

## January 28, 2018 - The Doctrine of Justification

A doctrine is a belief about God, held and taught by the church. Think of a doctrine as a sort of map. If you stand on the beach, looking out over the Atlantic ocean, you will notice the sand and the waves and the birds and the beauty! If you look away from the ocean to look at the map of the Atlantic, then you have turned from something real to something less real...from real waves to a bit of colored paper. Still, there are two things we need to remember about the map:

1. It is based on the experiences of what hundreds of others have found out by sailing the real Atlantic;
2. If you want to go anywhere, the map is absolutely necessary.

So doctrines of the church, are kind of like maps: they are based on the experiences of hundreds of others who were in touch with God; and as we seek to grow closer to God in our own relationship - to move from here to there - we will find such maps extremely useful.

So what is justification? It is primarily about reconciliation between God and human beings. When we justify a column of words, we line them up. Justification is about bringing us back in line with God. How does this happen? By entering into a relationship with God, through his son, Jesus Christ. The Bible says we are justified by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. (Romans 3.22). And in Ephesians 2.8-9: **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.**

Since we are all sinners, we are all guilty and we stand condemned before God. But when we come to God, repenting of our sins and receiving Jesus Christ as our Savior, God justifies us - declares us righteous - as a gift.

Once our legal status has been declared righteous, through faith in Christ, we need to bring our behavior in line with our new status. So rather than continuing in sin, we need to fix our behavior. The justified status we have received was not conferred upon us on the basis of right behavior; but it is supposed to be followed by transformed righteous behavior.

The Discipline of The United Methodist Church, speaks to the importance of the doctrine of justification in the last paragraph of our articles of religion. Article IX - Of the Justification of Man states:

*We believe we are never accounted righteous before God through our works or merit, but that penitent sinners are justified or accounted righteous before God only by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*We believe regeneration is the renewal of [humankind] in righteousness through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature and experience newness of life. By this new birth the believer becomes reconciled to God and is enabled to serve [God] with the will and the affections.*

*Wherefore, that we are justified by faith, only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.*

Indeed, what could be more comforting that to know that no amount of sin or inadequacy on our part, is enough to keep God from accepting us? And no measure of good performance is enough to GET God to accept us. God accepts us, not because we deserve or have earned it - but because of the worth of Christ. Now isn't that a helpful doctrine?