

The Justification of Rahab, Abraham, and God: Divine Declaration of Faith

Introduction to Justification

In theological discourse, justification is a foundational concept that explores how individuals are deemed righteous in the sight of God. Central to this discussion is the Greek verb *δικαίω* (*dikaioō*), which is pivotal in understanding the New Testament's portrayal of righteousness. The BDAG (Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich) Greek-English Lexicon, a premier scholarly resource, defines *δικαίω* with nuanced meanings that deepen our comprehension of justification:

1. To take up a legal cause, show justice, do justice, take up a cause.
2. To render a favorable verdict, vindicate.
3. As an activity of humans: to justify someone.
4. As an activity of God: to declare someone righteous, acquit, justify.
5. To demonstrate that something is morally right, show to be right.

These definitions emphasize that *δικαίω* is an active verb, highlighting that justification is not a passive state but an active declaration by God. It involves God declaring the believer righteous based on their faith, aligning with the lexicon's comprehensive explanations. This essay examines the lives of Rahab and Abraham, illustrating how their faith was justified by God through divine declarations and supernatural events. Their narratives provide profound insights into the nature of faith, obedience, and God's redemptive plan, closely aligning with the BDAG's definitions of *δικαίω* as an active, divine affirmation of righteousness.

Rahab's Justification and Legacy

Rahab's Faith and Actions

Rahab, a Canaanite woman residing in Jericho, emerges as an unexpected yet profound example of faith and righteousness. Her story, chronicled in the Book of Joshua, transcends cultural and religious boundaries, highlighting how genuine faith can emerge from unlikely circumstances. Despite her background as a prostitute and a non-Israelite, Rahab's actions reflect a deep-seated belief in the God of Israel.

When two Israelite spies entered Jericho to gather intelligence, Rahab chose to hide them from the authorities. This act was not merely one of self-preservation but a deliberate demonstration of her trust in God's power to save. By protecting the spies, Rahab aligned herself with the Israelites, implicitly acknowledging the sovereignty and power of their God over the Canaanite deities.

"But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them..." (Joshua 2:4, NIV)

Rahab's decision embodies BDAG's first definition of *δικαίω*: "to take up a legal cause, show justice, do justice, take up a cause." By hiding the spies, she took up the cause of God's people, demonstrating justice and righteousness through her actions. In a society that likely viewed her actions as betrayal, Rahab took a stand based on her belief in the God of Israel. Her faith was manifested not just in words but in tangible actions, setting her apart as a person of genuine trust and conviction. This aligns with the active nature of *δικαίω*, where justification is demonstrated through righteous deeds.

Divine Declaration of Rahab's Righteousness

Rahab's faith did not go unnoticed by God. Her story reaches a pivotal moment during the fall of Jericho, where her life and her family were spared from destruction. This divine intervention serves as a clear affirmation of Rahab's righteousness, embodying the second definition of *δικαίω*: "to render a favorable verdict, vindicate," particularly as an activity of God.

"Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men..." (Joshua 6:25, NIV)

The sparing of Rahab and her household was more than an act of mercy; it was a divine declaration that her faith was righteous. God's supernatural intervention underscores that Rahab's trust and actions were in alignment with His covenant of salvation. This event exemplifies how *δικαιόω* involves God's active role in declaring someone righteous based on their demonstrated faith.

Rahab's Enduring Legacy

Rahab's inclusion in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, as recorded in Matthew 1:5, is a powerful testament to her enduring legacy of faith:

"Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab..." (Matthew 1:5, NIV)

This inclusion highlights the transformative power of faith and how God's redemptive plan embraces individuals from diverse backgrounds. It aligns with the third definition of *δικαιόω*: *"to demonstrate that something is morally right, show to be right."* Rahab's life demonstrates that genuine faith, regardless of one's past or societal standing, is honored and declared righteous by God.

Furthermore, Rahab is commended in the New Testament as an example of faith:

"By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." (Hebrews 11:31, NIV)

This acknowledgment reinforces that Rahab's faith was exemplary, fitting Greek by BDAG definitions by showing how God justifies individuals through their faith-driven actions. Her story illustrates that *δικαιόω* encompasses God's active declaration of righteousness in response to human faith and obedience.

Abraham's Justification

Faith Demonstrated Through Obedience

Abraham, revered as the father of faith, provides another profound illustration of justification through faith. His narrative, particularly his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac, epitomizes the intricate relationship between faith, obedience, and divine righteousness.

In Genesis 22, Abraham is commanded by God to offer his beloved son Isaac as a burnt offering. This directive was a severe test of Abraham's faith, challenging him to surrender what he held most dear in obedience to God's command.

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice..." (Hebrews 11:17, NIV)

Abraham's willingness to comply with God's command, despite the emotional and spiritual turmoil it must have caused, exemplifies unwavering trust in God's promises. This action aligns with BDAG's first definition of *δικαιόω* in the sense of taking up God's cause through obedience. Abraham did not question God's intent or timing; instead, he acted on faith, believing that God's promises would prevail. His actions demonstrate the active aspect of *δικαιόω*, where faith is validated through obedient deeds.

Divine Affirmation of Abraham's Righteousness

God's response to Abraham's obedience is a profound act of justification, fitting the second definition of *δικαιόω* as God's activity in declaring someone righteous.

"Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you..." (Genesis 22:16-17, NIV)

This divine proclamation serves as a clear affirmation of Abraham's righteousness. God's promise to bless Abraham and multiply his descendants underscores that his faith, demonstrated through obedience, was acknowledged and declared righteous by God Himself. This event is not just a test of faith but a divine endorsement of Abraham's unwavering trust and commitment, embodying *δικαιόω* as an active declaration by God.

New Testament Perspectives on Abraham's Justification

The New Testament elaborates on Abraham's justification, particularly in the Epistle of James, which emphasizes the harmonious relationship between faith and works.

"Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did..." (James 2:21-22, NIV)

This passage aligns with BDAG's definitions by illustrating that justification involves both belief and action. James emphasizes that Abraham's faith was not passive but active, evidenced by his willingness to act upon God's command. His faith was "made complete" by his actions, demonstrating the active nature of *δικαίω* where faith and works synergistically lead to divine justification.

Theological Implications of Abraham's Justification

Abraham's narrative reinforces several key theological principles that are congruent with BDAG's definitions of *δικαίω*:

- **Faith and Obedience:** True faith is inherently active, involving obedience to God's commands, thus demonstrating righteousness through actions.
- **Divine Righteousness:** Righteousness is a status bestowed by God, not earned solely by human effort, aligning with the concept of God declaring one righteous.
- **Covenantal Relationship:** Abraham's faithfulness to God's initial promise leads to divine blessings, highlighting the relational aspect of justification where God's promises are fulfilled in response to human faith.
- **Typology of Christ:** Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son prefigures God's sacrifice of Jesus Christ, reinforcing the depth of obedient faith required for justification.

These implications underscore that *δικαίω* is an active, divine process where God declares individuals righteous in response to demonstrated faith and obedience, as defined by BDAG and other lexicons.

Justifying God: Affirming His Righteousness Through Baptism

Baptism as a Public Declaration

Baptism is a significant sacrament in Christian theology, symbolizing the believer's identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Beyond its symbolic meaning, baptism serves as a means of justifying God, where believers publicly acknowledge and affirm God's righteousness and sovereign will.

"All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John."
(Luke 7:29, NIV)

This act aligns with BDAG's third definition of *δικαίω*: "to demonstrate that something is morally right, show to be right." By being baptized, individuals declare their alignment with God's purposes and affirm the moral rightness of His plan of salvation. Baptism signifies active participation in God's redemptive work, reflecting the active nature of *δικαίω* as an affirmation of God's righteousness through human action.

Contrast with Self-Justification

In stark contrast to justifying God, self-justification focuses on self-declaration rather than God's declaration of righteousness. This is illustrated in Luke 10:25-29, where a lawyer seeks to "justify himself" by questioning Jesus, aiming to limit the scope of God's command to love others.

"But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"
(Luke 10:29, NIV)

The lawyer's attempt highlights the difference between self-serving motives and genuine, faith-driven actions that align with God's will. It underscores the importance of embracing *δικαίω* as active participation in God's righteousness, rather than attempting to establish one's own righteousness.

Theological Significance

Justifying God through acts like baptism emphasizes that justification extends beyond individual righteousness to affirming and upholding God's righteous standards. By participating in baptism, believers demonstrate the moral rightness of God's way, fitting BDAG's third definition of *δικαίω*. It signifies a conscious and public commitment to God's will, contrasting with self-justification that seeks to validate personal standards over divine commands.

Exploring Justifying God from Luke 7

Contextual Background of Luke 7

In Luke 7, Jesus addresses the crowds concerning John the Baptist and the varied responses to his ministry. This chapter highlights how different groups react to God's message delivered through John.

"All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John." (Luke 7:29-30, NIV)

This passage exemplifies humans justifying God, aligning with BDAG's third definition of *δικαίω*: *"to demonstrate that something is morally right, show to be right."*

Humans Justifying God

The phrase "acknowledged that God's way was right" translates the Greek term *ἐδικαίωσαν τὸν θεόν* (*edikaiōsan ton Theon*), meaning "they justified God." By submitting to baptism, the people and tax collectors publicly declared that God's plan and message were just and true, affirming His righteousness through their obedience.

BDAG's Definition in Action

According to BDAG, *δικαίωω* includes:

- To demonstrate that something is morally right, show to be right.

In Luke 7, the people's acceptance of baptism actively demonstrates their belief in the righteousness of God's message through John. They acknowledge God's inherent righteousness by obeying His commands.

Contrast with the Pharisees and Experts in the Law

Conversely, the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose by refusing John's baptism (Luke 7:30). Their refusal signifies a rejection of God's plan and a failure to acknowledge His righteousness, highlighting self-justification over divine obedience.

Theological Implications

The act of justifying God carries profound theological implications:

- **Affirmation of God's Righteousness:** Humans can acknowledge and declare God's righteousness through obedient actions.
- **Participation in God's Plan:** Accepting God's message and participating in practices like baptism signifies alignment with His purposes.
- **Contrast with Self-Righteousness:** Refusing to accept God's ways reflects reliance on self-righteousness and a rejection of divine authority.

Bringing Clarity to Justification

The example from Luke 7 clarifies the process of justification:

1. **God Initiates:** God offers His message and plan for salvation.
2. **Humans Respond:** Individuals choose to accept or reject God's offer. Acceptance involves acknowledging His righteousness and submitting to His will.
3. **Justifying God:** Through acceptance and obedience, humans justify God by declaring His ways to be right, as seen in the people's response to John's baptism.
4. **Resulting in Divine Justification:** God declares those who believe and obey as righteous, completing the cycle of justification as an active, relational process.

Conclusion

Summarizing Key Points

Rahab and Abraham epitomize the essence of justification by faith, demonstrating how trust in God is validated through divine declarations and actions. Their stories, along with the exploration of justifying God in Luke 7, align closely with BDAG's definitions of *δικαιόω*, illustrating that justification is an active process involving God's declaration of righteousness in response to demonstrated faith.

- **Rahab's Faith:** Her protection of the spies and inclusion in Jesus' genealogy highlight how faith, demonstrated through courageous actions, leads to divine justification.
- **Abraham's Faith:** His willingness to sacrifice Isaac exemplifies profound trust and obedience, resulting in God's affirmation of his righteousness.
- **Justifying God in Luke 7:** The people's acceptance of John's baptism demonstrates humans justifying God by acknowledging the moral rightness of His ways.
- **Divine Declaration:** Justification is fundamentally a divine act where God declares the believer righteous through faith demonstrated in action.

- **Contrast with Self-Justification:** The refusal of the Pharisees and experts in the law to accept God's plan underscores the pitfalls of self-justification.

Call to Reflection

As we contemplate the lives of Rahab, Abraham, and the responses depicted in Luke 7, we are invited to reflect deeply on our own faith journeys. Their stories challenge us to examine not only how our faith is expressed through our actions but also the underlying hope that sustains us in trusting God's justification.

Embracing Hope in Divine Justification

Rahab's story is a profound testament to the power of hope. Despite her uncertain and perilous circumstances as a Canaanite and a prostitute, Rahab placed her hope in the God of Israel. This hope was not a passive wish but an active trust that God would vindicate her faith and protect her family. Her actions—hiding the spies and aligning herself with God's people—were fueled by the assurance that God honors and justifies those who earnestly seek Him.

Reflecting on Our Own Hope

- **Hope as a Foundation for Action:** Like Rahab, our hope in God's righteousness should compel us to act justly and obediently. Are our actions motivated by a steadfast belief that God will honor our faith, even in challenging circumstances?
- **Sustaining Faith Through Hope:** Rahab's hope sustained her through adversity. In our lives, does our hope in God's justification help us persevere through trials and remain faithful in our commitments?
- **Trusting God's Plan:** Rahab trusted that God's plan was greater than her past or societal status. Do we, too, trust that God's redemptive plan encompasses and transforms our lives, regardless of our backgrounds or previous shortcomings?

Justifying God Through Hope-Fueled Actions

Our hope in God's ability to justify our faith encourages us to publicly affirm His righteousness through our actions. This is evident in practices such as baptism, where believers declare their alignment with God's will and demonstrate their trust in His redemptive work. By doing so, we not only affirm our own faith but also justify God by showcasing His moral and righteous character to the world.

- **Active Participation:** Are we actively participating in God's redemptive plan, driven by the hope that our actions reflect His righteousness?
- **Public Declaration:** Just as Rahab's actions were a public declaration of her faith, how do our actions publicly affirm our hope in God's justification?
- **Overcoming Self-Justification:** Rahab's reliance on God contrasts sharply with self-justification. Are we placing our hope in God's justification rather than attempting to validate ourselves through our own efforts?

Encouragement Through Rahab's Example

Rahab's hope was instrumental in her justification. Her unwavering trust in God's promises led to her salvation and inclusion in the lineage of Jesus Christ. This example encourages us to anchor our hope in God's faithful nature, trusting that He will justify our faith and uphold His righteous standards in our lives.

- **Hope as Assurance:** Let Rahab's hope in God assure us that our faith will be met with divine justification.
- **Transformative Trust:** May our trust in God transform our actions, just as Rahab's trust transformed her destiny.
- **Legacy of Faith:** Like Rahab, our hope-driven faith can leave a lasting legacy of trust and righteousness, inspiring others to seek and trust in God.

Conclusion of Reflection

In embracing the hope that Rahab exemplified, we are called to cultivate a faith that not only professes belief but also actively trusts in God's justification. This hope empowers us to align our actions with God's will, publicly affirm His righteousness, and participate fully in His redemptive work. As we do so, we follow

in the footsteps of Rahab and Abraham, becoming living testimonies of God's justifying grace and steadfast faithfulness.

Key Insights

- **BDAG's Definitions of δικαιώω:** The verb encompasses active demonstration and declaration of righteousness, both by God and humans.
- **Justifying God in Luke 7:** Humans can justify God by acknowledging the moral rightness of His ways through obedient actions like baptism.
- **Contrast with Self-Justification:** The refusal of some to accept God's plan highlights the danger of self-righteousness and the importance of submitting to God's standards.
- **Faith and Works Synergy:** Genuine faith produces righteous actions, aligning with BDAG's explanations that justification involves belief and action.
- **Divine Affirmation:** God declares believers righteous in response to their demonstrated faith, reinforcing the active nature of justification.
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