



# ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

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## Leave forgiveness to Israel.

The truth of Justification explained.



**F**orgiveness assumes guilt. In other words, no one can be forgiven who is not guilty. Have you ever heard anyone say, “I know you’re not the one who put that dent in my car, so I forgive you.”

The thing with God is, He has declared us—through Paul’s gospel and Paul’s gospel alone—to be not guilty. We have not dented anything. Another way to say “not guilty” is “justified.” And “justified” is another way to say, “not guilty.”

The first time Paul mentions this seemingly crazy idea of sinners not being guilty before God is in Acts 13:38-39, when he is in Antioch and he announces to the Jews and proselytes—

Let it then be known to you, men, brethren that through this One is being announced to you the pardon of sins, and from all from which you could not be justified in the law of Moses, in this One everyone who is believing is being justified.

This is the first mention of a justification before God in the Greek Scriptures. Paul casually drops it into the end of a sentence on forgiveness so that he doesn’t get stoned. It’s slick. He tacks it on at the end, almost casually. (Justification is not a working, applicable Jewish truth.) But after Paul testifies to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, he holds out the truth of Justification just to see if any Jews would actually hear it. Most would not. (It would have gone completely over their heads and wrecked most of their livers) Paul put out this feeler to see if anyone had an antenna for his gospel. Paul wanted to see if any of the Jews or proselytes would approach him afterwards and say, “What was that thing you mentioned there at the end, the ‘justification’ thing? Never heard of it, but it sounds intriguing.”

DETROIT

I did this myself, as I have told you, at an Israel-identity church outside Detroit, Michigan. This was 1997 or so, but it was first-century drama just as Peter and Paul lived it. I taught justification at this church, and the congregants were ready to stone me. This might have been my fourth invitation; it would be my last. This group had liked me whenever I taught the salvation of all, but this was too much for them. I knew that I was detonating a hand grenade. I finished to cold shoulders. One woman, however, approached me after the meeting and said, “Amazing. I heard my gospel for the first time.” I never get tired telling this story. She never went back to that church and has been a champion of Paul’s gospel ever since. She had an antenna for Paul, but in ten years no one had ever broadcast on that frequency.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT DID IT

The only place where any Jew might have heard of justification would have been from David who, under inspiration of the holy spirit, wrote in Psalm 32:1-2—

Happy he whose transgression is lifted away, Whose sin is covered over! Happy the human to whom Yahweh is not reckoning depravity.

In the second part of this, David had no idea what he was saying. The first part was common—“transgression lifted away.” The second part came from Mars—“not reckoning depravity.” David must have dropped his pen and wondered, “What the hell was *that*?” Then he would have shrugged and left the building. A couple thousand years later, Paul would unearth it.

David left Paul a tiny ounce of Scriptural recourse as a puzzle piece for the “new creation” truth given him by Christ. Paul drew upon “not reckoning depravity” centuries later and made it a platform. David, as I said, dropped it and left the building marvelling at the holy spirit, which he could not account for. Paul excavated the line, picked it up, dusted it off, overlaid it with gold and built an industry upon it. And yet in Antioch, early on and in the presence of Jews, Paul merely hinted at the treasure now in his possession. Later, in the book of Romans, he would elaborate upon it.

## THE DEATH OF THE OLD HUMANITY

To not even reckon depravity to a human is far different than lifting away transgression from that human. How can you lift away something that doesn't exist? With Justification, God does not consider Sin to even



exist. I'm not saying that it doesn't exist, but only that God *looks* at it as though it doesn't. The root word of justification is “just.” “Just” means “right.” Justification is God saying to someone, “You are right.”

Justification depends on the destruction of the old humanity. God cannot justify the old humanity because the old humanity is obviously flawed and sinning. The only way, therefore, that God could justify humanity is if He destroys the old humanity. But how can He destroy the old humanity if the old humanity still walks the Earth? He can see the old humanity in a new way. Does He simply change His mind concerning it? No. He destroys it through Christ on the cross.

The destruction of the old humanity is not a figment of God's imagination. Rather, it is based on a radical event. On the cross, Jesus Christ took away the old humanity. He did this through His six hours of suffering. Every minute of that suffering was real and consequential.

“The six hours on the cross transformed Sin so that even our failings lead us to God.”

This is not an Israelite truth. Israel has no understanding of the cross. Israel recognizes the death of Christ, but not the manner of His death. To Israel, the old humanity is reformed. It's propped up in a chair and its clothes are changed. It is enabled to do righteousness through an in-working of God's spirit. To Israel, sins are forgiven. This sounds like the best that one can do and it is—until one considers not being reckoned as sinning at all. The truth of Justification is that there is no sin to forgive. Again, this does not mean that we do not sin. It means that God looks upon humanity now and says, “It is right. I don't have a problem with it.”

But how can sins be right? The six hours on the cross transformed Sin so that even our failings lead us to God; even our failings are justified now. Our failings keep us weak and needing God. They remind us of our creaturehood.

The definition of justified is, “having, done for, or marked by a good or legitimate reason; to show (an act, claim, statement, etc.) to be just or right.” With Paul's message, Sin has reason. We appreciate it now as purposeful. We don't keep sinning so that there can be more purpose, but the sins we do commit have purpose. They are now legitimate in that everything we now do contrib-

utes in some way to our understanding of God. Sin is the necessary backdrop to salvation. God now sees us as just, even as we are sinning. He can only do this because Jesus Christ destroyed the old humanity. This is how important the six hours of suffering of Christ on the cross was to us. Were it not for that, we'd still be struggling with guilt and shame. Some of us do it anyway, but this insults the cross.

Paul explains all of this in Romans 6:4-7—

We, then, were entombed together with Him through baptism into death, that, even as Christ was roused from among the dead through the glory of the Father, thus we also should be walking in newness of life. For if we have become planted together in the likeness of His death, nevertheless we shall be of the resurrection also, knowing this, that our old humanity was crucified together with Him, that the body of Sin may be nullified, for us by no means to be still slaving for Sin, for one who dies has been justified from Sin.

Slow this down and let's analyze it. Paul says that we should be walking in newness of life. How can we do that if we are fretting over our old life? We can't. But our old life (our old humanity) was crucified together with Christ. Our old life is the life we lived when sin was being reckoned to us. The best that we could hope for then was forgiveness, that is, for God to say, "You did wrong, but I will overlook the penalty. I will cut you a break." Justification is *not* God cutting us a break. It is God looking at us and seeing nothing to cut us a break *over*. It means that He is not reckoning sin to us—at all. God now sees us as right. I must keep repeating this because of how radically different it is from everything we were taught when the Israelite message of forgiveness was crammed down our throats and we were made to feel guilty every five minutes because of things that we did and continued to do.

#### THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM

Then Paul says, "Our old humanity was crucified together with Him, that the body of Sin may be nullified." The nullification of the *body* of Sin is still future. We have been *reckoned* righteous but not yet *constituted* righteous. In other words, God is calling what is not as though it were. We are to be living in what God says *now* concerning us, and then waiting for Him to make it actual. Don't think it strange, for God said the same type of thing to Abraham in Romans 4:17-18 concerning him being the father of many nations—

According as it is written that, 'A father of many nations have I appointed you'—facing which, [Abraham] believes it of the God Who is vivifying the dead and calling what is not as if it were—who, being beyond expectation, believes in expectation, for him to become the father of many nations.

Abraham was *to become* a father of many nation. This would be future. It is the equivalent of Paul saying, "That the body of Sin may be nullified." But in the meantime, God declares what He will do in the future to be true *now*. This figure of speech is known as *prolepsis*. It is a Greek word that means "to take before." Prolepsis itself means, "the representation of a thing as existing before it actually does or did so, as in *he was a dead man when he entered*." I prefer God's definition: "Calling what is not as though it were."

Notice God's wording to Abraham: "A father of many nations have I appointed you." God was already calling Abraham—fatherless and impotent at the time—"a father of many nations." God called Abraham what he



was *going* to make him before He made him that. God applied a future thing to Abraham's present. That's prolepsis. Abraham faced it (listened to it; considered it) and then flat-out believed it. Why? Because it was God saying it. Who knew better than God? Abraham believed God.

This is a good thing to do—to believe God. I recommend it highly. God loved it so much that God reckoned

Abraham's faith as righteousness. God only wants to be believed, even for the radical things that He says. When we believe what God says, then we bathe ourselves in it and live by it in spite of what we see. God wants us to enjoy it now even before it happens. Why wait until it happens in order to get a kick out of it? This is God's thought with the use of the figure of speech known as prolepsis.

Abraham believing something that God said of him concerning something that he could not yet see or was not yet made is the equivalent of Paul saying, "Thus we also should be walking in newness of life." It's not simply believing that someday we will be resurrected, immortal and sinless, but walking in it, that is, living as though it were already true; whistling through life; not feeling guilty about anything; not wringing our hands over sin. Why wring hands over something that God is not reckoning? It's a slap in the face to God to refuse this treat.



Abraham believing the future promise of *actually* being a father of many nations is the equivalent of Paul saying, "Nevertheless we shall be of the resurrection also." The resurrection is future. But the truth that belongs to the resurrection is present. The truth is the radical declaration of God concerning us.

Abraham considered himself a father of many

nations even while he was fatherless and impotent. This probably caused others to call him crazy. Abraham walked and talked like the father of many nations. He was probably the only guy in history who passed out cigars *before* the baby was born. God liked this, because it meant that God was being believed.

Thus, we also are to walk and talk like people to whom God is not reckoning sin, to whom God has said, "You are right," and to whom God has said, "You are a new humanity." Nothing slaps this in the face harder than fretting over sin, begging God for forgiveness, or imagining that our failings are still keeping us from God's favor. In Paul's evangel, these things are insulting to God and to Christ. They are a denial of God's very declarations concerning us. They are an active proof that God is not being believed. Those pretending to understand grace and justification suppose that they are impressing God by battling their flesh and trying to bait you into battling yours. Instead, they are insulting Him by not believing Him. Additionally, they clearly don't know what they're talking about when they throw around the term "justification."

#### SLAVING FOR SIN

**"For us by no means to be still slaving for Sin, for one who dies has been justified from Sin" (Romans 6:6-7).**

Here, the great truth is repeated. One who dies has been justified from Sin. Sin no longer counts against one because God no longer sees it as sin. This can only come via the death of the old humanity, which is why Paul mentions "one who dies." This is a good point. If you were dead, could you sin? Not one corpse that I am aware of has ever missed the mark. A dead person has certainly, then, been justified from Sin. But we are still alive. Yes and no. We are to consider ourselves to have died with Christ, even as we live. Again, dead people can't sin. This is why God killed the old humanity, through Christ—so that we could think of the part of ourselves that sins as legitimately (though not literally) dead.

Only this apprehension keeps us from slaving for Sin. When Paul says "slaving for Sin," he is by no means, in this context, exhorting anyone to stop sinning. This is not a "stop sinning" context. (Paul does that elsewhere.) Paul exhorts his readers in this context to understand that slaving for Sin—fighting it, trying to eliminate it, feeling guilty over it—is downright stupid (at the least, unnecessary) for one to whom God is not reckoning sin.

A slave of Sin, in this context, is one who is still chained to the old creation. I know many people who wake up in the morning determined to undergo another battle with their flesh. It's too bad. These people are slaves of Sin—still chained to the old creation. Even if they were to manage to not sin for an entire day, they would have accomplished the feat as a slave of Sin. A slave of sin wrestles with his or her sin. Success or failure doesn't matter; it's the wrestling itself that denies the truth of Justification.

In light of the great truth of Justification, the struggle to produce a sinless day is, itself, a sin. And so the results of such a day do not even matter. What matters is the presence or absence of a struggle, of hand-wringing, of self-condemnation. For it is not the elimination of sin via struggle that delivers one from slavery to Sin, it is Christ on the cross and His six hours of suffering—*this* is what delivers from Sin. So the hand wringing only proves that one has been delivered *into* a slavery to Sin. One who is *truly* delivered from Sin reckons him or herself to be already righteous before God. This, God loves. Such a person—though still sinning—pleases God far more than the person managing to produce a sinless day through a slavery to something that God has already eliminated, through Christ.

God justifies sinners, not Boy Scouts (Romans 5:8-9).

## INDICTMENT

Who will be indicting God's chosen ones? God, the Justifier? Who is the Condemner? Christ Jesus, the One dying, yet rather being roused, Who is also at God's right hand, Who is pleading also for our sakes? —*Romans 8:33-34*

To indict means “to charge with a fault or offense: criticize, accuse.” The truth of Justification eliminates even the possibility of fault in the sight of God. Who eliminated the old creation? God did. Why? So that we could not have to worry about Sin any more, but just relax in grace and be thankful. Since God is the One Who justified us, it is insane to think that He could possibly be the One Who could indict us. How could the One Who calls us “not guilty” then turn around and charge us with a fault or offense? What about Jesus? Will *He* condemn us? Again, this is an insane consideration, for Christ is the One Who worked out God's justification of our sin at the cross.

No, I'm afraid that the only entity that could indict us, is us. Unless we know the truth of Justification, we are our own worst enemy.

Others can also attempt to indict us. I am not speaking now of someone trying to adjust our behavior so that we

reflect well on the evangel; this is one thing; Justification is another. I am talking about people trying to tell us that our sins bring us into disfavor with God. I don't put up with any such accusation for a second. I don't *tell* such a person, “screw you,” but this is precisely what I am thinking in my mind and I use it, silently, so that the accuser and the accusation gets no hold on me.

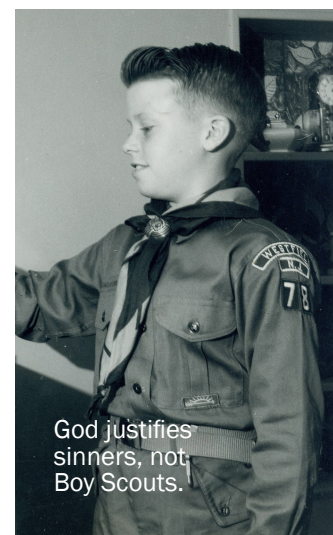
Whenever this happens, it's clearly an attack of Satan. It doesn't matter how sincere the accuser is. So in my mind I say, “screw you.” Thus becalmed, I can then tell the person in a kind way, “Have you ever heard of the truth of Justification? It's great. It's the fact that God sees me as righteous no matter what I do, based on the death of the old humanity when Christ took the old humanity to the tomb through His death on the cross.” My accusers shake their heads at this almost every time because they've never heard of such a thing. They've heard of Justification, of course, but no one has ever told them what it means. And these are people who have been to seminary and gone to church their entire lives. All this, and they have no idea what Justification is.

The religiously trained think they know what Justification is, but they don't. They say the word, but the definition may as well be sitting at the summit of Everest. They think that Justification is a fancy way to say “pardon.” They prove their ignorance of Justification by trying to convince me that God frowns upon me instead of bathing me in the glorious light of being righteous before Him.

Forgiveness is not Justification. Forgiveness is begging God to cut one a break. It's being sorry all day. It's waking up trying to do better. You can call a snail an eagle, but it doesn't stop the snail from being a snail.

## OFF AND ON THE HOOK

Forgiveness is an Israel thing. Israelites really do have to confess their sins all the time and hope that God will let them off the hook. The scary thing about a pardon is that



it can be revoked. One can be pardoned one day and back on the hook the next, depending on one's behavior.

The parable of the ten-thousand talent debtor in Matthew 18:21-35 demonstrates the "on again/off again" nature of a pardon. In this parable, Jesus tells of a man who begs his master to let him off (forgive) a debt. The master says, "All right." But then that servant refuses to offer the same consideration to a servant of *his*. The original master gets wind of it, is appalled, and loads the debt back onto his servant. Jesus winds up the parable like this: "Thus shall My heavenly Father also be doing to you, if each one should not be pardoning his brother, from your hearts." Scary stuff. But it's Israelite stuff. Obviously, there is no hint here of justification or of a new creation, or of God not reckoning Sin. In the Israelite arrangement, He reckons Sin all day.

### RICARDO JOHNSON

In the summer of 1999, I was teaching on Justification on live radio at WCCD, 1000 AM in Cleveland, Ohio, with a group of five other believers. The producer, Ricardo Johnson, couldn't take it anymore and actually broke into the show from his control room. He was not very happy. He had his Bible in front of him and he said, "How can you say that we can no longer worry about our sins? You are forgetting about 1 John 1:9. This verse says, and I quote, 'If we should be avowing our sins, He is faithful and just that He may be pardoning us our sins and should be cleansing us from all injustice.'"

My response was, "Ricardo, do you do this?"

"What do you mean?"

I turned the favorite Christian car crash scenario back on him and said, "If you got in a car crash on the way home and you still had an unconfessed sin, do you believe that this sin would still be held to your account by God?"

His answer, although hesitant, was, "Yes."

I said, "You're right—according to the gospel given to Israel. But I have not been talking about the gospel given to Israel, but about the gospel given to Paul. Those who believe this gospel are justified from sin. Sin isn't even reckoned to them. Why would anyone believing this gospel, therefore, need to confess something that doesn't exist? Why would God need to forgive someone whom He considers to be righteous? This would be like God saying, 'You are righteous in My sight. Therefore, I forgive you.'"

Ricardo couldn't handle it because he was trying to make the truths of Justification fit with the truths of forgiveness. Both are truths, but one is a higher truth and a greater blessing. It is a deeper, more profound, more permanent truth.

Ricardo couldn't reconcile Justification and forgiveness. I tried explaining to him, on the air, that these things were not meant to be reconciled because that they belonged to two different evangels, one called the Circumcision and one called the Uncircumcision (Galatians 2:7). I invited Ricardo to accept Paul's gospel to the nations. I invited him to receive the truth of the death of the old humanity so that he could stop struggling with and feeling guilty over his sins. But Ricardo was born and raised a Baptist and therefore couldn't accept it. Baptists run their lives and make their living flogging the old humanity. This flogging of his flesh was as much a part of Ricardo Johnson as his nationality.

For the rest of our tenure there at WCCD, Ricardo Johnson watched the Cleveland Indians on a small black and white television in his control room. Our sound sucked after that night because Ricardo had stopped listening to us after the truth of Justification had been revealed, preferring to watch baseball.

### "HAVING PEACE"

We are to forgive each other and apologize for bad stuff that we do to one another because we, being "one another," aren't God. Justification concerns our relationship with God. Our relationship with God sits on the footing of Justification.

I do sometimes tell God that I'm sorry, but it's completely an emotional, relative thing that makes *me* feel better. I know that God sees me as a new creation. I tell God "I'm sorry" because it feels good. *I* need it, not God. The Circumcision, on the other hands, *must* to do it. For them, it's a requirement. Our "requirement" is thanksgiving.

What a difference between sitting around all day wringing one's hands over one's failures, and basking in the sunshine of God's affection and thanking Him all day for not reckoning Sin. True and lasting peace can only come on the heels of Justification, for—

Being, then, justified by faith, we may be having peace toward God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ. —*Romans 5:1*

God would rather be thanked all day than begged all day for forgiveness. This is the beauty, the glory, and the privilege of the gospel of the Uncircumcision. David was right: "Happy the man to whom Yahweh is not reckoning depravity."

Leave forgiveness to Israel; they love to not be happy.

—MZ