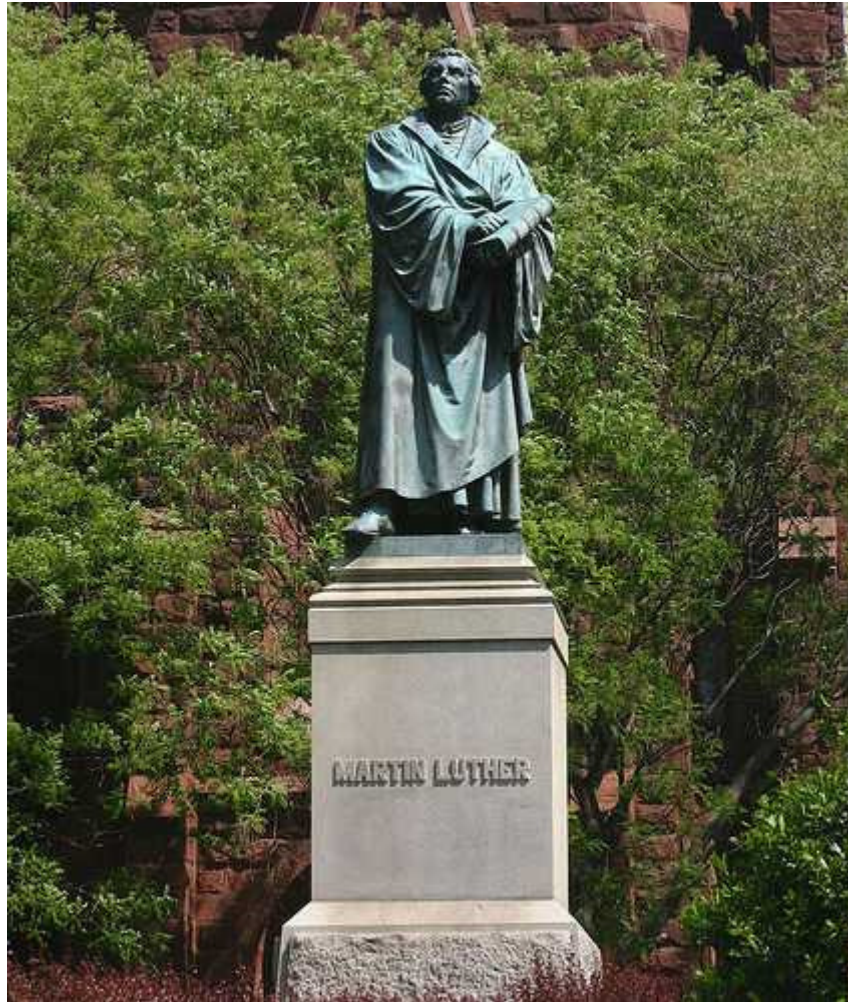


What is Justification By Faith?

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Martin Luther changed the course of the modern Christian faith by initiating the Protestant Reformation. He was a Roman Catholic priest and theology professor. He confronted the Roman Catholic Church with his 95 Theses in 1517. Luther strongly disputed their claim that freedom from God's punishment of sin could be purchased with money or that it can be granted by the Church. His refusal to retract his writings at the demand of Pope Leo X in 1520 and the Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms meeting in 1521 resulted in his excommunication by the pope and condemnation as an outlaw by the emperor

We humans have an inherent tendency to justify ourselves. No sooner someone points to a real or alleged mistake on our part, the defenses go up and we pile reason upon reason to demonstrate why we were wrong. We all wish to justify ourselves or offer a justification.

Thus Justification refers to the act of declaring that a person is not guilty. This might be done by him, or by someone else. It is somewhat in the same sense that this word is used in the Bible also. The major difference is that the doctrine refers to justification before God (and not man), and that also in the matter of sins (and not everyday omissions or failings).

Man's inherent need for justification is seen among people of all languages, cultures, and time. But much greater than that is man's perceived need for justification before the creator. This is why people of all religions at all times invented their own varied methods to get a clean chit from God. But, obviously, no man-made method can bring lasting justification. In every justly constituted human courts, a guilty person is deemed worthy only of punishment and not of vindication or justification.

Because of human conscience every person knows that he is a sinner deserving only punishment. He also knows that the Divine court is infinitely more powerful than the fallible human courts. This is why there is a life-long yearning in his heart to get right with God. The origin of all man-made religions and rituals can be traced to this fear and yearning.

Man-made religion and ritual can offer, at the most, only a temporary satisfaction. It cannot save, it cannot justify in the final reckoning. Thus God in His infinite mercy opened and offered a way of justification, the divinely ordained way of justification. He also chose a succession of people to carry this message unadulterated. It was transmitted from Seth to Noah and from Noah to Abraham orally and also through the written word. God also spoke directly with people in this chain. Finally He made Israel the custodian of this message. They were both to preserve the message from adulteration, and were also supposed to spread this message to people of all the world. And there are plenty of archeological and historical indications that they took this responsibility seriously.

As world population began to explode, even Israelites became numerous and some sort of written and codified communication became necessary to get the message of divine justification to all. This is the time when Moses rose to leadership.

Moses was a highly learned person, and since he was trained in the palaces of Egypt upto the age of 40, he was proficient in more than one language, was able to write in more than one kind of script, and had access to papyri and other writing material. God used him to write six books in the Bible: the first five books, plus the book of Job. He also wrote many psalms. Thus was the first time when the divine message of justification was codified down in writing.

From here the exposition of this doctrine kept on becoming increasingly clear, with unusually detailed descriptions being given in the last portion of the book of Isaiah. In His three and a half years of public ministry, Lord Jesus repeatedly spoke about justification, and even illustrated it. A classic incident is the parable of the arrogant Pharisee and the weeping Publican who went to the Temple. The Pharisee did not have an assurance when he left, though he followed the law to the letter. The Publican, on the other hand, went away justified on the basis of his faith in God, though he probably had broken all the stipulations of the Law. Such is God's compassion, but many in the Old Testament times failed to recognize it.

The special activities of the Holy Spirit from Pentecost onwards, the writing down of the doctrinal books of the Bible (Romans to Judah), and the never-before but newly-given filling and indwelling of the Spirit ensured that Divine Truth and the Divine Plan of the Ages are made clear to the people of God with unusual clarity. The message of Justification By Faith was spelt out clearly in the Epistles, specially and emphatically in the Epistle to Romans.

That Justification is an act of God's grace and that the Law had no part in it. It was abundantly clear to the Apostles. The Jerusalem Council publicly recognized this fact. Similarly Peter, chief among the Apostles also recognized this truth when God spoke to him through the vision of a large tray filled with all kinds of animals. Since the Apostles and their close companions spent much time in an intensive exposition of spiritual truth, and since a large number of believers like the "Bereans" made it a point to search the scriptures on a daily basis, doctrines related to salvation and justification were reasonably clear to believers in the first century. The wrong teachings of Judizers who insisted upon keeping the law, and the pagan influence of Gnostics were the main problems then, and the Apostles fought them with all might.

The Eclipse Of The Doctrine Of Justification By Faith

The second and third centuries did have many doctrines, but these were generally connected with the Lord Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Accepting the doctrine of Trinity (which includes accepting the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit as co-equal and co-eternal with the Father) was a problem for Pagan religions.

Again so substantial question came up about the doctrine of justification during this period. Meanwhile the Roman Emperor Constantine "converted" to the Christian "religion" in the fourth century, and there started the eclipsing of all major doctrines.

Every religion in the world teaches that man needs to labour hard, all his life, to receive salvation. The Bible is the only exception because if its emphasis upon salvation by grace, not by works. Thus any pagan influence obscures the doctrine of grace-based salvation in the first place. Thus the gross paganization of the Christian Faith under the Roman Christianity immediately obscured the clear and simple doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.



Picture: People worldwide work hard, submit themselves to untold hardships, with the hope that human works will bring justification, but none has assurance. (Pic by [Mahatma4711](#))

After Romanization of the Church, the next development was the control of the Roman Bishop over the whole of Christendom. Many treacherous and curious political, ecclesiastical, and personal battles were fought by the Roman Bishop and his cronies for this control. Eventually through a combination of deception and clever manipulation, the Bishop of Rome rose to become the human lord over almost the whole of Christendom. This was a battle for fame, power, and money and not doctrine, for pure doctrine does not guarantee these things. And once the power came into his hand, the Roman Bishop or Pope and the Roman Church did everything possible to consolidate and keep that power concentrated in their hands. The first requirement for this was the development of a theology and a "religion" that was

totally man-centric and work-centric instead of God-centric and grace-centric. The purpose was to enslave people, not to liberate.

Gradually a doctrine of work-based salvation was developed and taught. Additions were made as and when possible so much so that even after a person's departure his soul entered a place called purgatory. The relatives of a dead man had to keep on giving alms to the priests so that their dead forefather can escape the oppressive confines of purgatory and move to heaven.

Since God inspired the Bible in the common man's language, and a diligent reading of the Bible would tell people about salvation and justification based upon the grace-faith system, they invented methods to keep the Bible away from the masses. All liturgy was shifted to languages not understood by people, translation of the Bible was not allowed in the common man's language, and eventually the Roman Catholic church placed the Bible on the official list of "Forbidden Books". Severe punishment, imprisonment, and even confiscation of property was common if the Bible or a portion was discovered in any Roman Catholic home.

The Roman Catholics oppressed and even killed many for translating or for possessing the Bible. So enraged were they with William Tyndale for his Bible Translation that finally when they were able to lay their hands upon his grave, they exhumed Tyndale's bones and burnt in public to make an example of those who dared to defy the Catholic Church.

Rediscovery Of The Doctrine

The doctrine of Justification By Faith was taught by many small groups worldwide in spite of Catholic suppression. Church history tells that a faithful remnant was always active in spite of the eclipse of doctrine. The Roman Catholic Church mercilessly chased and persecuted these smaller reform movements, but they could not eliminate truth altogether. On the other hand, this violence ensured that these truths do not result in a mass-movement.

The "Dark Ages" are known to all students of history. The Roman Catholic Church ruled much of the Christian world with an iron hand. Free-thinking and dissent was made a crime. The dark ages followed. Yet many curious minds eventually laid their hands upon the Bible. Many began to secretly read the Bible, specially the books of the New Testament. This opened their eyes to many fundamental doctrinal truths, though only in an outline form. One of these men was Philip Melancthon. He wrote and spoke about God's justification which was available freely to all. (Presumably he did have access to the Remnant, which helped him to better grasp the Biblical truth).

Philip Melancthon's writings in turn touched Martin Luther a highly learned Roman Catholic monk. For years he had been reading the New Testament and fundamental doctrinal truths were gradually becoming clearer to him. He knew the Roman Catholic dogma was all men-made humbug and an outright pagan system meant only for the exploitation of the laity by the all-powerful priestly class. As he kept discovering the New Testament doctrines one by one, his restlessness and yearning to know the full and complete truth only kept increasing. Finally as he was studying the Epistle to Romans, he was struck by the insight that "Being Justified by Faith" is the key that united and revealed the fundamental doctrinal truths.

Soon he proclaimed this doctrine from the pulpit, and this Biblical insight spread among people like wild-fire. "You shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall set you free" was visible to anyone who observed the spiritual awakening that was spreading

rapidly in Europe.

The rest is well-known history. The Roman Catholic Church tried to suppress the Reformation with every tactic known to a conniving manipulator, and every tactic for torture which a sadist can contrive. Yet the Protestant Reformation kept growing, and with that the doctrinal affirmation of "Justification By Faith" (Sola Fide in Latin) reached all the continents.

Post Reformation Development

Though all doctrines are spelled out clearly in the Scriptures, not all doctrines are always clearly understood by people. Part of the reason is the way God has spread these truths throughout the Bible.

No Bible doctrine is ever introduced or explained in its totality in one place in the Bible. On the contrary, important statements are spread by God into many locations throughout the Old and New Testament. Thus all the verses related to a given topic have to be collected, classified and interpreted before a doctrinal topic can be understood clearly. This takes time and effort.

Since much systematic work is needed to define and expound any doctrine, the human understanding of any doctrine grows only gradually and in steps. Thus though the original Protestant Reformation brought people back to the fundamentals, it took many more years and even some more Reformations of lesser scope had to take place for further clarification and refinement in the understanding of these doctrines.

The rise of the Baptist Churches and the Presbyterian Churches, and the systematic work by their scholars further clarified many key doctrines, such as the doctrines related to the Inerrancy, and Infallibility of the Holy Scripture. The last of these Reformations was what is today known as the Plymouth Brethren movement.

The Plymouth Brethren movement started among the High Anglicans in England around the mid 1800s. Around 1890 a similar movement of the Holy Spirit took place independently in India, mostly among the Mar Thomaite, Jacobite, and Roman Catholic adherents. Eventually adherents of both of these movements recognized that they have the same doctrinal conviction, and thus they recognized each others as one and the same movement, later called the Plymouth Brethren.

Men in this group were dedicated Bible-students and established doctrines strictly on the protocols of the Bible interpretation resulted in a worldwide emphasis on interpretation of the Bible. A large number of interpreters and theologians worldwide made a substantial contribution to restating Biblical doctrines accurately in common man's language. There were many other connected activities also, and together they played an important role in the revival and rise of conservative Christianity. This also was the era when the doctrine of Justification By Faith received further clarification and restatement.

Today the fruits of the Protestant Reformation, which reached its pinnacle in the Plymouth Brethren Movement, are in front of us. The fundamental doctrines are available in every man's language in an accessible manner.

The Doctrine Of Justification By Faith

The Scripture makes it clear that all men are sinners. In Romans 3: 23 we read "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God". In Psalm 51:5 we read, "Surely I

have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me".

Thus every person is a transgressor before God, and every man, woman, and child is more or less conscious of it. They know they have trespassed, and just as every guilty person feels a need to justify himself, every sinner also yearns for relief. However, they also know that as trespassers they cannot be justified for justification actually belongs to a person who is innocent. The only relief that a sinner and a violator can hope is "pardon" and not justification. The greater the offense, the more difficult would be a pardon. Further, the more grave the offense, the higher needs to be the position or rank of that person before he can grant pardon. Everybody knows these things because these observations are part of all social life from the most primitive to the most advanced societies.

While trespassers and criminals are punished in all societies, a more lenient attitude is usually shown to the repentant person. Many a times their period of imprisonment is reduced, or converted into a fine, after paying which they are set free. In rare cases even pardon is granted by the highest authority in response to appeals for mercy coupled with grounds for compassion, such as the presents who need support of this person. All man-made religions take advantage of these practices and have built into themselves rituals for pleasing God (the highest authority) through alms, penance, and special rituals. The idea is to get a "remission" from the highest authority in the universe. Many of them even talk about forgiveness and cleansing of sins in lieu for harder work. There is, however, no question of justification in man-made religions because man knows that only a sinless and basically innocent person can be rightly "justified" by the judge.

The same was the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church: that man can get a remission and forgiveness, in lieu for penances, alms, and intercessory prayers of saints. The faithful were exhorted to lead a devout life, doing all what was expected of them to see if they might be able to secure a remission from punishment. There was no talk of justification (in the Biblical sense) because no judge of integrity can ever declare a trespasser as innocent. The maximum he could do was to offer pardon, making the recipient a "pardoned sinner" not righteous or innocent. However, this is not what God has in store for those who accept the Lord Jesus as their Savior. He both pardons as well as justifies. It is amazing, but it does happen. God wants it that way and He has a solution for it.

The First Step, Salvation By Grace: As mentioned before, what a trespasser longs for is forgiveness and relief from punishment. This is exactly what God does first.

In Romans 6: 23 we read, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is Eternal Life in Christ Jesus". In John 3:16 we read, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have Everlasting life". While man struggles, God has already paid the cost and opened the way to all. Man is alienated from God as long as he is a sinner condemned unto death. However, once he comes to God and obtained forgiveness and salvation, God can now work in him. This is exactly what we see in the next stage.

The Second Step, Union With Christ: Once a person trusts in Christ and accepts Him as personal Savior, God forgives him and unites him with the Body of Christ. That Church is the Body of Christ as mentioned in Ephesians and Colossians. In Ephesians 2: 16 we read, "And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross". In Colossians 1:24 we read, "...For His body's sake, which is the church". And in Ephesians 12:22 and 23 we read, "... head over all things to the Church, which is His body...".

Taking a regenerate believer and uniting him with the body of Christ is a special activity of the Holy Spirit. In I Corinthians 12: 13 says, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body". Here baptism refers to identifying or uniting two things.

There was no need for God to lay the penalty of our sins on Christ. That He chose to do so is His grace. Similarly, there is no need for God to unite with the body of Christ. However, He does so in His grace because that union opens a way for God to do many things for the new believers. Because of this union, God can now grant many things to the believers that He had granted to Christ because now they are in union with each other. Also, many things which Christ has can be imputed to those who are in union with Christ.

The New Testament repeatedly uses the expression "in Him" and "in Christ". This is a reference to things which are given, or attributed, or imputed to believers "in union with Christ". We must remember that not all what Christ has can be given to others. But certain things like His Holiness can be attributed to others at least positionally. This is exactly what happens in justification.

The Third Stage, Justification: Once a new believer is united with the body of Christ, God grants many things to the believer which He grants to Christ. Sonship of believers is a good example of this. God also imputes many things to believers which Christ has, and the best example here is justification.

It can be understood in the following way. Once a believer is united to the body of Christ, God views that person as part of the body of Christ. As a consequence, the righteousness which is Christ's so that God views that person as righteous (in Christ).

Here it should be understood clearly that Christ's righteousness is not transmitted or infused to a believer. On the contrary it is only attributed or imputed to the believer. This is not a physical transmission to a believer, but only a legal accounting.

Thus this person who was a sinner till yesterday, stands as righteous in Christ today. God no longer sees him as a sinner but as a righteous person or a "saint" in the language of New Testament. This act of declaring and viewing a sinner as a person who is "not guilty", who is righteous, who is a saint, because he is imputed or covered with the righteousness of Christ is called justification. A sinner and trespasser cannot be justified. But when the penalty has been paid, and when he is covered with the cloth of Christ's righteousness, he who was a sinner now stands justified as a saint.

The Process Of Justification

In the earlier portions of this book, we split up God's work into several stages for the sake of clarity and understanding. In reality, all these and several additional things take place in the life of a believer simultaneously at the moment he believes in Christ. God the Father does all these things in His grace so that He can give us a new nature, a new identity, and a new destiny. However, it is always helpful from the human perspective to view these divine actions in a more expanded form for our understanding. That is what we have done in the previous pages. God forgives our sins, unites us, and we stand justified.

The big question now is, does man play any role in his justification. Or can he do anything to expedite or assure his justification. And all man-made religions assert that he can work for his justification, and thus hasten the process. To establish this

theory, all of them in one form or other teach that man has a "spark of the divine" in him that can be nurtured to grow and make him holy or justified. Hindus teach this in the most potent form, because they claim that man is god and all what he needs is to shed his illusions that he is god. The Roman Catholics teach to the effect that this "spark" is transmitted to the child at the moment of his baptism. There is a whole range of teaching between these two, and ultimately all of them amount to "work for your justification" concept. However, this is not what the Bible teaches.

Justification is a gift of God, and He does not demand or accept anything in lieu of it. In Romans 3: 24 we read, "Being justified FREELY by grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus". This is a reminder redemption come first and justification is granted freely and non-meritoriously graciously along with that. The scripture repeatedly reminds that human work is not the basis of justification. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4: 5). On faith, a totally non-meritorious response from man, can bring divine justification to him. This is "justification by faith" or Sola Fide, as repeatedly proclaimed in Latin by the Reformers. This is declared in many places including Roman 3: 28 where we read, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law". Galatians 2:16 we read, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ, even as we believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified".

Implications of Justification by Faith

Often a fundamental doctrine looks just like another piece of theory. No practical implications can be seen. The problem here is not with the doctrine, but with those who fail to expound the practical aspects after they explain the theoretical part. The more an expositor is removed in time from the Reformations, the greater is the possibility that he will fail to see this connection, making his preaching all the more ineffective.

All ideas have practical consequences. More so when it is a fundamental doctrine. This is illustrated by the Protestant Reformation which spread worldwide like a wildfire and created a vertical split in families, societies, and churches. The Roman Catholic Church tortured millions of Protestants and killed hundreds of thousands. The consequences of this single doctrine were so life-transforming that millions chose torture over compromise. Obviously this doctrine has serious implications for life, enough for people to become willing to forfeit life and property.

Teaching Justification Leads to Freedom: All man-made religions teach work-based salvation and no objective justification. Thus their adherents (including the adherents of the 'christian' religions) slave all their lives without assurance of salvation. God offers salvation first, and then expects us to work. Not "for" salvation or justification which has given us a new identity.

Anyone who has worked hard to pass an examination or for a promotion knows about the toil and tension. But God does not want man to suffer this fate for salvation. And anyway his toils cannot earn salvation for him. So God provides promotion in grace, and invites us to work (lead a holy life) because of what we received as a gift. There is no more uncertainty, fear, or doubt about the outcome.

Teaching Justification By Faith leads to true spiritual freedom. People need to know about salvation by grace and justification by faith. They can know only when it is taught. It is the joy of this discovery, and assurance of the new life which motivated

the Reformation Generations to pay the heavy cost.

Teaching about Justification leads to liberation, and liberation leads people to action. Doctrines do have practical consequences. This is the reason why Reformation was followed by the great Missionary Movement. What they experience, they now wanted the whole world to experience. Liberty and liberation is contagious, specially when it comes after prolonged bondage.

Suppressing Justification Leads to Slavery: We all know how leaders of all religions exploit their people. By making salvation uncertain and dependent upon the priestly class, they exploit the masses from birth to death and even after that. With the "conversion" of Constantine, the Christian would also fell into the same pattern.



Pic: God does not ask people to slave themselves for the sake of salvation (Pic by [stevehicks](#))

Actually the Christian faith is the sower of liberty. God does not ask people to slave themselves for the sake of salvation. On the contrary He invites everyone to go unto Him and receive "rest" freely. There is no need for fear, doubt or skepticism about one's salvation. It is available without toil as a gift to anyone and everyone. But this message

also spelled the doom for the priestly class that indulges in luxury by enslaving people. But all of this changed with Constantine. Truth was suppressed, and owning or reading the Bible became a crime. There was no more any mention (or even remembrance) of inconvenient doctrines like justification by faith.

Just look at what Christendom has become in the sixteen centuries after Constantine. A good example of this perversion is the Roman Catholic Church. For salvation a person has to depend upon priests, seven or more sacraments, and life-long slavery to the church. Sins have to be confessed regularly to a priest, a perversion through which they enslave everyone. Spiritual freedom and Biblically true teaching are non existent in the church. Hundreds of millions are being pushed into hell, after having the false assurance that they know Lord Jesus Christ. It is suppression of "Justification By Faith" which has helped the Roman Catholic church to run the biggest spiritual slavery in the name of Christ the greatest liberator.

The picture is not much different in most Episcopal Churches. Among the Protestants the majority of denominational Churches are associated with the World council of churches and its national counterparts in each nation. The top men in this umbrella group are so degenerate that they see no difference between them, the Roman Catholics, the Hindus and people of other religions. Their proclaimed goal is a one-world religion, not the evangelical Christian Faith. Justification by works in their banner and justification by faith in Christ is anathema to them.

Then there are the Eastern Orthodox Churches and their counterparts, which includes the Jacobites and sister groups. They abandoned the doctrine of justification by faith hundreds of years ago, and today they are growing in their intimacy with the Roman Catholic church. In fact in Kerala there is a faction of Orthodox Churches and Bishops who function under the Roman Pope as their head. Salvation by grace through faith is anathema to all these groups.

Except for small groups of Evangelicals among them, the Anglicans were always closer to the Roman Catholic dogma rather than to Bible. Thus in 1970 some of their top leaders had begun to proclaim that all religions are essentially one and same. Specifically Indian groups such as the Mar Thoma Church, the Church of South India (CSI). The church of North India (CNI), are also moving in the same direction. The majority of their leaders might be religious and pious, but are not born-again. They jeer at the idea of salvation through grace and justification by faith. Hundreds of millions of so-called "Christians" race towards hellfire under these leaders. Millions live entangled in man-made rituals enslaving all their life to the whims of priests, never enjoying spiritual freedom. The single reason is suppression of the ideas related to the grace-faith system that is taught clearly in the Bible.

Conclusion

Every person ever born lives with guilt in one form or another. they crave for justification, but know a guilty person cannot be justified. So they spend all their life trying for a remission or forgiveness of sins, but no amount of human efforts has ever given an assurance to anyone.

The Word of God assures that God grants both salvation as well as justification in His grace, but this truth was suppressed every time that "Christian religion" rose to power. Protestant Reformation was the result of discovering this truth after 1000 years of suppression by the Roman Catholic church.

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