

Justification

Justification is a forensic term in the most legal sense of the word. It is a judicial act of God whereby God pardons all of the sins of those who believe in Jesus Christ and treats them as righteous in conforming to all of the demands of the Law. Further justification adds to the pardon of all sins freedom of any claim of the Law such claims having been fully satisfied. Gods justifies as an act of the Judge, not as the Sovereign whereby the Law is not lessened or made null and void for those to whom it applies but is declared to be fulfilled in the most strict sense so that the person justified is entitled to all the advantages and rewards that come from perfect obedience to the Law.¹

Justification comes forth by God's imputation to the believer the perfect righteousness both passive and active of God's Representative and the believer's surety Jesus Christ.² Justification is not then the forgiveness of a person without righteousness but the declaration by God that this person has a righteousness that is perfect and satisfies the Law forever, the righteousness of Jesus Christ.³

The righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer by God is on the single condition of faith in Jesus Christ.⁴ Faith though called a condition has no merit in itself

¹ Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." (Romans 5:1-10 AV)

² For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*;) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:3-9 AV)

³ 2 Cor. 5:21; "For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:21 AV)

"Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, *Saying*, Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." (Romans 4:6-8 AV)

⁴ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: (Ephesians 2:8 AV)

but is the only instrument by which a person may make his own the righteousness of Christ. This same faith that makes justification sure also appropriates to itself sanctification.⁵ The doctrine of justification by faith alone then does not lead to lawlessness or corrupt lifestyles but will be made manifest by good works. In other words while justifying faith stands alone and the only instrument of justification it is just as certain that good works are the consequence of justification.⁶

Galatians to a great extent answers the question of whether the Old Testament Law of Moses is binding upon Christians. While other topics are broached, this is the driving force behind this epistle of Paul to this particular audience. When this epistle is taken together with Romans Paul proves clearly that justification is by faith alone and never was or is of any merit whatsoever of the person justified. Justification can only be received by faith in Jesus Christ and this faith is totally the free gift of God in His infinite mercy.⁷

The Westminster Shorter catechism words it this way: “Q33: What is justification? A33: Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins,[1] and accepteth us as righteous in His sight,[2] only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us,[3] and received by faith alone.[4]”⁸

⁵ For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith. (Romans 1:17 AV)

Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Romans 3:25-26 AV)

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. (Romans 4:20-22 AV)

Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. (Philippians 3:8-11 AV)

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:16 AV)

⁶ For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14 AV)

⁷ (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that *we should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only *they would* that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.” (Galatians 2:8-10 AV)

⁸ 1. Eph. 1:7 2. II Cor. 5:21 3. Rom. 5:19 4. Gal. 2:16

The Second Helvetic Confession of Faith article XV Presents justification this way: “What Is Justification? According to the apostle in his treatment of justification, to justify means to remit sins, to absolve from guilt and punishment, to receive into favor, and to pronounce a man just. For in his epistle to the Romans the apostle says: It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? (Rom. 8:33). To justify and to condemn are opposed. And in The Acts of the Apostles the apostle states: Through Christ forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38 f.). For in the Law and also in the Prophets we read: If there is a dispute between men, and they come into court . . . the judges decide between them, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty (Deut. 25:1). And in Isa., ch. 5: Woe to those . . . who acquit the guilty for a bribe.

We Are Justified on Account of Christ. Now it is most certain that all of us are by nature sinners and godless, and before God's judgment-seat are convicted of godlessness and are guilty of death, but that, solely by the grace of Christ and not from any merit of ours or consideration for us, we are justified, that is, absolved from sin and death by God the Judge. For what is clearer than what Paul said: Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:23 f.).

Imputed Righteousness. For Christ took upon himself and bore the sins of the world, and satisfied divine justice. Therefore, solely on account of Christ's sufferings and resurrection God is propitious with respect to our sins and does not impute them to us, but imputes Christ's righteousness to us as our own (II Cor. 5:19 ff.; Rom. 4:25), so that now we are not only cleansed and purged from sins or are holy, but also, granted the righteousness of Christ, and so absolved from sin, death and condemnation, are at last righteous and heirs of eternal life. Properly speaking, therefore, God alone justifies us, and justifies only on account of Christ, not imputing sins to us but imputing his righteousness to us.

We Are Justified by Faith Alone. But because we receive this justification, not through any works, but through faith in the mercy of God and in Christ, we therefore teach and believe with the apostle that sinful man is justified by faith alone in Christ, not by the law or any works. For the apostle says: We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law (Rom. 3:28). Also: If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. . . . And to one who does not work but believes in him who justified the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness (Rom. 4:2 ff.; Gen. 15:6). And again: By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast, etc. (Eph. 2:8 f.). Therefore, because faith receives Christ our righteousness and attributes everything to the grace of God in Christ, on that account justification is attributed to faith, chiefly because of Christ and not therefore because it is our work. For it is the gift of God.

Looking at the entry for Justification in the Belgic confession finds this declaration in Article XXII: “We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. For it must needs follow, either that all things, which are requisite to our salvation, are not in Jesus Christ, or if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior.

Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith apart from works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits, and so many holy works, which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.”

The Heidelberg Catechism in Lords Day 32 answers concerning merit and good works this way: “Q86: Since, then, we are redeemed from our misery by grace through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we do good works?

A86: Because Christ, having redeemed us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image, that with our whole life we show ourselves thankful to God for His blessing,[1] and that He be glorified through us;[2] then also, that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by the fruits thereof;[3] and by our godly walk may win others also to Christ.[4]

Q87: Can they, then, be saved who do not turn to God from their unthankful, impenitent life?

A87: By no means, for, as Scripture says, no unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, covetous man, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or the like shall inherit the kingdom of God.”[5]⁹

Within these confessional documents of the reformation we find that all sides of the Reformed church have always held to the justification by faith alone. Yet there has arisen today a movement that would usurp the teachings of the reformed tradition while claiming to hold to the same standard. They are wolves in sheep’s clothing that would divide the church and return her to the corruption of the early Roman church and their doctrines of a works based salvation. The Thirty Nine Articles of the Anglican Churches likewise claims justification to be of faith alone.¹⁰ Outside of the proliferation of

⁹ 1. Rom. 6:13; 12:1-2; I Peter 2:5, 9-10, 12; I Cor. 6:20; 2. Matt. 5:16; I Peter 2:12 3. Matt. 7:17-18; Gal. 5:6, 22-23 4. Rom. 14:19; I Peter 3:1-2; II Peter 1:10 5. I Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:5-6; I John 3:14-15

¹⁰ The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, Article XI
Of the Justification of Man

denominations in the late eighteenth century and later we could declare those involved in this heresy concerning justification to not even be Protestant. Of all the early creeds of the church the only one that leaves room for such doubt is The Waldensian Confession.¹¹ No Reformed church has ever raised this confession to a secondary standard to which its officers subscribed.

There are those who have sought to bring this heresy inside the Reformed veil of orthodoxy for several decades now. In the past our faithful fathers have stood and closed the door in their face but have not acted hastily or rudely. It is time to remove the gloves and declare that those who cannot embrace justification by faith alone as taught in the Bible and the Reformed standards are heretics and unfit for office in a Reformed church.

The Savoy Declaration, which was an attempt to create a standard that allowed co-existence of congregational churches with Presbyterian churches, also affirms this doctrine of justification by faith alone.¹² The London Baptist Confession of Faith is

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely expressed in the Homily of Justification.

¹¹ The Waldensian Confession, Articles XX-XXXIII

XX. That as God promised us regeneration in Jesus Christ, so those who are united to him by a living faith ought to apply, and do really apply themselves, unto good works.

XXI. That good works are so necessary to the faithful that they can not attain the kingdom of heaven without the same, seeing that God has prepared them that we should walk therein; and there fore we ought to flee from vice, and apply ourselves to Christian virtues, making use of fasting, and all other means which may conduce to so holy a thing.

XXII. That, although our good works can not merit any thing, yet the Lord will reward or recompense them with eternal life, through the merciful continuation of his grace, and by virtue of the unchangeable constancy of his promises made unto us.

XXIII. That those who are already in the possession of eternal life in consequence of their faith and good works ought to be considered as saints and glorified persons, and to be praised for their virtue and imitated in all good actions of their life, but neither worshipped nor invoked, for God only is to be prayed unto, and that through Jesus Christ.

¹² The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order, Chapter XI
Of Justification

I. Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience to the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

II. Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ, and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

almost the same as the Savoy Declaration. So even when we move to the margins of the Reformed faith we find the core teaching concerning justification did not enter into this heresy. It does not matter what supposed good these men have done in the name of Christ and for the church or may have accomplished there can be no reason for the church to continue to tolerate heresy such as this and not face the Just Judge's wrath and withdrawing of His blessing from them. Their academic standing or position in the church leaves no fig leaf to hide behind. They are attempting to corrupt the Gospel of Jesus Christ and unless they repent they shall likewise perish, for they are not of the family of God.¹³

Dr. Chuck Baynard September 2003

III. Christ by his obedience and death did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified, and did by the sacrifice of himself, in the blood of his cross, undergoing in their stead the penalty due unto them make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in their behalf. Yet in as much as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for any thing in them, their justification is only of free grace, that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

IV. God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did in the fulness of time die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified personally, until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them.

V. God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may by their sins fall under God's fatherly displeasure: and in that condition they have not usually the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

VI. The justification of believers under the Old Testament, was in all these respects one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

¹³ Mt. 7:20; Luke 13:3, 5