

The Basis of Justification

But how and on what basis can God pardon freely? How is the justice of God actually met if we do not pay the penalty for our own sins? This is an important question to which the Scripture says much and gives clear answers. As we have discussed, justification is a legal term describing the act whereby God *declares* us righteous based on the merits of Christ. This justification is a complete work of God whereby He fully meets all the requirements of divine justice and then on that basis declares the sinner righteous. In this work God.....

- satisfies and appeases the divine requirements of justice - **Propitiation**
- completely removes the guilt of our sins, - **Expiation**
- credits the righteousness and merit of Christ to the believer – **Imputation**
- restores relationship and rightstanding with God - **Reconciliation**

It is clear from scripture that in the death of Christ upon the cross, that God's wrath because of sin has been satisfied by Christ's payment of death. This is called "**propitiation.**" Because Jesus was without sin, His was qualified to pay **the debt for all sin** by His death. He died as a substitute or in place of sinners, and bore the wrath of God Himself, not dying for His own sins but for the sins of all who would trust him. This sacrifice of atonement, that is, the death of Christ, affected a real and fundamental change in our relationship to God by taking our place and bearing the guilt of our sins as an offering to appease the holy wrath of God.

Hebrews 2:17 - 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, **to make propitiation for the sins of the people.** NASB

It is in this "**propitiation**" that God, in His requirement of divine justice is actually propitiated. Because God has instituted the sacrificial system as a means of atonement, he has therefore been pleased to have a sacrifice appease or satisfy His wrath. Propitiation is an "**appeasement**" or "**satisfaction.**" The holy anger and wrath of God toward sin demands a satisfaction of justice, and His vengeance is enraged toward sin and must have a subject to inflict the good and righteous penalty of death.

Romans 6:23 - 23 **For the wages of sin is death,** but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. NASB

Therefore we must have a substitute to satisfy God's wrath or be consumed ourselves. This is what sets Christianity apart from every other world religion. Jesus Christ is the only sufficient substitute who can meet the just requirements of God's law (divine justice) in order to die vicariously (for us) as a substitute (in our place). Jesus becomes then this propitiation *Himself* to appease the wrath of God.

1 John 4:10 - 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and **sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** NASB

Notice here, that this propitiation is not only what Christ did (the work of Christ), but that Jesus Christ Himself (the person of Christ) is the propitiation for our sins. The New Testament words normally translated as "**propitiation**" are the Greek [hilasterion 2435] and [hilasmos 2434], and carry with them the idea of "**expiation**" (to remove offense or guilt) or to "**cover over.**" In fact, these Greek terms actually hold a more personal meaning to the means of expiation, namely that of "**an atoning victim**" or the actual sacrifice of atonement, an expiator. This idea, that Jesus is the "**atoning victim,**" the propitiatory sacrifice, means that Jesus paid a very real price. He literally bore the penalty for our sins! Our chastisement became His! He carried our griefs....and our sorrows! This was beautifully expressed by Isaiah's prophecy, in chapter 53.

Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-12 - 4 Surely **our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried;** Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He **was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.** 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his

own way; But the **LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him**. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, **My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities**. 12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet **He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors**. NASB

Therefore, the atonement does in fact *satisfy* God's holy wrath toward sin because it is God's own work, graciously creating the means for us to be justified and His holy wrath to be appeased. All of this was designed in eternity by God and implemented by Him in the course of History because of the great love that He wished to express to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Peter 1:18-20 – 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For **He was foreknown before the foundation of the world**, but has appeared in these last times **for the sake of you** NASB

But propitiation is not the only thing that justification is. Not only has God's wrath been appeased but, the actual guilt of sinners has been removed by Christ's payment, because He paid the full price of that guilt. This is called **"expiation."** Jesus removed our guilt having paid the full price of redemption for our sins. Christ made a fundamental change in our relationship with God by *expiating* our guilt. In expiation, our guilt has been removed by meeting the demands of holy justice for sin on our behalf. The offense of our sins has been absorbed by the *sacrifice* of the body of Jesus for us, and the requirements of God's justice for sin have been **"cancelled out."**

Colossians 2:13-14 - 13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 **having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us** and which was hostile to us; and **He has taken it out of the way**, having nailed it to the cross. NASB

The penalty deserved in our guilt, has been paid in full by the sacrifice of Christ. This is to say then that the atonement is *redemptive*, that it pays the price required by justice. Jesus death on the cross is seen as a ransom price paid to redeem us from the penalties of the law, **"the certificate of debt consisting in decrees against us"** that we owed to God because of sin.

1 Timothy 2:5-7 - 5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 **who gave Himself as a ransom for all**, the testimony borne at the proper time. NASB

This is why the scripture can say, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Having our guilt cancelled, the corresponding condemnation for our sins has been removed.

Romans 8:1-2 - 8:1 There is **therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. NASB

Jesus death is the full payment price demanded by the law because of our violations of it. He redeemed us from the *curse* of the law.

Galatians 3:13 - 13 **Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law**, having become a curse for us — for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE" NASB

All of this was done by God, who justifies, and this has removed our guilt and condemnation.

Romans 8:33-34 - 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? **It is God who justifies**. 34 **Who is he that condemns?** Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

However there is still yet more to the basis of justification than propitiation and expiation. Having our guilt removed and God's wrath because of our sins satisfied, we still lack the positive righteousness required of us by God's Law. You may recall that there are two kinds of sin. There is the transgression of the negative aspects of the Law we call *penal sanctions*. These transgressions or violations have been fully paid for by Christ's sacrifice. But the Law also has *preceptive requirements* whereby God expects us to fulfill certain precepts such as **"love your neighbor as yourself."** We have sinned by failing to do this again and again. Therefore it is necessary for God to provide for us a righteousness of fulfilled *preceptive requirements* because we have failed to fulfill them in order to have this positive righteousness before God. We have

need of a foreign righteousness that is not our own, but is rather being afforded to us by other means because we do not possess it in and of ourselves. In justification, God provides this righteousness to us by **"imputation."** In this imputation God credits the righteousness of Christ to us. Jesus' perfect righteousness has become ours through faith in Him. It is the merits of Christ perfectly fulfilling the preceptive requirements of the Law that becomes ours in justification through imputation. This gives us positive righteousness in the sight of God. We can stand in God's presence therefore, with the imputed righteousness and holiness of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 - 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, **who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,** 31 that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." NASB

Romans 5:18-19 - 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so **through one act of righteousness there resulted justification** of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so **through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.** NASB

2 Corinthians 5:21 - 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, **that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.** NASB

Therefore when we say that the sinner is **"declared righteous"** by God it is because the sinner is not actually righteous in himself but in Christ has received a foreign righteousness which is not his own, but is from God in Christ. Since Jesus' life was one of sinless perfection, this righteousness which is received is also therefore perfect.

Philippians 3:9-10 - 9 and may be found in Him, **not having a righteousness of my own** derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, **the righteousness which comes from God** on the basis of faith, NASB

Romans 3:21-24 - 21 But now apart from the Law **the righteousness of God** has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe;** for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a **gift by His grace** through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; NASB

Christ's righteousness is now ours and this has then fully met all the requirements of God's Law for us so that before His seat as our righteous Judge, we can be declared righteous on **this basis of propitiation, expiation and imputation.** And all of this has brought about Justification before God.

Romans 5:9 - 9 Much more then, **having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.** NASB

Now because the requirements of divine justice have been fully met and we are now declared righteous in the sight of God, this has restored the relationship with God that was damaged because of sin. In the Bible, this is called **"reconciliation."** We have been reconciled to God through Christ! God took the initiative, and sent His Son Jesus to reconcile us to Himself.

2 Corinthians 5:18 - 18 Now **all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ,** and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, NASB

In this reconciliation we now exult in God. This means we are overwhelmed with joy because the most fundamental problem that mankind faces (estrangement from God because of sin), has been corrected and we can now rejoice that we have been brought back into right-standing with Him through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:10-11 - 10 For if while we were enemies, **we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son,** much more, **having been reconciled,** we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom we have now received the reconciliation.** NASB

On this basis then we can now fellowship with God once again. We are free to love Him because He has freely loved us, even when we were at enmity with Him.

1 Peter 1:8-9 - and though you have not seen Him, **you love Him,** and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, **you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,** 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. NASB

The below diagram by James Boice is helpful in understanding reconciliation.