

# The Journey To Justification

By Ben Godwin



## ► The Profile of the Justifier

“...That [God] might be just and the **justifier** of him that believeth in Jesus.” (Ro. 3:26)

When considering the meaning of the term **just** and whom it applies to, it is fitting to begin with God Himself. He alone, without the aid of any other entity, can be described by this word in its full meaning. Several Scriptures ascribe this attribute to God and, since He is the only One who is inherently and eternally just, He is the only One who can legitimately justify the unjust—“*It is God that justifieth.*” (Ro. 8:33) So just what exactly does the term **just** mean?

There are fifty-nine Old Testament references containing the word **just**. Five of these references are translated from Hebrew words meaning: “complete, full, perfect, whole, a right verdict or sentence, straight, upright, the right, equity, even.” (See Lev. 19:36, Pr. 11:1; 16:11; 29:10, Ezk. 45:10)

The rest of the references use two other Hebrew words translated “just”:

- *Tsaddiyq* = “lawful, righteous.”
- *Tsadaq* = “to be right, cleanse, clear self.”

Thirty-five New Testament references translate the word **just** from these two Greek words:

- *Dikaios* = “equitable, fair, innocent, holy, righteous.”
- *Endikos* = “in the right, equitable, fair.”

A dictionary defines the adjective **just** as “honorable and fair in one’s dealings and actions, consistent with moral right, valid within the law, legitimate, suitable and proper in nature, fitting, based on fact or reason, well-founded, precise, exact.” Other synonyms include: evenhanded, fair-minded, impartial, unbiased, trustworthy, honest, moral, upright, ethical, honorable, balanced, logical, well-grounded, solid, firm and strong.

In respect to God, all of these adjectives apply. He is the epitome of all that is just, right and fair. God Almighty is so perfect, so holy and so righteous that He is the standard by which everything and everyone else is measured. Deuteronomy 32:4 declares, “*He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.*” Even when God levies terrible judgments against evildoers or His own backslidden people, His fairness and justice cannot be questioned. (Neh. 9:33) Many people wonder how God will judge those who’ve never heard the Gospel in the remote areas of the world. One thing is certain, God will be right and fair in whatever He does. He will not and cannot do anything that contradicts His divine nature. When God disclosed His plans to destroy Sodom, Abraham questioned, “...*Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ...shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*” (Gen. 18:23, 25) Abraham should have known, as he tried in vain to find ten righteous people in that sin-filled city, that God could not do anything other than what was right. “*The just Lord is in the midst thereof; He will not do iniquity; every morning doth He bring His judgment to light, He faileth not...*” (Zep. 3:5) He not only *does* right; He *is* right! Thus, everything God does is absolutely just. To do otherwise, He would have to cease to be God. He is justice personified! God has no tolerance for injustice of any kind. Martin Luther captured God’s perspective on this issue with these words, “*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.*”

Isaiah 26:7 describes the Most High as being “*most upright.*” Furthermore, “*The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works.*” (Ps. 145:17) This means that God cannot do anything that contra-

dicts his holy nature. To do anything unjust, God would have to change—that He will never do (Mal. 3:6)

- **God is just:** Dt. 32:4, Neh. 9:33, Is. 45:21, Ho. 14:9, Zep. 3:5. Another term applied to God is *equity*. (Ps. 98:9; 99:4, Is. 11:4) Equity is the quality of being just, impartial or fair. That God is no respecter of persons (Ac. 10:34) means He is unbiased and without prejudice, treating all fairly and without favoritism. Whether He extends mercy to repentant adulterers and publicans (Jn. 8:11, Lu. 19:7-9) or strikes careless priests and hypocritical saints dead in His wrath (Lev. 10:1-3, Ac. 5:1-5, 9-10), He is absolutely, unequivocally and unquestionably just, right and fair!
- **Jesus is just:** Zec. 9:9, Mt. 27:19, 24, Jn. 5:30, Ac. 3:14; 7:52; 22:14, 1 Jn. 1:9. Though He was tempted in all points like we are, He remained unstained by sin. He was made to be sin for us “*who knew no sin.*” (2 Cor. 5:21) The cruel irony of the cross is that the only truly Just One—“*who is holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners*” (Heb. 7:26)—was subjected to the greatest injustice and inhumanity of all.
- **God’s laws are just:** Ro. 7:12. Unlike the demands of domineering dictators and greedy governments, “*...His commandments are not grievous.*” (1 Jn. 5:3) They are not unbearable, overly demanding or unduly burdensome. Rather, they are designed with our best interest in mind. If heeded, God’s laws result in peace, health, happiness, prosperity, liberty and equal justice for all.
- **God requires civil and church leaders to be just:** Dt. 16:18-20, 2 Sam. 23:3, Am. 5:12, Ti. 1:7-8. Without question, a higher standard of character is required by God of those in leadership. Historically, God exacted severe punishment on those who wielded the scepter unjustly. Leaders are commanded to execute their offices impartially, honestly, ethically and with the highest integrity.
- **God commands us to think on what is just:** Ph. 4:8. Just as we are what we eat physically, we are what we think spiritually. And, since thoughts potentially produce deeds, it should be a high priority to discipline our thought-life to what is becoming to a believer and what is pleasing to the Master.
- **God commands employers to be just with their employees:** Col. 4:1. Employers are to treat their employees fairly with a reasonable work schedule, work load and adequate compensation—“*The laborer is worthy of his reward.*” (1 Tim. 5:18) Employees, in return, should give an honest day’s work for an honest day’s wage.
- **God requires weights and measures to be just:** Dt. 25:13-16, Pr. 16:11. “*A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is His delight.*” (Pr. 11:1) This ensures honest and fair business. Money made through dishonest means (fraud, deceit, taking advantage of the vulnerable, price gouging, etc.) provokes God’s displeasure, but He sanctions an honest living through honest work. (Pr. 13:11)

## ► **The Plight of the Unjust**

In light of the justness of God, it’s obvious that unredeemed man cannot lay claim to the quality of being just without divine intervention. Solomon made this observation “*...There is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*” (Ec. 7:20) In fact, only seven individuals, excluding Jesus, were specifically described in the Bible as being just (Noah—Gen. 6:9, Joseph—Mt. 1:19, Simeon—Lu. 2:25, John the Baptist—Mk. 6:20, Joseph of Arimathea—Lu. 23:50, Cornelius—Ac. 10:22, and Lot—2 Pt. 2:7). A few others were spoken of as being justified (i.e., Abraham—Ja. 2:21, Rahab—Ja. 2:25). While this is a rather exclusive list, this is not to say that many other Bible characters did not possess and/or exhibit this quality. They simply were not spoken of as such. However, it does suggest how rare a just person is. Due to the Fall, the Adamic nature of man is inherently unjust.

- **Consider the plight of the unjust:**

- The unjust have no hope (apart from God)—Pr. 11:7.
- The unjust are an abomination—Pr. 29:27.
- The unjust know no shame—Zep. 3:5.
- Those who are unjust in small things will be unjust in great things—Lu. 16:10.
- The unjust are reserved for the day of judgment to be punished—2 Pt. 2:9.
- The unjust will ultimately be sealed in their unjust state—Rev. 22:11.

- **The Parable of the Unjust Steward:** Luke 16:1-10. In this mysterious parable, Jesus emphasized that “...*He that is **unjust** in the least is **unjust** also in much.*” In other words, a person who is unjust is flawed to the core of his character and cannot be trusted. The defect runs too deep, even to the soul. Someone might wonder why God can’t simply overlook people’s unrighteous tendencies and indiscriminately allow everyone, good or bad, entrance to heaven. The prophet Isaiah offers this answer: “*Let favor be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal **unjustly**, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.*” (Is. 26:10) God will not risk another rebellion in heaven as occurred with Lucifer. So He will separate the just from the unjust at His coming based upon each individual’s response to the Gospel and their obedience and faithfulness to His Word. Here, in this life, we must find justification through the Scriptural means because the unjust will not be permitted in paradise but, rather, will be punished. (2 Pt. 2:9)

- **The Resurrection of the Unjust:** Acts 24:15. There will actually be two resurrections: the first is the resurrection of the **just** which Jesus called “*the resurrection of life.*” (Jn. 5:29) This will take place at the Second Coming of the Lord as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. Those who take part in this first resurrection will not be affected by the second death (the casting of both soul and body into the Lake of Fire, eternal separation from God—See Rev. 20:6, 14). The second is the resurrection of the **unjust** which Jesus called “*the resurrection of damnation.*” (Jn. 5:29) Many Bible scholars feel this will occur after the 1,000-year reign of Christ and the saints. (Rev. 20:5) At that time the sea, death and hell will give up their dead to appear at the great White-Throne Judgment where every man will be sentenced according to his works. Those whose names do not appear in the Lamb’s Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:12-15) This is the bleak future that awaits the unjust unless they follow God’s prescription for justification.

- **The Seduction of Self-justification:** Those who attempt to justify themselves are being set up for exposure. A lawyer approached Jesus with the seemingly innocent question: “*Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” (See Lu. 10:25-36) When Jesus asked him what the law required, he rattled off a list of commandments. Then he opened a trap door. “*But he, willing to **justify himself**, said unto Jesus, and who is my neighbor?*” Jesus cleverly used the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” to expose this man’s prejudice against the Samaritans (Jews hated Samaritans and vice versa). In fact, when Jesus asked him who acted the most neighborly in the story, the lawyer couldn’t bring himself to even say the word “Samaritan.” Instead, he reluctantly replied, “*He that had mercy on him.*” Jesus often rebuked the Pharisees for their shameless self-justification, “*Ye are they which **justify** yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts.*” (Lu. 16:15) He exposed the hypocrisy of those who “*trusted in **themselves** that they were righteous and despised others*” with the “Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.” (See Lu. 18:9-14) It was the humble publican who admitted his sin rather than the proud Pharisee who thanked God he wasn’t “unjust” like other men that went home “*Justified!*” Self-justification is perhaps more offensive to God than no justification at all. Isaiah prophesied how Jesus would deliver those caught in the plight of the unjust, “*By his knowledge shall my righteous servant **justify** many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*” (Is. 53:11) And when one unjust person responds to His call, there is more joy in heaven over them “*...than over ninety and nine **just** persons, which need no repentance.*” (Lu. 15:7)

Only in God's mercy does He make "...His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the **just** and on the **unjust**." (Mt. 5:45) Paul even reprimanded the Corinthians for taking disputes between believers to court "*before the **unjust***" instead of settling them among the saints. (1 Cor. 6:1) Paul prophesied there will be "...a resurrection of the dead, both the **just** and the **unjust**." (Ac. 24:15) However, the unjust will be raised only to be judged by God. (Rev. 20:5, 10-12) Obviously, the plight of the unjust is very grim. Fortunately, there is hope! Only one thing can avert the inevitable destiny of the unjust—to fall on the mercy of the Just Judge of all the earth. "*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the **just** for the **unjust**, that He might bring us to God.*" (1 Pt. 3:18)



## ► The Path To Justification

To **justify** means "*to render just, to make right.*" To be **justified** means "*to be legally acquitted of all guilt, and to be reckoned righteous in God's sight.*" There are actually several things that work in concert to render us justified—made innocent **just as if we never sinned**. Bildad, one of Job's comforters, asked this pertinent question, "*How then can man be **justified** with God?*" (Jb. 25:4)

The short answer to Bildad's inquiry is JESUS! Zacchaeus experienced first-hand how Jesus can change an unjust life. He was a hated tax-collector who swindled people out of their money to pad his own greedy pockets. When Jesus spotted him sitting in a sycamore tree, He invited Himself to Zacchaeus' house. The crowd murmured their disapproval that Jesus would have dinner with a sinner. Apparently, Jesus never even mentioned this short man's avarice or his shady business tactics. (See Lu. 19:1-10) But Zacchaeus came under conviction and evidenced his repentance by vowing to pay restitution to those he defrauded. Jesus pronounced, "*This day is salvation come to this house.*" Zacchaeus' name, by the way, means "*justified.*" The court of public opinion labeled him a "sinner," but Jesus reckoned him "justified." Justification is only possible through Jesus for "...By Him all that believe are **justified** from all things, from which ye could not be **justified** by the law of Moses." (Ac. 13:39) But to facilitate this work in us, God uses or requires the following things:

- **Faith:** "*Therefore being **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Ro. 5:1) Many believers, like the Old Covenant Jews, make the mistake of trying to establish and trust in their own righteousness instead of submitting to God's imparted righteousness (See Ro. 10:3.) This is an endless treadmill that enslaves people in legalism. The Book of Galatians deals specifically with this issue of relying on works instead of faith for justification. (See Gal. 2:16; 3:11.) The way to *become* and *remain* righteous is to **believe** in the finished work of Christ. "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that **believeth**.*" (Ro. 10:4)
- **Grace:** "*That being **justified by his grace**, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*" (Ti. 3:7) Grace is unmerited love, unearned divine favor. Grace is something we could never be good enough to deserve. It's a free gift from God that we must simply receive by faith. (Eph. 2:8-9) Grace is also divine ability. (1 Cor. 15:10) So not only are we justified by grace initially, but grace enables us "*To do **justly**, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with [our] God*" continually. (Mi. 6:8)
- **The Blood of Jesus:** "*Much more then, being now **justified by his blood**, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*" (Ro. 5:9) As the great hymn reminds us, "*What can wash away my sin? What is all my righteousness? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!*" The blood is a cleansing agent that renders us "*holy and without blame before Him in love.*" (Eph. 1:4) The saints in John's vision arrayed in white robes (symbolic of righteousness) had washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:13-14; 19:8) Jesus' blood is the only blood that can make a spotted garment or a sin-stained soul white as snow.

- **The Name of Jesus & The Holy Spirit:** “*And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are **justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.***” (1 Cor 6:11) These two powerful forces work in unison to present us washed, sanctified and **justified**. Through the name of Jesus we can identify with the Just One and His just nature is transferred to us. Furthermore, in His name, we can take dominion over everything in or around us that is unjust. The Holy Spirit’s role is to empower us to implement “*whatsoever things are **just***” into our daily lifestyle.
- **Our Words:** “*For **by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.***” (Mt. 12:37) This is a sober reminder that our speech will be a deciding factor in how we are rewarded or punished come judgment day. Jesus advised us to monitor our mouth for we will be held accountable for every idle (thoughtless) word. (Mt. 12:36) No wonder Solomon and James penned these verses about taming the tongue: “*He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life*” and “*...If any man seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue...[his] religion is vain.*” (Pr. 13:3, Ja. 1:26)
- **Works:** Rahab and Abraham are cited as examples of how works justify us (See Ja. 2:21-26). This seems like a contradiction to the previous comments on faith and grace, but it isn’t. Here’s why—a person acts on what they believe. Faith produces action! Works do not replace faith; rather, works are the evidence of faith. In other words, where there is fire (faith), there will be smoke (works).

Faith is the key factor for “*without **faith** it is impossible to please [God]*” and “*The **just** shall live by **faith.***” (Heb. 11:6, Ro. 1:17) Faith in Jesus and His finished work on the cross is what places us in right-standing with God. And the way we *become* righteous is the way we *stay* righteous—by believing in the blood and work of Christ. (Ro. 10:10) “*...Abraham **believed** God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*” (Ro. 4:3) The truth is no amount of good works make us righteous. (Gal. 2:16) In fact, all of our noble attempts at being righteous are equivalent to “*filthy rags*” in God’s eyes. (Is. 64:6) On the other hand, once we are justified (made righteous), godly works will result because faith produces action. Good works do not replace faith in justification, they simply verify faith’s existence—“*Faith without **works** is dead...*” (Ja. 2:20)

Hosea 10:12 provides this analogy of how our works and God’s imparted righteousness combine to produce a spiritual harvest: “***Sow to yourselves in righteousness...till He come and **rain** righteousness upon you.***” Rain is useless without seed in the ground. Conversely, all the seed in the world will yield no crop without rain. The point is we can’t expect God to rain down (impart) His righteousness on us if we are not at least sowing righteous seeds. Furthermore, if we are trusting in our works instead of God’s grace, we are doomed for spiritual crop failure. Thus it behooves us to strive to be as righteous as possible, but to also realize that it is only God’s imparted righteousness that justifies us. It is not abstaining from sin and doing good works that *makes* us righteous. It is the fact that we *are* righteous that makes us want to abstain from sin and do good works.

## ► **The Promises to the Justified**

There are numerous promises that apply exclusively to **the just**. One specific promise states, “*For a **just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again...***” (Pr. 24:16) This verse tells us that a just person isn’t perfect. He or she may falter occasionally. But notice what the just do when they fall—they rise up again! So being just doesn’t mean living a mistake-free life. It means striving for perfection. But when the just fall short, they get up with a resilient faith in the things that made them just to begin with.

The Book of Proverbs alone is replete with benefits, attributes, promises and rewards that apply specifically to those who possess the quality of being just. Perhaps the reason Solomon wrote so extensively on this subject is because he sensed his own need as a king to be just. In fact, at the outset of his reign, God

appeared to him and asked him, “*What shall I give thee?*” Solomon wisely responded, “...*Give [your] servant an understanding heart to **judge** thy people that I may discern between the good and the bad...*” (1 Kgs. 3:9) God granted his request and Solomon became world renowned for his wisdom and his knack for fairness and true justice. Here are several of the just king’s observations:

- God blesses the home, family, life and memory of the just—Pr. 3:33; 10:6-7; 20:7.
- God supernaturally guides the just—Pr. 4:18.
- The just are teachable and willing and eager to learn—Pr. 9:9.
- The just speak timely words of wisdom—Pr. 10:20, 31.
- The knowledge of the just delivers them—Pr. 11:9.
- The just will escape and/or rebound from trouble—Pr. 12:13; 24:16.
- The just are protected from evil—Pr. 12:21.
- The wealth of sinners is laid up for the just—Pr. 13:22.
- Those who condemn the just will answer to God—Pr. 17:15, 26.
- The just walk in integrity—Pr. 20:7.
- The just delight to see justice prevail—Pr. 21:15.
- The just support an honest person—Pr. 29:10.

Other Bible authors gave contributions on this subject as well. Job, for example, concluded that the just are in the minority and are often ridiculed for their integrity. (Jb. 12:4) The Psalmist David prayed that God would “*establish the **just***” so that the wicked who “*plotteth against the **just***” would not prevail against them. (Ps. 7:9; 37:12) Ezekiel made a detailed list of fifteen things that “*he that is **just***” does or does not do. (Ezk. 18:5-9) Hosea wrote, “...*The ways of the Lord are right, and the **just** shall walk in them...*” (Ho. 14:9) Amos denounced those who “*afflict the **just***.” (Am 5:12) Habakkuk prophesied of the revolutionary New Testament truth that “...*The **just** shall live by his faith.*” (Hab. 2:4) This simple truth revolutionized a young monk named Martin Luther as he read the book of Romans. The result was the Great Reformation that brought the church world out of 1,000 years of darkness and launched the world-wide protestant revival.

All of the above things are “*exceeding great and precious promises*” that the just shall inherit—some here and now in this life and others in the life that is to come. (2 Pt. 1:4) And these promises to the just, like all of God’s promises, are “*in Him yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*” (2 Cor. 1:20) 2 Peter 3:9 assures us that “*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise.*” In other words, these aren’t the empty campaign promises of a vote-desperate politician. What God has promised, He is able also to perform!

- **The Parable of the Unjust Judge:** Luke 18:1-8. The purpose of this parable is clear, “*That men ought always to pray and not to faint.*” A certain widow appealed to a corrupt judge to give her justice concerning an enemy. At first he ignored her. But she wouldn’t give up or take no for an answer. She became such a nuisance that he finally granted her request just to get rid of her. Jesus concludes the story by saying, “*And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.*” If persistence pays when dealing with an unjust judge who has no interest in your case, how much more does it pay when dealing with the Just Judge of all the earth who has a supreme interest in your case.

Sometimes life doesn’t seem fair. Have you noticed how so many sinners seem to succeed while many good people struggle just to get by? Solomon was perplexed by this very issue “...*There is a **just** man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.*” (Ec. 7:15, See also Ec. 8:14) David reminded us, “*Fret not thyself because of [evildoers] who prosper in [their] ways.*” (See Ps. 37:1, 7-8) The truth is, all accounts are not settled in this life but, be assured, all accounts will be settled! (See 1 Tim. 5:24-25) God keeps good records. Solomon eventually concluded that it does pay to be just despite the apparent prosperity of the unjust, “*Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God...*” (Ec. 8:12) The success of the wicked is a mere illusion, and a temporary one at that. The promises to the just, however, are as real and eternal as God Himself. In the end, it pays to serve God. For He is the only Just One who can justify us.