

Justification | Doctrine of Salvation | Theological Equipping Class

April 7, 2024

The Effects of Union with Christ

- Justification
- Reconciliation
- Adoption
- Sanctification
- Preservation
- Glorification

Understanding the Doctrine of Justification

Justification is God's judicial act of reckoning sinners who have faith in Christ as righteous in Christ

1. Justification is *judicial in nature*: how can a sinner be right with God?

“The universal problem of guilt is not just a problem of how to feel better, but how to be right with God.”
(John Piper)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. (Revelation 20:11-12)

2. Justification is an *instantaneous event*, not a process

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith... (Romans 5:1)

3. Justification is *God's work*, not ours

Those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:30)

4. Justification is an act of *imputation* (“reckoning”), not infusement

[Abraham] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

5. Justification is a crediting of *righteousness*, not merely forgiveness

¹³ *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14)*

As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

6. Justification is given through *faith* in Christ, not works

7. Justification is an imputation of *the very righteousness of Jesus*, not our own

He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21)

Unpacking the Doctrine of Justification

I. A Primary Text: *Romans 3:9-30*

⁹ *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one;¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God.¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”¹³ “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.”¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.”¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

¹⁹ *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

²¹ *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

²⁷ *Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.*

²⁸ *For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. (Romans 3:9-30)*

→ **The Need for Justification: God is righteous, and we are guilty**

→ **The Witness to Justification: the Old Testament**

→ **The Basis for Justification: God's grace**

→ **The Instrument of Justification: faith in Christ alone**

1. Specific faith: *in Christ*
2. Singular faith: *sola fide, solus Christus*

“My faith has found a resting place, from guilt my soul is freed; I trust the ever-living One, his wounds for me shall plead. I have no other argument, I need no other plea, it is enough that Jesus died, and that he died for me.” (My Faith Has Found A Resting Place)

→ **The Means of Justification: the death of Christ**

→ **The Message of Justification: God is just *and* merciful**

II. Corroborating Texts

A. Abraham's Example

³ Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.”⁵ And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”⁶ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:3-6)

² If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:1-3)

B. Paul's loss & gain

⁴ If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his

sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. (Philippians 3:4-9)

Defending the Doctrine of Justification

I. James vs. Paul on Justification

² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:2-3)

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (James 2:14-24)

“St. James’ epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.” - Martin Luther

A. Paul & Justification (Romans 4)

- a. Case Study: Genesis 15
 - i. Abraham believes God’s promise for the first time
 - ii. God credits righteousness on the basis of faith (v.6)
- b. “Justify” = declare righteous
- c. Righteousness is imputed through faith (declaration)

B. James & Justification (James 2)

- a. Case Study: Genesis 22
 - i. God tested Abraham’s faith (v.1); cf. Hebrews 11:17-19
 - ii. Abraham displays the authenticity of his faith
- b. “Justify” = demonstrate faith
- c. Faith is proven through works (demonstration)

Wisdom is justified by all her children. (Luke 7:35)

“Paul and James are not antagonists facing each other with crossed swords, they stand back to back, confronting different foes of the gospel. Paul is attacking self-righteous legalism, and James self-righteous indifference.” (Robert Rakestraw)

“Faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone.”

II. The Roman Catholic View of Justification

A. The Council of Trent (1563 A.D.)

“If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, 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.” (Council of Trent)

B. Roman Catholicism Today

“The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ and through baptism” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, §1987)

“Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, §1989)

Roman Catholic theology teaches:

1. Justification is a process of moral transformation (“infused righteousness”)
2. Justification includes our efforts
3. Justification requires baptism
4. Justification involves our own inherent (not strictly alien) righteousness
5. Justification is near-synonymous with sanctification

III. The New Perspective on Paul & Justification

A. Three concerns raised by the New Perspective

1. We’ve read Paul through Luther’s experience (an individualistic and guilt-focused view)
2. We wrongly view 1st Century Judaism as legalistic (it was a religion of grace)
3. We misunderstand “works of the law” in Paul’s writings (they were marks of covenant membership, not “good deeds”)

B. Three responses to the New Perspective

1. They have an overly-narrow interpretation of “works of the law”

All who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” (Galatians 3:10)

2. They have an overly-simplified reading of Christian history

“O the sweet exchange, O the incomprehensible work of God, O the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous man, while the righteousness of one should justify many sinners!”
(The Epistle to Diognetus, 130 A.D.)

3. They helpfully push us to read the Bible with nuance and in its original context

Application

I. Be confident in your Savior who justifies you

“God cannot but accept into his favor those who are invested with the righteousness of his own Son”
(John Murray)

II. Justification is the beginning of and basis for living a holy life

“No one has entrusted himself to Christ for deliverance from the guilt of sin who has not also entrusted himself to him for deliverance from the power of sin” (John Murray)

III. Stop trying to justify yourself

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)