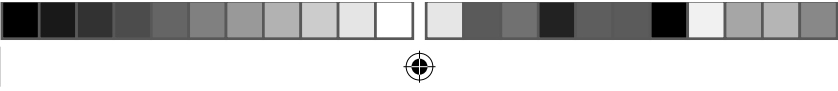




A CHRISTIAN'S POCKET GUIDE TO


# BEING MADE RIGHT WITH GOD






Guy Waters is one of those rare treasures: a serious and able academician whose feet are grounded in the church. This primer on justification is a clear and sure-footed guide that is conversant with the latest scholarly issues. By reading this book, you will be grounded in this most important of doctrines and your faith will be enriched. If you are not absolutely certain about the biblical way of justification with God, then reading the Bible with this book in hand is your most urgent need.

Richard D. Phillips,  
Senior Minister,  
Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina



Waters offers a concise yet extremely helpful treatment of what Scriptural justification is, its practical value in the Christian life and how the doctrine is being challenged in our present day. I won't hesitate to give this little book to the university students under my pastoral care.



Aaron Messner,  
College Chaplain,  
Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Georgia



A CHRISTIAN'S POCKET GUIDE TO  
**BEING MADE RIGHT WITH GOD**

UNDERSTANDING JUSTIFICATION

GUY WATERS



CHRISTIAN  
**FOCUS**



Dr Guy Waters is Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi. He has published a number of books including *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul* (P&R Publishing).

Unless otherwise indicated Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2007

Copyright © Guy Waters 2012  
paperback ISBN 978-1-78181-109-9  
epub ISBN 978-1-78191-165-5  
mobi ISBN 978-1-78191-170-9

First published in 2010  
reprinted in 2012

by  
Christian Focus Publications Ltd,  
Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire,  
IV20 1TW, Scotland, Great Britain  
[www.christianfocus.com](http://www.christianfocus.com)

Cover design by Paul Lewis  
Printed by Norhaven, Denmark

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher or a license permitting restricted copying. In the U.K. such licenses are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London, EC1 8TS [www.cla.co.uk](http://www.cla.co.uk).



## CONTENTS

Preface vii

1 Justification Defined 1

2 Justification Applied 27





3 Justification Undermined 51

Suggestions for Further Reading 77

Endnotes 81







-  Warning
-  Don't Forget
-  Stop and Think
-  Point of Interest





## PREFACE



The late Dr John H. Gerstner tells the story of a talk he once gave on the Bible's teaching on justification. A reporter for the local newspaper was present and wrote a story about the talk. Much to Dr Gerstner's surprise, the story reported that the subject of the talk had been 'Just A Vacation'!

The language of justification is increasingly foreign to the secular Western mind. It has not always been that way. When the Reformation burst upon Europe in the sixteenth century, the doctrine of justification by faith alone coursed through the church with a power and effect not seen since the apostolic age. Awakened to the tyranny of a system for salvation that could not deliver what it promised, men and women discovered the freedom that

the gospel of grace alone brings to sinners. Some of them willingly sacrificed property, homes, families, and their own lives because of their commitment to this doctrine.

Is justification by faith alone a relic of church history? For the twenty-first-century person, is it simply a way to explain the seismic political and intellectual shifts taking place in Europe a half millennium ago? To understand the otherwise incomprehensible actions of premodern persons? What relevance could it possibly have to modern people living in a modern age?

Put aside the word 'justification' for a moment. Give some thought to what that word is trying to say. There is a holy and just God. There is our sin. There is our accountability to God for our sin. There is a place where sinners go for punishment and never leave. In that word are dark and sober realities.

But there is something else in that word. There is the love of God the Father for sinners—as rich and as deep as it is incomprehensible. There is the Son of God stooping an infinite distance to come into this world—one who was born to die. There is the self-giving of Jesus Christ at the cross. There is the Spirit of Christ, uniting the sinner to the Savior, and clothing the sinner in 'righteousness divine.' Out of the darkness and shadows emerge beams of light.

These realities concern us as human beings—whether we live in the twenty-first century, or the sixteenth, or the first. The Bible, which teaches the doctrine of justification by faith alone, was written to speak to people in all generations. In the pages that follow we



are going to consider what God has to say in the Bible about justification.

In this little work, we have three related goals. First, we will get a handle on what justification is...and is not. Second, we will see that justification is a practical doctrine. It affects the way that believers live every day—how we relate to God, to ourselves, to others, and to the trials of life. Third, we will look at something that has been getting attention in the church over the last few years—the ‘New Perspective on Paul.’ What is it? What does it have to say about justification?

The first two chapters of this book began as lectures delivered before the Church Society in Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire, UK, at their 2006 Conference, ‘The Gospel of Grace.’ I reiterate my thanks to the Church Society both for their invitation to me and for their warm Christian hospitality. I especially wish to thank my generous and gracious hosts, the Rev. and Mrs George Curry, and the Rev. and Mrs David Phillips.

Chapter three of this book began as lectures delivered before the Grace Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in September 2008, and at the Sola Scriptura Ministries International Conference in London, Ontario, in November 2008. Both Grace Presbytery and Sola Scriptura Ministries hosted me superbly. I am especially grateful to the Rev. Stan Layton and Mr Heinz Dschankilic, for their sacrificial and hospitable labors on my behalf.

In revising these lectures for publication, I have benefited from the editorial help of Messrs. Anthony



Pyles and Nicholas Reid, and the Rev. James T. O'Brien. I especially wish to thank Ms Rebecca Rine for her careful, thoughtful, and patient editorial labors.

I dedicate this book to the memory of Dr John H. Gerstner, who so tirelessly explained and defended the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and from whose writings and recorded lectures and sermons I and many others have benefited immeasurably.





## JUSTIFICATION DEFINED

What does the Bible say about justification? The Bible speaks of justification in many places (e.g. Rom. 3–5, 8; Gal. 2–3; James 2). It is tempting to jump directly into a definition of justification. Before we do that, however, we need to look at the background to the Bible’s teaching on justification. Scripture tells us that justification is God’s ‘solution’ to our ‘problem’ of sin. We will first examine the problem that occasions justification. Then, we will be in a better position to understand justification itself.

### THE PROBLEM

The *problem* that occasions justification is sin. Why, one may ask, should a treatment of justification begin



with sin? What does sin have to do with justification? Could we not skip over sin and simply begin discussing justification? The nineteenth-century Reformed author J.C. Ryle addresses precisely this issue in the opening lines of his classic work, *Holiness*.

The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Without it such doctrines as justification, conversion, sanctification, are 'words and names' which convey no meaning to the mind...Dim or indistinct views of sin are the origin of most of the errors, heresies, and false doctrines of the present day. If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul's disease, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies. I believe that one of the chief wants of the Church in the nineteenth century has been, and is, clearer, fuller teaching about sin.<sup>1</sup>

Ryle's wise comments apply no less to the twenty-first century than they did to the nineteenth. Let us suppose that a person goes to the doctor with an aggressive form of malignant cancer and that the doctor misdiagnoses the problem as a cold. Not only is this doctor's prescribed remedy unlikely to help the patient, but the patient will remain in mortal danger. Misdiagnosis can be fatal.



J. C. Ryle (1860–1900) was the first Anglican bishop of Liverpool, an evangelical leader in the Church of England, and the author of hundreds of tracts. His work, *Holiness*, developed out of tracts which Ryle expanded and supplemented to produce a complete work.

Ryle reminds us that this principle is also true spiritually. If we water down, compromise, or simply ignore the Scripture's radical diagnosis of the human condition, then we are hardly in a position to receive, much less appreciate, the only prescribed remedy for that problem. This is why any understanding of the Bible's teaching on justification must begin with a study of sin.

Many people today, even people in the church, look at most human beings as basically good people who sometimes do bad things. Some of us, they say, do more bad things than others. Those of us whose good works outnumber or outweigh our bad works will enjoy the favor of the Deity. Those of us whose bad works outweigh our good works will suffer the displeasure of the Deity.

Of course, most people believe that they are good. They believe that their track record of performance is good enough to receive the blessing of God. To be sure, there are some who will fall short. Those who will meet the divine displeasure, however, are notoriously wicked criminals and tyrants—the kind of people we read about in the newspapers and see on the evening news.

This is not to say that people who have this outlook on humanity can have no sense of divine mercy. They may admit that the Deity is favorably inclined to receive and to accept individuals who, though not perfect, are basically good. They may presume that the Deity graciously overlooks their transgressions and failings. But the prevailing basis of the Deity's acceptance of them is the life lived.

In theological terms, what we have just described is a doctrine of justification by works. This doctrine says that a person is accepted before God on the basis of his performance. God rewards that person with life and blessing because that person's life merits that reward. It is as though Adam had never fallen, and sin had never entered the world through Adam. The prevalence of this doctrine shows how deeply engrained the principle 'do this and you will live' (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12) is upon the hearts of Adam's descendants.

The Bible's testimony, however, is that a sinner's track record can never merit the favor of a holy God. On the contrary, that track record can only bring him under the condemnation of God. The Bible explains how this is so in two ways. First, it gives us an *empirical* assessment of the human condition. It surveys the human landscape and gives us God's assessment of human behaviors, words, thoughts, choices, and desires. Second, it gives us what we might call an *historical* account of the human condition. The Bible answers the questions, 'Why are we the way that we are? Why is it that people are so attached to sin?'

### *The Empirical Assessment*

One of the most extensive surveys of human sinfulness is in the opening chapters of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans. Paul summarizes his survey at Romans 3:9–11, 'What then? Are we Jews any better off [than the Gentiles, or non-Jews]? No, not at all. For we have

already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul comes to this conclusion by focusing on the Gentiles, on the one hand, and on the Jews, on the other. Paul insists that all people, even the Gentiles, know God through the world that God made (Rom. 1:20–21). Furthermore, their consciences bear witness to the righteous law of God (Rom. 2:14–15). God has given all people an innate sense of right and wrong. They are aware that wrongdoers ‘deserve to die’ (Rom. 1:32).

One might think that people who know the difference between right and wrong and who know the consequences for wrongdoing would live the way that God wants them to live. After all, many in our world today tell us that education is the solution to society’s problems.

Paul’s statements are a splash of cold water in the face. He calls people ‘haters of God’ (Rom. 1:30). Hating God, they hate one another (Rom. 1:29–31). What’s more, they are ‘inventors of evil’ (Rom. 1:30). Never satisfied, always bored, they are in a frenzied race to find newer and newer ways to sin. Rather than making them better, the knowledge of God leaves sinners worse off than if they had never known God in the first place.

What about the Jews? Perhaps they are better off than the Gentiles. After all, they have received the Torah, the law of Moses. They have received the sign of God’s covenant, circumcision. Surely they must be in a better position than the Gentiles.

Paul's assessment of the Jews is sobering. Simply having the law or receiving circumcision cannot put a person into God's favor. It is not that Paul discounts the law and circumcision (Rom. 3:1). They are valuable, but they cannot deliver a sinner from the righteous judgment of God. The Jew who sins will be held accountable for his sins (Rom. 2:1–10). If he perfectly and continually observed all the requirements of the law, then God could accept him on that basis (Rom. 2:13). The problem, of course, is that he does not keep the law perfectly. Simply 'hearing the law' will be of no value to bring him into God's favor. 'Doing the law' is what counts.

Is Paul singling out Jews for bad treatment? Is this anti-Semitism? No. Paul, after all, is a Jew himself. He loves his people greatly (see Rom. 9:1–3). He is addressing a problem that uniquely arises within God's people. We could put Paul's point in contemporary terms. Let us say a person is baptized, faithfully attends church services, and daily reads the Bible. Paul is saying that these things cannot bring that person into God's favor. They can't bring him into God's favor because God requires a perfect record to enter into His favor (Rom. 2:13, 26–7), and no member of God's people can produce that perfect record.

God shows no favoritism, Paul says. He will not give the Jews special treatment simply because they are His chosen people. God is just. He has one standard for every human being, Jew or Gentile. In fact, if a Gentile were ever to keep the law perfectly, he would rise up to condemn the Jew (Rom. 2:25–9)!