

JUSTIFICATION

INTRODUCTION



- We continue to study how the application of redemption unfolds (logically, although not necessarily chronologically)
- We have seen how God has worked in eternity past (foreknowledge, election, predestination)
- We have seen the work of God in time in the sinner's heart through calling and regeneration by which he imparts new spiritual life to his people
- We have seen that in conversion the sinner responds to the gospel call in faith and repentance, both of which are gifts from the Lord which enable us to lay hold of the blessings of salvation
- Going forward from conversion, we look at the benefits that accrue to the believer as a result of their conversion...the first is justification
- When Paul gives an overview of the process of salvation, he clearly includes justification in it

Romans 8:29-30 ~ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also **justified**; and these whom He **justified**, He also glorified.

- This is critical because there is a universal problem that all people face: How can they be right with God?
- Job identified this as a problem in Job 9:2; 25:4 ~ How can a man be in the right before God?... 25:4 How then can a man be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman?
- But the situation is even more grave when we understand that it is sinful people who need to become right with God
- So, it is not simply, "how can man be just with God, but how can sinful man be just with God?"
- How can a sinful, doomed, depraved, and guilty sinner have a right relationship with a God who is perfectly holy, infinite, and mighty?
- The answer to this question is that we cannot be right with him because we are wrong with him due to sin
- However, this has not stopped most in the world from attempting to earn God's favor by attempting to be good people
- The various religions of the world propose a list of rituals and ceremonies to engage in to achieve a measure of righteousness that might make us acceptable to God
- However, "[w]e do not justify ourselves. Justification is not our apology nor is it the effect in us of a process of self-excusation. It is not even our confession nor the good feeling that may be induced in us by

confession. Justification is not any religious exercise in which we engage however noble and good that religious exercise may be.”¹

- This reality is underscored by Jesus’ statement in Matt 5:20 ~ For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.
- “In Jesus’s day, the scribes and Pharisees were the paragon of ceremonial righteousness in Israel. They were the religious elite; everyone in Jewish society would have expected the scribes and Pharisees to have attained the righteousness that God requires. And yet Jesus says that if man is to enter heaven, he needs a righteousness that surpasses even the most religiously devout people. In fact, he goes further than that just a few verses later when he says, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). If man is to be reconciled to God, he does not just need to be a good person; he needs to be a perfect person. He needs a perfect righteousness, for God himself is perfect and requires perfection.”²
- So, again the dilemma...how can sinful mankind be right with God when they lack the righteousness that an infinitely holy God possesses and requires in order to have fellowship with him? → justification is the answer!
- It is God who justifies the ungodly by an act of his free grace!
- The only way for a sinner to be right with God is if he justifies him!

Romans 3:24 ~ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

Romans 4:5 ~ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

Romans 8:33 ~ Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies;

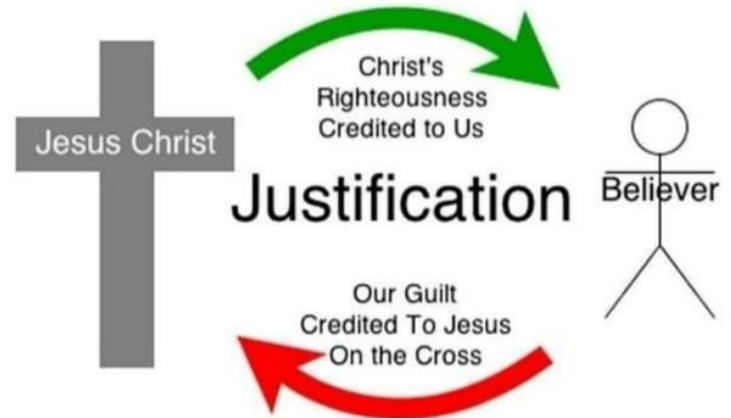
- These verses indicate that the only way for sinners to be right with God is for them to be given the very righteousness that belongs to God himself
- This brief introduction to the doctrine of justification highlights the glorious reality of this precious truth
- Were it not for God’s justifying grace, none of us would be saved and right with a holy and perfect God

DEFINITION

- Justification is an instantaneous act whereby God **declares** the believing sinner righteous on the basis of the blood of Christ
- It is the judicial act of God, by which he pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ and accounts, accepts, and treats them as righteous in the eye of the law...i.e. as conformed to all its demands
- The word “justify” in the Greek is *dikaioo* that means “to declare righteous”...it describes crediting something to someone’s account...i.e. calculating or counting something for (or even against) someone
- The words for “righteous, righteousness, justify” are all from the same root in Greek...they describe the legal status of individuals
- In justification, God legally declares that we are no longer deemed guilty under his law but are forgiven and counted righteous in God’s sight
- In justification, sinners are declared or pronounced to be righteous

¹ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 118.

² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 610.



- “Justification is God’s righteous way of righteousing the unrighteous. When God justifies sinners, he is not declaring bad people to be good, or saying that they are not sinners after all; he is pronouncing them legally righteous, free from any liability to the broken law, because he himself in his Son has borne the penalty of their law-breaking.”³
- What glorious truth...the reason God accepts us and pardons us is not found in us...it is on the basis of an alien righteousness credited to our account
- In justification, God imputes (credits or assigns) to the sinner the very perfections and righteousness of Christ
- This results in a new standing before God...before Christ, we were sinners, under wrath and judgment...but in Christ, his righteous standing is credited to us so that God sees us as righteous (not because we are in practice, but because we are in position)
- Thus, the Christian is someone who is at the very same time righteous and sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*)

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS ISSUE

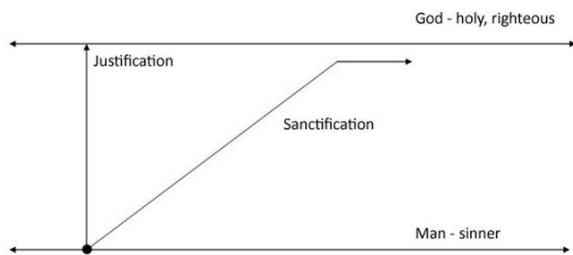
- The primary issue in the Reformation was a dispute with the Roman Catholic Church over justification
- John Calvin called justification by faith the “hinge” of the Reformation
- Martin Luther said that justification by faith alone is the article upon which the church stands or falls
- This cardinal doctrine was seen as the battleground for the Gospel itself
- The Roman Catholic Church’s understanding of justification:
 - Something that changes us internally and makes us more holy within
 - It is the sanctifying and renewing of the inner man that begins with baptism and continues with faith
 - It is based not on *imputed* righteousness but on *infused* righteousness...that is righteousness that God actually puts into us and that changes us internally
 - Since Rome views justification as including something that God does within us, it follows that people can experience varying degrees of justification
 - The logical consequence of this view is that our eternal life with God is not based on God’s grace alone but partially on our own merit as well
- The Council of Trent was a Catholic Council held from 1545-1563 to refute the Protestant Reformation and codify Catholic theology...it summarized justification this way:

³ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 190.

- Canon 7.** If anyone says that all works done before justification, in whatever manner they may be done, are truly sins, or merit the hatred of God; that the more earnestly one strives to dispose himself for grace, the more grievously he sins, let him be anathema.
- Canon 9.** If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, [114] meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema.
- Canon 11.** If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, [116] and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema.
- Canon 24.** If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, [125] but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema.
- Canon 30.** If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged either in this world [131] or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened,[132] let him be anathema.
- Canon 33.** If anyone says that the Catholic doctrine of justification as set forth by the holy council in the present decree, derogates in some respect from the glory of God or the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and does not rather illustrate the truth of our faith and no less the glory of God and of Christ Jesus, let him be anathema.

- This is what Martin Luther was taught as a monk during his time at the monastery...Luther dedicated himself to all manners of trying to assuage his guilty conscience
 - It was the fear of God's wrath that consumed him for the next five years...so much so that he did everything within his power to earn God's favor...he devoted himself to fasting...long hours in prayer...pilgrimages frequent and long hours in confession (sometimes for 6 hours a day)...the sacraments and penance
 - He even tried acts of self-punishment like sleeping on hard floors...going without sleep...enduring cold winter nights without a blanket...even whipping himself in an attempt to atone for his sins
 - Speaking of his dedication he said, "I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I"
 - It was in 1508 when he was studying Romans that he became particularly fixated on Paul's teaching about the "righteousness of God" in the book of Romans
 - But instead of finding hope in the "righteousness of God" Luther came to hate that phrase...because he thought of this righteousness as a condemning righteousness...a punitive justice which condemns sinners
 - The question he had been wrestling with was: If he was unrighteous, in spite of his best efforts, how could he be made right before a holy and just God?
 - The answer to that question came in 1513 and 1514 when he was lecturing through Psalms and studying the book of Romans again when he came to Romans 1:16-17
- Romans 1:16-17** ~ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 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."
- Little by little, he began to understand that "the righteousness of God" in Romans 1:17 is not punitive...it is not referring to God's righteous indignation against sin
 - Rather it is referring to God's own righteousness imputed to the sinner by faith which then declares him righteous

- He says, “At last meditating day and night, by the mercy of God, I gave heed to the context of the words, ‘In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.”’ Then I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith...Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open. An entirely new side of the Scriptures opened itself to me...and I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the loathing with which before I had hated the term ‘the righteousness of God.’”
- Luther rediscovered justification by faith alone...he came to see that when sinners receive Christ by faith, they receive not just forgiveness of sins, but also the righteousness of Christ is imputed to their account and all the perfections of Christ’s life is credited to them!
- Thus, a right understanding of justification is necessary for a right understanding of Gospel
- A right view of justification is the dividing line between Gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone and of salvation by works
- “Justification does not mean to make righteous, or good, or holy, or upright. It is perfectly true that in the application of redemption God makes people holy and upright. He renews them after his own image. He begins to do this in regeneration and he carries it on in the works of sanctification. He will perfect it in glorification. But justification does not refer to this renewing and sanctifying grace of God. It is one of the primary errors of the Romish Church that it regards justification as the infusion of grace, as renewal and sanctification whereby we are made holy. And the seriousness of the Romish error is not so much that it has confused justification and renewal but that it has confused these who distinct acts of God’s grace and eliminated from the message of the gospel the great truth of free and full justification by grace.”⁴
- “This is what is meant when we insist that justification is forensic. It has to do with a judgment given, declared, pronounced; it is judicial or juridical or forensic. The main point of such terms is to distinguish between the kind of action involved in regeneration. Regeneration is an act of God in us; justification is a judgment of God with respect to us. The distinction is like that of the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon, when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. This is not what a judge does – he gives a verdict regarding our judicial status. If we are innocent he declares accordingly. The purity of the gospel is bound up in this distinction. If justification is confused with regeneration or sanctification, then the door is opened for the perversion of the gospel at its centre.”⁵
- “Justification and sanctification are not the same. Justification is without us; sanctification is within us.”⁶
- A comparison of justification and sanctification⁷



1. Sinful man separated from a holy, righteous God.
2. Justification declares sinful man positionally righteous before God.
3. Sanctification is an ongoing process of growing in holiness.

| Justification | Sanctification |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Legal Standing | Internal Condition |
| Once for all time | Continuous throughout life |
| Entirely God's work | We cooperate with God |
| Perfect in this life | Not perfect in this life |
| The same in all Christians | Greater in some than others |

⁴ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished*, 118-119.

⁵ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished*, 121.

⁶ Thomas Watson

⁷ https://www.more-free-online-sermons.com/3-aspects-of-salvation.html/#google_vignette

Justification Involves Double Imputation – Our Sin to Christ, His Righteousness to Us

Romans 3:19-30

Romans 4:1-12

Romans 5:1 ~ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

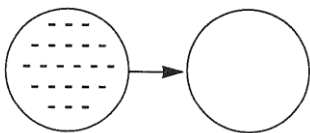
Romans 5:18 ~ So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.

Romans 8:33 ~ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies

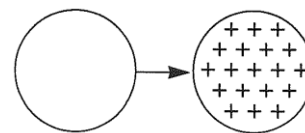
Galatians 2:16 ~ nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Galatians 3:21-26

- In justification, God declares that we, though guilty sinners, are righteous in his sight
- This does not change our inner nature or character but results in a legal declaration of forgiveness and righteousness
- This is similar to what an earthly judge does...when he declares someone guilty, he is not making them guilty...he is simply declaring their guilt and assigning them their punishment
- Similarly, when he declares someone innocent, he is not making them innocent...he is simply declaring their innocence and assigning them their freedom
- So justification is not making someone just but declaring someone just...justification is not an act of God that makes us righteous...it is an act of God that declares us righteous
- Justification is an act (not a process) that involves two equally necessary parts:
 1. Forgiveness of past sins – but viewing justification as “just as if I’d never sinned” is insufficient
 2. Imputation of Christ’s righteousness
- Justification is not simply a pronouncement of innocence but of righteousness
- “Without the positive provision of righteousness, mere forgiveness would leave us in a state of innocence or moral neutrality, as Adam was before the fall—reckoned as never having sinned but as never having obeyed either.”⁸
- In addition to the pardon of sin, justification declares that all the claims of the law are satisfied in respect of the justified...the law is not relaxed or set aside, but is declared to be fulfilled in the strictest sense
- The person justified is declared as one who has exhibited perfect obedience to the law



FORGIVENESS OF PAST SINS IS ONE PART OF JUSTIFICATION
Figure 36.1



IMPUTATION OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS TO US
IS THE OTHER PART OF JUSTIFICATION
Figure 36.2

(charts taken from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 725.)

⁸ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 616.

Justification is Based on the Righteousness of Christ

- How can God declare the ungodly righteous? → An earthly judge justifies those who are righteous
- But God declares a guilty, totally unrighteous man righteous...how can this be?

- An illustration...think about two accused criminals...one guilty and one not guilty
- The one who did not commit the crime is shown through evidence and witnesses to be innocent...so the judge “justifies” him...he tells him he is innocent and that he can go free
- The other criminal, who really did commit the crime, is shown to be guilty by the evidence
- But imagine that the judge also “justifies” him...he declares the guilty criminal to be innocent and can go
- We can’t imagine that happening because it seems unfair

- But that’s exactly what God does in the Gospel...he declares sinners and law breakers not only not guilty but righteous
- God justifies the unrighteous, the ungodly, and lawbreakers...how? by simply pardoning them?
- No, he does so by granting them his righteousness
- And what is it that enables God to remain just when he justifies sinners? → the righteous obedience of the one man Jesus Christ!
- “Justification is therefor a constitutive act whereby the righteousness of Christ is imputed to our account and we are accordingly accepted as righteous in God’s sight. When we think of such an act of grace on God’s part, we have the answer to our question: how can God justify the ungodly? The righteousness of Christ is the righteousness of his perfect obedience, a righteousness undefiled and undefilable, a righteousness which not only warrants the justification of the ungodly but one that necessarily elicits and constrains such justification. God cannot but accept into his favour those who are invested with the righteousness of his own Son...The obedience of Christ must therefore be regarded as the ground of justification; it is the righteousness which God not only takes into account but reckons to our account when he justifies the ungodly.”⁹

Romans 3:21-22, 24 ~ But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus

Romans 5:9 ~ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Romans 5:17 ~ For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:4 ~ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

1 Corinthians 1:30 ~ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

2 Corinthians 5:21 ~ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Philippians 3:9 ~ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

⁹ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished*, 124-125.

- In justification, the source of righteousness is God himself...Christ gives the believing sinner his own perfections
- “It is essential to the heart of the Gospel to insist that God declares us to be just or righteous not on the basis of our actual condition of righteousness or holiness, but rather on the basis of Christ’s perfect righteousness, which he thinks of as belonging to us.”¹⁰
- In order for God to justify the ungodly, two things must take place
- First, we must have no guilt before God...the sin which separates us from God must be taken away
- Second, we must be not only not guilty but also righteous
- And the wonder and glory of justification is that Christ does both of those!
- He becomes for us both a sacrificial death and a perfect life...he provides both a pardon and a perfection
- In his suffering and death, he became our curse and our condemnation...he paid for our sin...he took the full wrath of God against our sin
- In his perfect life and perfect obedience to God in keeping the law and never sinning once, he became our perfection
- To say it another way, Christ’s death is the climax of his atoning sacrifice which satisfied God’s wrath against our sin...and his death is the climax of a perfect life of righteousness which is imputed to us
- So, there is both a negative element in justification and a positive element
- The negative element is Christ’s passive obedience which refers to Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross
- The positive element is Christ’s active obedience which refers to Christ’s perfect obedience to God’s law lived on behalf of the believer
- Christ’s life lived in perfect submission to God’s will in thought, word, and deed is imputed to the believer’s account
- In the entire history of mankind there are only 33 ½ years lived on earth by one Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, that God will accept
- That’s why his perfectly keeping the law was so important...that’s why him not sinning once is so important
- “In other words, the reason for which God accepts us and pardons us is not found in us! It’s not because we were good. It’s not because we were better than others. It’s not because God foresaw good works in us. It’s not because God foresaw faith in us. It’s based upon what God saw in Christ and credited to our account. This is a glorious, radical truth. But we’ve taken it for granted, forgotten and domesticated it, and some today are even trying to modify it. Over and over through the years, we have seen false teachers attempt to sneak something of our work back into justification. One reason for this: People just can’t imagine that God would declare sinners to be righteous. It is counter-intuitive. But that is precisely what Paul says that God does. We naturally incline to think that God will justify those who are righteous. But Paul is saying that God accepts and pardons those who don’t deserve to be accepted and pardoned, declares righteous those who are unrighteous, declares accepted those who ought not to be accepted, and declares sinners in rebellion against Him to be accepted and in right relationship to Him. That’s how radical justification by faith is!”¹¹

Justification is Granted by Grace Through Faith Alone

Romans 3:22-24 ~ even the righteousness of God through **faith** in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; 23 for there is no distinction for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His **grace** through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

Romans 3:25-26 ~ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through **faith**. This was to demonstrate His

¹⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 727.

¹¹ <http://ligonduncan.com/justification-by-faith-the-radical-truth/>

righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has **faith** in Jesus.

Romans 3:28, 30 ~ For we maintain that a man is justified **by faith** apart from works of the Law...30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised **by faith** and the uncircumcised **through faith** is one

Romans 4:3-5 ~ For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM **BELIEVED** GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but **believes** in Him who justifies the ungodly, his **faith** is credited as righteousness

Romans 4:13-16 ~ For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of **faith**. 14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; 15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. 16 For this reason **it is by faith**, in order that *it may be* in accordance with **grace**, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of **the faith** of Abraham, who is the father of us all

Romans 5:1 ~ Therefore, having been justified by **faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Galatians 2:16 ~ nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through **faith** in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by **faith** in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Philippians 3:9 ~ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is **through faith in Christ**, the righteousness which comes from God **on the basis of faith**.

- The sole condition on which this righteousness is imputed or credited to the believer is faith in Christ
- Faith is the instrument which lays hold of Jesus Christ and his merits
- Justification is by faith because it is the exact opposite of depending on ourselves...and it is by grace through faith so that we have nothing to boast in ourselves!
- Does this contradict James?

James 2:21-25 ~ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?