

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY:

JUSTIFICATION

WEEK 5: WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION AND WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

#3 IN THE SERIES

- We are continuing the series on Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation
- We've looked already at Atonement, the Effectual Calling, Faith, and Repentance
- Today we'll be looking at the subject of Justification. For many Christians, this is not a familiar doctrine.
- I want to start by asking a question. Has anyone here ever served on or been asked to serve on a Jury?
Raise your hand, if so.
- Don't raise your hand on this one, but has anyone ever been convicted of a crime?
- In my pre-Christian days, a friend and I tried to sneak into an auto race. We were both students with a limited budget, and couldn't afford the tickets, so we jumped the fence, got caught, and had to face the judge. It was a misdemeanor, but there was a fine, and we paid.
- The Judge didn't ask if we were guilty or innocent; he asked for our plea. We both said we were guilty, and he pronounced judgment.
 - Did he make us guilty? No, we were already guilty, and we admitted it.
 - Did he absolve us of guilt once we paid the fine? No, but the fine was acceptable to the judge.
 - Could he have pronounced us innocent and let us go? Yes, but that would have overlooked our guilt, and by law, he **shouldn't** – it would go against the law he took an oath to uphold.
- In a few words, that's essentially what Justification is, which we will look at today in much more detail, and in eternal spiritual terms, not in society's legal terms.
- Here's an outline of the session:
 - Introduction
 - Justification defined
 - Justification discussed
 - What Justification is not
 - Some wrong doctrines of Justification

JUSTIFICATION DEFINED

- **Some Background**

- The NT work for Justification comes from the Greek word **δικαιοσύνη** (noun), or **δικαιώω** (verb). From the lexicon, it has the following meanings:
 - Quality, state, or practice of judicial responsibility (n)
 - Quality or state of juridical correctness with focus on redemptive action (n)
 - Quality or characteristic of upright behavior (n)
 - Take up a legal cause, to render a verdict, or to demonstrate to be morally right (v)
- So, justification talks about legal things – practice of law, rendering verdicts, etc.
- It is a concept that relates to the courtroom – facts uncovered, law applied, and judgments rendered.
- It was the primary issue the Reformers disputed with the Roman Catholic Church. Luther had been brought up in the RC Church, and it taught that there is no assurance of salvation in this life, and even in the afterlife justification depended on the RC Church, its teaching, and following it completely. More on this later.
- When Luther understood the doctrine of justification by **grace**, he realized that it is available now, in the present, not in some hoped-for, maybe-realized future time.
- Luther called Justification an “alien righteousness”; that is, it is the righteousness of another instilled from without in us.¹ The “another” is God Himself.
- The central teaching on Justification is found in the book of Romans, but it is not unique to the NT; we find the concept throughout OT and NT Scripture. We read in Dt. 25:1, “*If there is a dispute between men and they go to court, and the judges decide their case, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked..*”
- We see that the judges “decide” – pronounce judgment – the case, and either justify or condemn. For both the righteous and the wicked, it is a declaration, not a change of their condition.
- It is a **forensic declaration**; that is, a statement of the situation based on the facts of the case.
- “The biblical truth of Justification says that my rescue from sin and God’s wrath is first a legal rescue, and only then a moral one. First, I am legally absolved of guilt and credited with a righteousness that I don’t have. That is, I am declared righteous in the courtroom of heaven, where God sits as judge, and where I, without Justification, would stand condemned by His law. That’s what the work “justify” means: not *make* just, but *declare* just.”²

¹ CCKPCA.org/blog/post/luther=s=two-kinds=of-righteousness

² John Piper, When the Darkness Will Not Lift

JUSTIFICATION DISCUSSED

- **Why is Justification Critically Important?**
- So, Justification addresses the most fundamental question a person faces: How can a sinful person be **right** with God?³
- In Job 9:2 we read, *“In truth I know this is so; but how can a man be in the **right** before God?”* The Hebrew word used here is **צַדִּיק** (Saddiq), which means to be just, or be in the right, and has the same meaning as the NT Greek word.
- For many Christians, we don’t understand it or appreciate its importance.
 - To truly grasp its importance, we must understand:
 - The Holiness and wrath of God, and
 - The gravity of our sin and guilt
 - And for most, if we are honest with ourselves, we minimize our sin and guilt and prefer to avoid the idea of God’s wrath
- In Romans 1 we read, *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all **ungodliness and unrighteousness of men** who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,”* Rom. 1:18, and
- *“For even though they knew God, they **did not honor Him as God** or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”* Rom. 1:21-23
- But Justification is a cardinal doctrine of Christianity because it demonstrates that Christianity is founded on **grace and faith**.
- Rom. 5:1 says, *“Since we have been justified **by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*
- And Rom. 3:24, *“... being justified as a gift **by His grace** through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;”*
- This distinguishes it from religion made by man as we saw in Romans 1 – Justification is a gift from God, not by any works that we do but only by faith. And in Eph. 2:8-9: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

³ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pg. 123

- Throughout, Scripture teaches that God is our Judge.
 - Gen. 18:25, Abraham says – “*Far be it from You! Shall not the **Judge** of all the earth deal justly?*”
 - Psalm 96:13 – “*For He is coming to **judge** the earth. He will **judge** the world in righteousness, and the peoples in His faithfulness.*”
 - Paul writes in 2 Tim. 4:8 “*in the future there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous **Judge**, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*”
 - James 5:9 states “*Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the **Judge** is standing right at the door.*”
- So, we have the problem, the fundamental question mentioned before. But considering it from God’s perspective, the question becomes, ‘How can a perfect, holy, righteous Judge, who is without injustice, deal with a sinner coming before Him in His court?’ There are only 3 logical options:
 - Condemn the sinner. Since all of us are sinners (Rom. 3:23), none would be saved
 - Compromise His righteousness. But God cannot go back on His nature.
 - Change them to be righteous people, but righteousness on His standards, that of perfect righteousness. Romans 5:19 states it this way: “*For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners [Paul refers to Adam], even so through the obedience of the One [that is, Christ] the many will be made righteous.*”
- In *Basic Theology*, Ryrie outlines 5 aspects of Justification – the Plan, the Prerequisite, the Price, the Position, and the Pronouncement, outlined in Romans 3:21-26⁴, one of the key passages on Justification.
 - ²¹*But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,* ²²*even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;* ²³*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;* ²⁵*whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because of the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;* ²⁶*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.*”

⁴ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pg. 344-345

- **5 Aspects of Justification**

- The **Plan**:

- It is **apart from the Law**.
- “But now, **apart from the law**, the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets...” **Rom. 3:21**
- It is broader than the Mosaic law, since it encompasses the teaching of the Prophets also.
- In fact, Justification by faith preceded the Law, since Abraham was justified by faith and the Law was given through Moses. *“For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be the heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.”* **Rom 4:13.**
- We see this also in **Acts 13:39**, when Paul is preaching in Antioch. He says, *“and through Him [that is, Christ] everyone who believes is **freed from all things**, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.”*

- The **Prerequisite**:

- *“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 Christ Jesus** . . .”*
Rom. 3:21-22a
- The prerequisite for this process is the faith we apply. Righteousness comes **through** faith.
- An important distinction is that it is not **because** of our faith. If justification depended on our faith, then Justification would be a works-based salvation. God’s work + our faith.
- Our faith must be in the right place. It would be of no use to have faith in a stone, or a block of wood, or a picture, or any man-made thing, as in Romans 1. But to be effective, the object of our faith must be what God Himself declares worthy, that which is perfect. **Jn 1:1** says, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* Christ, our sacrificial Lamb, has the same essence and perfection as God the Father.

- The **Price**:

- *“. . . being justified by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as **a propitiation in His blood** through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.”*
- The price paid was nothing less than the blood of Christ, the Son of God. Paul told the leaders in Ephesus as he left them, *“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the*

*Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which **He purchased with His own blood.***” Acts 20:28.

- And in **Hebrews 10:19**, “*Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest **by the blood of Jesus Christ.***”
- The NT makes clear that it is the blood, and not only Jesus’ death, which ties this doctrine to the OT sacrificial system. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus at the beginning of His ministry, saying, “*Behold the **Lamb of God**, who takes away the sin of the world.*” **Jn. 1:29.**
- Then what does Paul mean when he says, “a **propitiation in His blood** through faith”? In the sacrificial system, the substitute of an animal slain and its blood offered on the altar “propitiated” or appeased God’s wrath. Christ’s shedding of blood was the perfect Substitute that appeased God’s wrath once and for all, through faith in Him. He became the perfect culmination of the OT sacrificial system.
- So many of the early hymn writers tell of this truth; William Cowper expresses it beautifully in the lyrics to his hymn, “Praise for the Fountain Opened”:
 - There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains

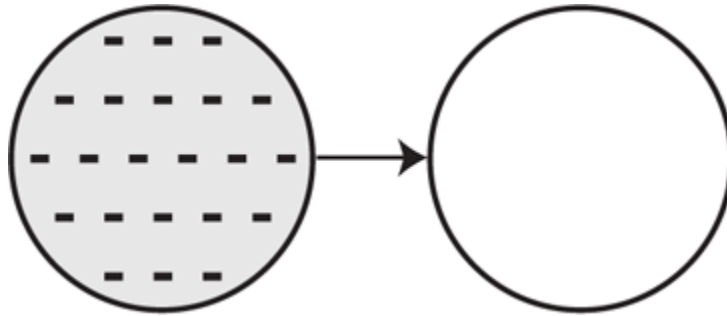
- The **Position**:

- By placing our faith in Christ Jesus, we are positionally **in Him**.
- Gal 3:26-28 explains this reality: “*In Christ Jesus you are all **children of God** through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have **clothed yourselves with Christ**. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for **you are all one in Christ Jesus.***”
- We are adopted, we are clothed with Christ’s righteousness, and there is unity in Christ.
- Rom. 8:1 says, “*There is therefore **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus.*”
- We are no longer condemned for our sins; they were completely paid for by Christ on the cross.
- And in 2 Cor. 5:21, we read of the “**Great Exchange**”, a term attributed to Luther: “*For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that **in him** we might **become the righteousness of God.***” This is why Protestants teach “**forensic Justification**” – a completed act because of what Christ did, and not an ongoing process as we will see Catholics teach.⁵

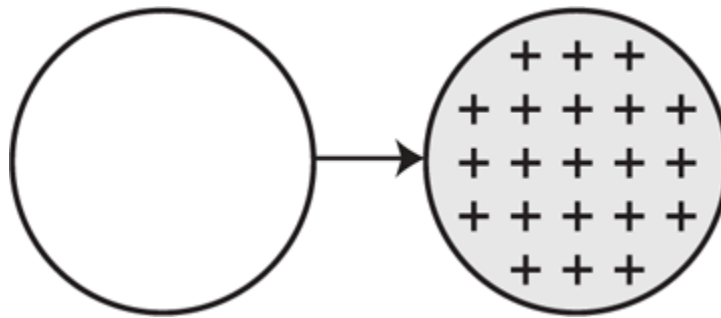
⁵ Orthodox Christian Theology, The Great Exchange and Forensic Justification in the Early Church Fathers.

- This is pictured by the following diagrams (Grudem: Systematic Theology)⁶:

Our sins (negative signs) are taken by Christ on the cross.



Christ's righteousness (the positive signs) covers us, through faith in Him.



- The **Pronouncement**:

- God, the Just, justifies us, as **Rom. 3:26** states. “. . . *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.*”
- So, how can God be both just, and the justifier of the ungodly (all of us) since all have sinned? He can because He poured His wrath on His own Son, punishing the sins of the ungodly on Christ.
- The hymn writer, Robert Lowry, expressed it beautifully:

What can wash away my sin?
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus
 What can make me whole within
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus

O precious is the flow
 That makes me white as snow
 No other fount I know
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

⁶ Grudem, Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, pg. 887 in Logos

WHAT JUSTIFICATION IS NOT

- Justification does not **make** a person righteous.
 - The analogy is between a surgeon and a judge. The surgeon changes something in a person, as in removing a cancerous tumor; the judge does something to a person by pronouncing a verdict on their judicial status.⁷
 - We see this from the following passage: *“Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the One who justifies;” Rom 8:33*
- Justification is not a **work** of salvation.
 - Rom. 4:5: *“But to the one who **does not work**, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his **faith** is credited as righteousness”*
 - This was a main point in the Reformers’ opposition to Roman Catholic doctrine, as we will see in the last section.⁸
 - But faith without its demonstration is not genuine faith. James makes this point in his letter.
 - Jam. 2:25-26 says, 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? ²⁶For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”*
 - And Phil. 2:12b-13: *“... work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”*
 - John Piper states that “It is crucial in the fight for joy that we not confuse or combine justification and sanctification. Confusing them will, in the end, undermine the gospel, and turn justification by *faith* into justification by *performance*.”⁹
 - Ryrie calls this faith-works combination “a ‘two-coupon’ ticket to heaven. The coupon of works is not good for passage, and the coupon of faith is not valid if detached from works.”¹⁰
- Justification is not **Universalism**.
 - Universalism is the idea that all will be saved; none will perish. They look to **Rom. 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.”*

⁷ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pg. 128

⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 49

⁹ John Piper, *When the Darkness Will Not Lift*, pg. 14

¹⁰ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pg. 345

- But this verse is in the context of verses before and after, which contrast the one and the many, not the one and all – see **Rom. 5:15, 19**. Taking the entire passage, it does not teach a universal justification.

SOME WRONG DOCTRINES OF JUSTIFICATION

- The Roman Catholic position on Justification teaches:
 - That the Reformers' view of justification by faith alone went against the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification was mentioned before.
 - The Roman Catholic church teaches that when a newborn is baptized, they experience regeneration, including Justification.
 - At that point, the child is:
 - Free from original sin
 - Born again
 - Made a partaker of eternal life
 - Receives the Holy Spirit
 - Committed to being raised in the Roman Catholic church
 - But the child is not:
 - delivered from the consequences of sin, **and**
 - is not guaranteed eternal life.
 - In this respect, they are 'saved, but not saved'.
- Grudem's Systematic Theology illustrates the difference in this way: "The Roman Catholic Church understands justification as something that changes us internally and makes us more holy within. . . includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man. . . granted through Baptism."¹¹
- The result of this for the Catholic is "works-based" salvation. By their teaching, they do not hold to the clear teaching of Scripture that salvation, and specifically, Justification, for this discussion, is by grace through faith and not by works.
- The Reformers recovered "the original gospel, which declares, '*The wages of sin is death but the **free gift of God** is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*'" Rom. 6:23¹²

¹¹ Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, pg. 890

¹² Ibid, pg. 891

CONCLUSION. QUESTIONS?

- Returning to the original question, ‘How can a sinful man be right with God?’, I hope this material has provided a clear explanation of the rich doctrine of the process of Justification, based completely on His work, and a deeper appreciation of the abundant grace we have been given, so that our love for God and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ increase.
 - Questions?
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