

# 1. Why is Justification Important?

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF ASKING WHY

'Why?' This is the question my children ask me the most. 'Why do I have to get ready for school? Why do I have to do my homework right now? Why can't we have something else for dinner?' While I have to confess that I do get annoyed by these questions at times, 'why questions' are incredibly important when it comes to our motivation and understanding as we learn and grow. Often if we know why something is important, we have an easier time jumping into it, sustaining our focus, and have the motivation to think, learn, and respond.

This is an especially important question to ask of the teachings of the Bible, the Holy Scriptures. We may want to rush into the 'what questions,' but answering the 'why questions' is where we will find the needed drive to properly engage with the answers to the 'what

## JUSTIFICATION

questions.' Without the clarifying energy and curiosity of the 'why questions' we may not be able to sustain our investigation of the topic.

So, in an effort to apply this to our present topic: *Why is justification important? Why read a book about justification?* Let me give you a few answers to that.

### OUR PROBLEM: THE 'BAD NEWS' OF THE GOSPEL

In the movie *Apollo 13*, the American astronauts on their mission to the moon realize that their spacecraft has sustained critical damage during one of their operational procedures. Strange things are happening to the crew as they struggle to make sense of what has happened to them. Eventually, Captain Jim Lovell, after analyzing the catastrophic results, says to mission control, 'Houston, we have a problem.' Their mission and their very lives were in peril and they now knew it.

Similar to Lovell and his crew, we have a problem! A big problem. A life-or-death size problem. While the Bible is about the 'good news' of Jesus Christ at its core, this wonderful news is preceded by inescapable 'bad news.' In fact, the 'good news' of Christ is the answer and response to this 'bad news.'

## *Why is Justification Important?*

So, what is this bad news?

The Apostle Paul sums it up well in Romans 3:22b-23 where he writes, ‘For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’ The bad news is that we have sinned against our Creator, the holy and just God, and, as a result, we are alienated from Him, others, and even ourselves. As Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 2:1-3, we are all spiritually ‘dead in our trespasses and sins,’ ‘sons [and daughters] of disobedience,’ and ‘by nature children of wrath.’ Not only has our sin separated us from God, but we are unable to close the gap or remedy the situation. We cannot save ourselves! Spiritually, we’re dead, prone to wander in selfish disobedience, and rightfully deserve and experience the anger of God. We justly deserve God’s punishment and the eternal torment of hell.

This is bad news! But we need to hear it, understand it, and embrace it in order for the good news to be truly good to us. Without believing the bad news, the good news will not be good to us and Jesus will be meaningless. We will remain separated from God, ourselves, and others. J.C. Ryle said it well when he wrote, ‘The plain truth is that a right knowledge of

## JUSTIFICATION

sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity.<sup>1</sup> We must acknowledge and confess our sin – our willful rebellion and spiritual inability – in order to make any headway. Salvation is available to us, but it depends on believing the bad news about ourselves first. This is a life-or-death problem.

### THE CORE OF THE GOOD NEWS

This is where justification comes in. The doctrine of justification is the good news answer to our pressing life-or-death problem of sin and death. J.I. Packer suggests that this Christian teaching is ‘the heart of gospel’ as far as the Apostle Paul is concerned.<sup>2</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, echoing the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, indicates that justification is not only ‘the article by which the church stands or falls...but also of the standing or falling of Christianity.’<sup>3</sup> Justification is at the very core of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ and is the source of life for the Church of Christ.

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1 Ryle, J.C. *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 1-2.

2 Packer, J.I. *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 164.

3 Ferguson, Sinclair B. *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1981), 80.

## *Why is Justification Important?*

This is why the doctrine of justification is important: it's a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith that speaks to our greatest human need – the forgiveness of our sins, becoming holy in God's sight, and the reconciliation of all relationships. The most important relationship being that with our Creator. If you can understand and embrace this doctrine, you will have a firm foundation to stand on and a path toward peace and joy in fellowship with God through an abiding relationship with Jesus Christ.

### **Main Point**

*Justification is important because it is at the heart of the good news response to the bad news of our sinfulness.*

### **Questions for Reflection**

- How does the 'bad news' we find in the Bible prepare us to receive and embrace its 'good news' ?
- What does 'a right knowledge of sin' look like?
- What kinds of forgiveness and reconciliation do you hope and long for in your life?