

Self-Justification

by Hendrik Joubert

The simplest form of self-justification may start out with an abuse of the words of Jesus when He said: **"Do not judge so that you will not be judged."** (Matthew 7:1) We will selfishly apply this condemnation of frivolous judgments by human standards to the righteous standard supplied by God: **All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;** ¹⁷ **so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.** (2 Timothy 3:16-17) We dismiss the responsibility to **not judge according to appearance, but to judge with righteous judgment.** (John 7:24) – effectively refusing to be corrected or reproofed by God.

God's standard is also easily dismissed by ascribing the words to a man, or his interpretation. This interpretation is an extremely convenient tool for self-justification. Ultimately the words of God can mean anything a man wants it to mean. Those words I do not have any difficulty in accepting stand as they are. The rest is subjected interpretation so that they will not condemn me. In **2 Peter 3:15-16** we learn that Paul wrote **according to the wisdom given him** (by inspiration), and that some would distort what he wrote, **as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.**

Another way to disallow quotations from the Scriptures is to suggest that it has been corrupted by repeated translation. The ability of God to keep the message dependable is denied, while His supposed providential care in my life is abused to suggest a unique relationship with Him – effectively proving that I am justified by means of a special relationship. Favoritism? Opening his mouth, Peter said: **"I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality,** ³⁵ **but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.** (Acts 10:34-35)

We may allow some to criticize our behavior, however we will not allow them to speak of the ultimate consequences of our actions – that we are, or may be eternally lost. We do not like to think of our actions as sin, or sinful. Indiscretions are a softer term suggesting less harsh consequences. What have I done to deserve eternal damnation? *"Do not get me wrong, I do have my mistakes, but I am not that bad."* It is so easy to find someone I consider worse than myself, even if it is merely by ascribing an evil motive for doing exactly what I did – they sin, I stumble. **And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?"** ³ **"I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.** (Luke 13:2-3)

How serious is my sin really? What are the consequences of these indiscretions we so easily dismiss as we spend God's grace on ourselves, while failing to acknowledge that this grace instructs **us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age?** (Titus 2:11-15) Grace does not mean anything goes, it explains the gracious terms on which a sinner may escape eternal condemnation. These terms are explained through **the gospel, the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.** ¹⁷ **For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."** (Romans 1:16-17) Those **who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.** ⁹ **These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,...** (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9)

Another way to justify self is to solemnly declare *"who among us is perfect"* as we raise our hands with a facial expression of *"sincere"* acknowledgement of our *"weaknesses."* *Confession is good for the soul*, and admission of guilt (in a limited and controlled way) is considered humility. Repentance is one of the conditions of salvation, as we have already noticed Jesus saying. (Luke 13)

We may impress others, but the Lord knows the heart. And He said to them, ***"You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. Luke 16:15*** In spite of the fact that salvation is by grace through faith, Peter writes: ***For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?*** (1 Peter 4:17-18)