



## Is It Justified?

Devotion

I hope I'm not the only mom who referees debates filled with finger pointing between her children.

"He hit me!"

"Yeah because you threw your shoe at me."

"But he called me dumb first."

This kind of behavior has been around as long as sin.

When God confronted Adam and Eve in the Garden after they had eaten the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the finger pointing began. *The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate"* (Genesis 3:12-13). Adam blamed Eve. But he did not stop there. He goes so far as to insinuate God was partly to blame for putting the woman in the garden in the first place. And when God turned to Eve, she blamed the serpent.

I do it, too. I look for someone else to blame when I've sinned.

"But he cut me off in traffic."

"But they didn't do what I told them to."

"But she spread nasty gossip about me."

"But he said he would be home in time for dinner tonight."

"But God You didn't give me a chance."

"But ... "

My guess is you have your own list of "buts."

We try to absolve ourselves of guilt, justify our actions, share the blame, and cast off personal responsibility. Using the bad behavior of others to excuse our own only deceives ourselves (1 John 1:8). Sin is still sin, even when someone else sins against us first.

I'm trying to teach my boys, as I preach to myself, that we are all responsible for our own actions. We do not have to react when we have been wronged. Nobody else can make us sin. Our actions are never justified by what has been done to us. We are only justified by the blood of Christ. He suffered the consequences for all our sins though He was without any of His own. So, the next time I find myself pointing a finger at another person to justify my actions, I pray I will turn toward the cross instead.

If there was ever a person who would have been justified by finger pointing or retaliating against his enemies, it was Jesus. He was without sin, falsely accused, convicted, and murdered. Jesus could have called legions of angels to His defense saying,

"But Judas ... "

"But Pilot ... "

"But the Roman soldiers ... "

But He did not. Instead He said, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34). He prayed **for** the people who mocked, beat, tortured, and crucified Him. If He is able to call on His Father to lavish forgiveness upon the unforgivable, we can too.

Jesus’ work on the cross is the only thing that justifies us. Let us take a closer look at what justification means from Strong’s *Concordance*.

**justification** - (Greek dikaiosin (dik-ah-yo-sis)) the act of justifying or state of being justified; to render just or innocent: free; righteous.

**justify** - (Greek dikao (dik-ah-yo-o)) 1. to show or prove to be valid. 2. to declare free of blame: ABSOLVE. 3. To free (a person) from the penalty attached to grievous sin. - Used only of God.

The Greek word “dikaiosin” is derived from the verb meaning “to acquit.” I have watched enough crime dramas to know that if a person is taken to trial and acquitted, they are free to go, right then and there. The accused is irrevocably justified.

The Bible tells us in Romans 5:18, *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.* Adam and Eve committed the first crime against God in the Garden of Eden and ushered in a new era of separation between mankind and the Creator. By their sin and our own, we are all guilty (Romans 3:23) and deserve the death penalty (Romans 6:23) according to God’s law. But because the blood of Christ **justifies** us, we are saved from the wrath of God (Romans 5:9).

As Christians, this does not mean no sentence was served for our sins. Because God is just and righteous our sins cannot go unpunished. Instead, the penalty was paid on the cross, by His Son. Because Christ was without sin, only His sacrifice on the cross can justify us.

We are rendered just because He paid the price.  
We have been absolved of our guilt.  
We are free from the penalty of our sins.

*For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law* (Romans 3:28). Our faith in Christ is the means by which we are justified, not our good works or obedience.

Justification is both an act entirely accomplished in the past yet only fulfilled in the future when Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead (2 Timothy 4:1). Because it was finished on the cross, we look forward with great hope, not despair, to His return. His blood declares us free of blame from every sin that ever has been or ever will be committed.

Justification enables us to both live at peace now with God and be filled with hope for our future. Have you seen those people who have been acquitted in the courtroom? Their entire countenance is changed as soon as the judge declares the verdict. Relief floods their body. Joy lights their face. Hope returns to their eyes. May it be so for us, too, when we realize that by Christ’s work on the cross, we are acquitted. We are justified.

How might living with this verdict change your life? Because God has pardoned us, we ought to extend the same forgiveness to others – no matter what they do to us and no matter how many times they do it (Matthew 18:21-22).

I watched the movie **42**, about Jackie Robinson. Branch Rickey, who recruited him to be on the Dodgers baseball team, was talking about the negativity likely to ensue when he stepped on the white-dominated baseball diamond. He was coaching him not to react. And Jackie asked, "So you want a player on your team who doesn't have the guts to fight back?" Mr. Rickey's character responded, "I want a player who has the guts not to fight back." He knew the only thing people would see if he retaliated against their prejudice would be Robinson's misbehavior. And that would sway the tide of public sentiment against integrating the sport.

Romans 12:19 says, *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* Retaliation leads to escalation, but mercy fosters peace. As God's ambassadors to the world, His Word coaches us not to fight back so we might instead show the world the beauty of His peace justified by the blood of Christ.

Do you have the guts?

**Prayer:** Dear Father, forgive me for all the times I have tried to excuse my actions by pointing out other's faults. I know that nothing escapes Your all-seeing presence and no sin goes unnoticed. Thank you for sending Your Son to die for all my sins and teaching me how to live according to Your loving law. Fill me with holy courage to not fight back when I am attacked. Show me the way of mercy and equip me to be one who fosters peaceful living with all people. By Your Spirit, help me to live in peace with all people. Help me to extend the forgiveness to others that You have lavished on me. I trust You, O Lord, to vindicate every offense on my behalf. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Is It Justified?

Written by Elizabeth Giertz, Harker Heights, Texas

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017