

“By The Deeds Of The Law”

God, in His infinite wisdom, provided the scriptures for mankind written in a language perfectly suited for the message of redemption. The Koine Greek, which fell out of use in the centuries after the New Testament era, was a wonderfully precise and vivid language. It is certainly worth the Bible student's time to carefully investigate key Greek phrases in the scriptures.

In Romans 3:20, Paul is discussing the grand topic of justification by faith. He had previously spent the last two and a half chapters demonstrating how all men are under sin. Furthermore, man's need for salvation from sin was not met by the law. Therefore, there was a pressing need for the gospel. From the context, the “law” which Paul had in mind was the Law of Moses.

The main verb in the verse is “justified” or *dikaiothesetai*. The Analytical Greek Lexicon identifies it as a future-passive-indicative. This construction reveals that justification is a certain, future action which God performs on the obedient believer. *Dikaiothesetai* comes from the root word *dikaioo*. *Dikaiothesetai* is defined by Thayer “to judge, declare, pronounce, righteous and therefore acceptable” (p. 150). He goes further to say, “Especially it is so used, in the technical phraseology of Paul, respecting God who judges and declares such men as put faith in Christ to be righteous and acceptable to Him, and accordingly fit to receive the pardon of their sins” (p. 150).

Earle states that *dikaioo* was used in the early Greek writers to signify “custom, rule, right, righteous in performing duties to gods and men” (p. 151). Earle quotes Vincent as saying, “Justification aims directly at character. It contemplates making the man himself right” (p. 152). W. E. Vine says, “Ideally the complete fulfillment of the Law of God would provide a basis of justification in His sight, Romans 2:13. But no such case has occurred in mere human experience, and therefore no one can be justified on this ground, Romans 3:9-20” (p. 625).

Young's Concordance indicates that the word occurs 38 times in the New Testament. One can quickly see the importance of the term to Paul because he uses it 15 times in the book of Romans. The word has a variety of meaning in the New Testament, but the most intriguing is the use between Paul and James. Paul is mainly concerned with a right relationship before God, while James is concerned with right conduct before God. The two do not conflict, but rather harmonize the total teaching of justification. Justification can only come about by faith and obedience (James 2:24). Twice in the Roman letter (1:5; 16:26), Paul referred to the “*obedience of faith*.”

The Greek Interlinear indicates word order of the first clause as subject-verb. The structure is indicative of an emphasis being placed upon "deeds" because of the point that Paul is trying to make. Christians will not be justified by how perfectly they can adhere to a set of rules. God's people are saved by His grace. The Greek Interlinear also indicates that the prepositional phrase "*for by the law*" occurs ahead of the verb. This construction stresses that the knowledge of sin comes through realizing law. Humans could never have been held accountable of sin unless there was law. Paul's emphasis of this prepositional phrase demonstrates that law reveals sin. This premise sets up Paul's later argument of salvation by grace through faith. The "*righteousness of God*" mentioned in later verses was obtained through grace. God's grace was manifested in redemption through Christ Jesus, who was our sin offering. We can be thankful for the richness of the scriptures!

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