life." This is how God can "be just, and the justifier of [those who believe] in Jesus" (Rom 3:26). This is how He can pardon sinners and treat them as righteous without compromising His own righteousness or lowering His perfect standards in every way.

2. If all our sins, past, present and future, have now been punished in Jesus, and forgiven forever, doesn't that give us a licence to sin? (Check out Rom 6, 7 & 8).

Not at all. In fact, the opposite is true. Salvation means more than just forgiveness. It includes a changed heart (regeneration) that now is inclined towards obedience, not disobedience (see Jer 24: 7 & Ezek 36:27), and union with Christ that makes us a new creation (2Cor 5: 17). His laws are now written on our heart (Jer 31: 33, 2Cor 3: 3), meaning that we now have an inner desire to obey, not an external compulsion.

Imagine being saved from bankruptcy and destitution by a generous person. Wouldn't that make you grateful enough to want to do something in return? Or imagine falling into a swollen, raging river, and being rescued from certain death by a stranger who lost his own life in the process. Would you want to bless his family, and serve them in some way out of sheer thankfulness for your salvation? Even our earthly experience reveals to us that a natural response to being saved from disaster is to seek to repay the favour in some way.

How much more, then, when we realize we have been saved from the furious wrath of God, and the accompanying eternal destruction, would we want to give thanks to God and serve Him in some way? We can never hope to repay God, for we do not have the means to do so. But we will have a changed attitude and heart towards Him, with a desire to bless Him in return.

In fact, the desire to continue in sin, or to abuse the privilege of salvation, is quite possibly a mark that the person has never actually been saved, in spite of any claims or protests to the

contrary. As we saw in Ezek 36:27, having a new heart and new spirit within us will cause us to be careful to obey God.

Sanctification is not instant, but an ongoing process. A transformed mind and behaviour is also an ongoing process, and it often takes time to see the fruit of justification in a person's life. So we must allow for the fact that a new believer will not necessarily be completely changed in their outward actions immediately. But a heart desire to abuse the privilege of salvation, rather than to seek the Lord, and seek to be conformed to the image of Christ, tells a tale that the mouth may deny.

3. The reformer Martin Luther believed that the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, was the heart of the gospel. What do you think he meant by this?

"The reason why the doctrine of justification is central to the gospel is that God's basic relationship to us as His rational creatures is that of Lawgiver and Judge, so that our standing before Him is always determined by His holy law. The sinner's first problem, therefore, is to get right with God's law, for until he is right with the law he cannot be right with God whose law it is. As long as the law condemns him, true worship and fellowship with God are impossible for him. The gospel of justification, however, solves his problem by showing him how, through faith in Christ, the condemning voice of the law against him may be silenced for ever. Now he may draw near, unafraid, to worship his Maker... Thus the knowledge of one's justification is the basis of all true religion. It has always been so; it always will be."⁹

Rom 4:25 tells us that Jesus Christ "... was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." Just as a criminal may spend time in prison as the penalty for his crime, his release from prison is evidence that the requirements of the law and judgment against him have been met. In like manner, Jesus' death paid the penalty for our sins, and His resurrection is the evidence that the payment was sufficient acceptable to God.

This in a nutshell is the gospel. We are guilty sinners; Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sin; Jesus Christ was resurrected; we can now stand before God without guilt.

⁹ Packer again, 18 Words

This one verse of Scripture alone (Rom 4:25) is sufficient to tell us just how important the resurrection is. There are many today who claim the resurrection never really happened, that it is a story made up by His followers or by the church in later years.¹⁰ If Christ has not been resurrected, then we have no justification, and therefore we have no hope of ever being able to stand in the presence of God. Our only prospect is eternal destruction in the fires of hell.

The apostle Paul made this abundantly clear when he wrote about resurrection in 1Cor 15.

¹²Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied (1Cor 15: 12-19).

Do you see what Paul is saying? If Christ has not been raised, then forgiveness is not possible. If Christ has not been raised, then we remain in our guilt, rebellion and sin, and still under the just condemnation of a holy God.

It is inconsistent to claim that the resurrection never happened, and yet claim forgiveness for sins. In fact, I would go further and state that it is impossible to reject the resurrection, but claim forgiveness. The two stand or fall together. I would go further still, and point out that, according to Paul, Christianity itself stands or falls on the truth of the resurrection. If it never happened, then our faith is in vain (v. 14), our faith is futile (v. 17), we are fools to be pitied (v. 19).

¹⁰ Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code* popularised ancient Gnostic beliefs that denied Christ's death and resurrection. But, it is not just the non-Christians who claim this. Tragically, there are 'Christian' leaders around the world who make similar claims. Bishop John Shelby Spong, an American Presbyterian minister makes the claim in a number of books that have had worldwide sales. Dr Francis Macnab, an Australian Uniting Church minister and author with an international reputation echoes him. Unfortunately, they are not alone. And many who think themselves Christian believers today accept this heresy without question and without qualm.

Preachers waste everyone's time (v. 14), and even worse, misrepresent God (v. 15), if Jesus Christ has not been raised.

Thinking back, then, to Rom 4:25, He was "raised for our justification," do you see just how central, how vital this doctrine is?

"To 'justify' in the Bible means to 'declare righteous': to declare, that is, of a man on trial, that he is not liable to any penalty, but is entitled to all the privileges of those who have kept the law. Justifying is the act of a judge pronouncing the opposite sentence to condemnation – that of acquittal and legal immunity. It is an act of the law which settles a person's relationship to the law."¹¹

The law makes two demands on sinners: it demands their full obedience to God's commandments, and that, being transgressors, they fully bear the law's penalties. We could never meet these demands. Praise God that it has already been done by the Lord Jesus Christ acting in our name. He became obedient unto death (Phil 2:8). He obeyed perfectly, and He died to bear the penal curse of the law in our place.

Justification is not an act of inner transformation (this occurs at Regeneration, and continues with Sanctification), but an act of conferring a legal status and canceling a legal liability. Justification is a changed position, not a changed state. It is a double-sided blessing, saving us from the past and securing for us the future. It involves the pardon of sin and the ending of our exposure to God's enmity and wrath (by reconciliation to Him – see Acts 13:39; Rom 4:6; 5:9-11). It also involves the bestowal of the status of righteous man and entitlement to all the blessings God promises to the just, which includes adoption (Gal 4:4-6; Rom 8:14-17), peace with God (Rom 5:1), access to grace (Rom 5:2) and hope of glory (Rom 5:2). We also have blessings from God (Psa 5:12), will see the face of God (Psa 11:7, 17:15), have the ear of God (Jas 5:16, 1Pet 3:12), the presence of God (Psa 14:5), an inheritance (Rom 4:13-15), victory in life (Rom 5:17), increasing holiness (Rom 6:19), life (Rom 8:10), increasing harvest (2Cor 9:9-10, Jas 3:18), a new self (Eph 4:24), filled with fruit (Phil 1:11), a crown as a reward (2Tim 4:8). Do I need to go on?

¹¹ Packer again, 18 Words

So, we see that it entails much more than simply the forgiveness of sins. That would merely leave us with a blank slate. But we need to be more than just morally neutral; we need to be actively righteous. So God credits the positive merit of Christ's righteousness to our account. The full credit of His perfect righteousness and holy life is now accounted to those who would trust in Him.

There is a legal concept (and also a movie) called "Double Jeopardy." Double Jeopardy ensures that you can only be put on trial once for a crime. You cannot be put on trial a second time, unless new evidence is found that shows that the court may have got it wrong the first time. But think about this a moment. What new evidence could be brought before the great Judge of the universe? Remember, one of the things we learnt about Him in Session 2 of Bitesize is that He knows all things. He is omniscient. He knows the end from the beginning (Isa 46:8-10, Rev 22:3), therefore He knows whether you will still be trusting Christ at the end of your life. He knows the thoughts and intentions of your heart (Gen 6:5, Psa 139:23, Matt 9:4, Heb 4:12), so He is aware of each and every evil desire, every sin, everything you do out unbelief instead of faith. Which one of your sins has escaped His view, that it could be presented to His court as new evidence? The answer is, of course, none. So, if there is no new evidence against you, then His ruling of not guilty will always stand. You see how important the doctrine of the omniscience of God is; how it has significant implications for the doctrine of justification.

The doctrine of God's immutability is also important here. "For I the Lord do not change.." (Mal 3:6), and "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" (Num 23:19). God does not change His mind. If He has ruled that a person is justified, righteous before Him, He will not change His mind and unjustify that person. What possible confidence could we have in a God who changes His mind and withdraws our justification without any apparent reason? Has He suddenly decided that His own Son's death is no longer sufficient? Has He decided that His own plans do not work? It is inconceivable, and indeed foolishness, to talk this way. If our justification cannot stand for eternity, then God is no longer God. His own "God-ness" is destroyed if our justification by faith in Christ should fail at any point.

While on this subject, we should remind ourselves that "... if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins..." (1John 2:1-2). There

is never a moment, not a single second, in heaven when Jesus Christ is not presenting to the Father the completeness and the perfection the atonement, purchased by His blood poured out on our behalf to turn the wrath of God away from us. For this reason, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8: 1). What is there in the universe that can overwhelm this and cause God to remove our justification and condemn us all over again? "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-more than that, who was raised-who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Rom 8: 33-34). If our justification could ever fail, God is not God.

Think about the confidence and security justification brings. If the great Judge of the all humanity and the universe, who knows the end from the beginning, has declared you just and righteous, who can reverse His decision? He is the supreme authority. He presides over the highest of high courts. When His decision is made, no lawyer, no accuser can appeal the decision. To what court and what judge above God would they go?

This same Judge knows your final state, your eternal destiny, and therefore if His ruling is that you are righteous, then it can never be overturned. "Those whom He justified, He also glorified" (Rom 8: 30). It is the judgment of the last day brought forward to the present. It is the final verdict, and can never be overturned. When Paul wrote, "He also glorified," he wrote in the past tense. What God has resolved to do is as good as done!

Speaking of past tense verbs, during your study of Redemption, you may have come across Luke 21:28 "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." This implies that redemption is future, but other verses (for example, Eph 1: 7) talk about redemption in the past tense, as something which has already happened in the past, or present tense (see Col 1: 14) as our current possession. This sort of thing is not uncommon in Scripture. We have been adopted already (Rom 8: 15), but we eagerly await adoptions as sons (Rom 8:23). We are not yet glorified (Rom 8: 17), but those who are justified are already glorified (Rom 8: 30).

The Bible is able to talk in this way because whatever God has purposed to do, will certainly come to pass. There is no doubt or indecision. If God intends to do it, then it is as good as done. So Paul can tell us that "those whom he justified he also glorified," because from God's perspective, it is as good as done. We live "in

the now and the not yet," as someone once put it. We already have certain things, such as adoption, redemption, justification, glorification, but still await the completion, the full experience of them. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1Cor 13:12).

It may be important to remind ourselves that justification is always by faith. It is not received any other way, and is not available to anyone who will not trust Christ as their Saviour, unless they are able to present a life of perfect obedience to the law in every point, which we know is impossible. Faith is not the cause of justification. If it were, then faith would be a 'work,' and Paul could not describe the believer as "one who does not work" (Rom 4:5). Faith is the natural outworking of regeneration which then receives righteousness by receiving Christ. John Piper puts it like this, "New birth awakens faith, and faith looks to Christ for righteousness, and God credits righteousness to us on the basis of Christ alone through faith alone... When new birth awakens faith and unites us to Christ, all legal obstacles to our acceptance with God are removed through justification."¹²

Certainly, you should be able to see from this that "there is no room for boasting" (see Rom 3:26-28). Once again, we find our salvation entirely dependent on the actions and choices of God, not based on anything we have done, anything we deserve, or anything we are owed. It is yet another doctrine that gives glory to God, and to God alone (*Soli Deo Gloria*¹³). It removes any opportunity for pride in man, and directs all praise, honour and worship to God.

Phil Johnson says about the importance of this doctrine, "... there are many other doctrines that are fundamental – essential to true Christianity. The deity of Christ, His incarnation, His bodily resurrection, and the promise of the second coming – all of those are explicitly named in Scripture as non-negotiables – essential to true Christianity and essential to authentic faith. Not to mention all the key doctrines of Trinitarianism. Deny any of those you have in effect departed from the Christian faith..."

He continues, "So why place so much emphasis on the principle of justification by faith? A person can affirm the doctrines of the virgin birth of Christ, have a solid grasp on the incarnation, believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ, and yet be one of those described in

¹² John Piper, *Finally Alive*

¹³ See footnote 14 below

Romans 4:4 and Romans 9:32 and Romans 10:3 who – rather than trusting Christ alone for justification - are seeking to establish a righteousness of their own by works. In other words, you can be basically sound on Christology or theology proper and unsound on the gospel. And that error, Paul says, will damn you without remedy.”

“But the converse is not true. I have never met anyone who truly understood and affirmed justification by faith and the principle of ‘sola fide’¹⁴ who was unsound on other fundamental doctrines. If you truly understand justification by faith and the principle of imputed righteousness, then you are going to affirm the deity of Christ...”

“That’s why if you were to ask me to name the one doctrine in all of theology that is most vital; the one that carries the most weight; the one doctrine most important to handle with care and the most vital to proclaim accurately, it would not be a difficult choice. I would tell you instantly that in my opinion, it’s the doctrine of justification by faith – the Reformation principle of ‘sola fide.’ This one doctrine encompasses the heart and soul of everything that is essential to Christianity, everything that is fundamental to our faith. The doctrine of justification by faith is the very life and nerve of the gospel itself.”¹⁵

We cannot hope to deal properly with the subject of Justification in this brief study. I would encourage you to study further and deeper on this topic. Phil Johnson also says, “History reveals that when the church has backed away from this doctrine, the church has gone into decline and worldliness. But when preachers have featured this truth, as the Reformers did, and as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards did in the First Great Awakening, as the Welsh preachers did just before the outbreak of revival in Wales – this truth has awakened the church and enlivened the people of God.”¹⁶

We need to understand and live in the truth of this great doctrine, possibly more now in the 21st Century than ever. The first place to start your study is, of course, Scripture, especially the first several

¹⁴ A Latin phrase which means *by faith alone*. This was one of five “catch-phrases” that were key principles of the Protestant Reformation of the 1500’s. The other four are: *Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone, Sola Gratia, by grace alone, Solus Christus, for Christ alone, and Soli Deo Gloria, for the glory of God alone.*

¹⁵ From *Justification: Defending the Heart of the Gospel*, by Phil Johnson

¹⁶ Also from *Justification: Defending the Heart of the Gospel*, by Phil Johnson

chapters of Romans. There are also many excellent books on the subject.¹⁷ Enjoy your study. You will be enormously edified by it.

¹⁷ Such as *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution*, by Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey & Andrew Sach, and *The Great Exchange: My Sin for His Righteousness*, by Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington, and *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement*, by JI Packer and Mark Dever, and *Justified by Faith Alone*, and *The Truth of the Cross* both by RC Sproul, and *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for us in Justification*, by K Scott Oliphant.