

# JOINED BY FAITH TO CHRIST AS RIGHTEOUSNESS: A BIBLICAL PRESENTATION OF JUSTIFICATION

*Who shall bring a charge against God's chosen ones?*

*It is God who justifies.*

(Paul, *To the Romans*, 8:33)

The apostle who trumpeted this truth had discovered the victory of justification, that is, the victory of God the Justifier and of all those justified by Him through faith in Christ. That it is God—and God alone—who justifies stirred the apostle Paul, as it should stir us, to accept, to exult, and to boast in God with all boldness and assurance, for the only One qualified to condemn us, to “bring a charge” against us, has approved us according to His righteousness. Paul was keenly aware that the God who justifies is righteous in all His acts (Psa. 103:6), that righteousness is the foundation of His throne (Psa. 89:14), and that He judges everything according to righteousness. But in reading Romans 8, we get the impression that Paul was not cringing in fearful expectation or wallowing in self-condemnation but rejoicing with exuberance in the righteous God who justifies. How could he rejoice in the God who justifies and even boast that he was justified, and how can we do the same today?

The answer has everything to do with Jesus Christ the Righteous (1 John 2:1), the One who is absolutely righteous in both His divinity and humanity (e.g., Heb. 1:8-9; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; 1 Pet. 3:18). As God, certainly He is righteous; but as the God-man, He lived a human life of absolute righteousness and suffered death under God’s righteous judgment for our sake, “the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous” (1 Pet. 3:18), thus satisfying the demand of God’s righteousness and redeeming us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13). This wonderful God-man is the very righteousness of God. God the Father delights in Him (Matt. 3:17) and has approved Him (Rom. 4:24-25). And as incomprehensible as it may seem, God the Father delights in and approves all those who turn from themselves to Jesus Christ and believe into Him, thereby discarding the filthy rags of their own righteousness (Isa. 64:6) and donning Christ Himself as their righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:27). To those who believe into Christ, the Father does something most remarkable

and almost unutterable: He approves the believers as righteous—He justifies them—based on Christ as their righteousness. He makes Christ Himself their righteousness for their justification. One of the wonders of justification, then, is that the believers’ righteousness before God is not a condition or a status that they possess in themselves but a person whom they are joined to, the living Christ Himself. Those who receive Christ are approved by God according to Christ as righteousness. God sees them as righteous, for they have Christ as their righteousness. Their righteousness before God is perfect because the Christ who is their righteousness is perfect, and their righteousness before God is unchanging because the Christ who is their righteousness is unchanging. Those who have laid hold of such a righteousness by laying hold of Christ can surely exult, as the apostle Paul exulted, in the victory of justification and in the God who alone justifies.

Another wonder of justification is that God justifies the believers *through faith in Jesus Christ* (e.g., Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16). This faith is not blind, nor is it a mere assent. The apostles taught that faith in Christ issues in receiving Him through the Spirit (John 1:12; 7:39). Thus, faith ushers those who believe in Christ into an organic union with Him, and God approves them based on their oneness with Christ as righteousness. The Epistles of Paul disclose the relationship between the believers’ union with Christ through faith and their justification in Him, and it is manifest that the apostle’s consideration of justification was enriched and buoyed by his deep knowledge of Christ and of the believers’ union with Him. As his Epistles testify, Paul was intimately familiar with Christ, not in the way of doctrine but in the way of spiritual knowledge and experience. He knew Christ (Phil. 3:8, 10), pursued Christ (Phil. 3:12, 14), aspired to be found in Christ (Phil. 3:9), and even described himself as a man in Christ (2 Cor. 12:2). In Acts 13:39 Paul preaches Christ as the One in whom “everyone who believes is justified.” In 1 Corinthians 1:30 he declares that we who believe are “in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption” and in Romans 8:1 that “there is now then no condemnation to