

Quotable: “Justification by faith alone is the fountain and origin of all our holiness and spiritual liveliness.” - William Bridge

“Justification still matters at the most foundational level because you will never love God and lean into the Christian life if you don’t understand that God will clothe those who have failed, and slipped up, and keep on sinning – with the righteousness of Christ.” - Michael Reeves

“I call your attention to those words, ‘Him who justifies the ungodly’ (Rom 4:5). They seem to me to be very wonderful words.” Charles Spurgeon

Introductory Discussion: After our 2-week study on the Atonement, how might you describe the relationship between Justification and what Christ achieved on the Cross? How might you explain it to a child? Or to someone new to the faith? To a Roman Catholic? What Questions about Justification do you have before we dive in?

I. Justification: *What is it?*

- “Justification is an instantaneous *legal* act of God in which he (1) *thinks* of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) *declares* us to be righteous in his sight.” Wayne Grudem
- Forgiveness (not counting our sins against us) *and* Imputation (crediting Christ’s righteousness to us)
- “Justification is the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men. It consists in the remission of sins *and* the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.”¹ John Calvin
- “Justification is a judicial act whereby God declares us righteous, pardons us of sin, puts us in a right relationship with him on the basis of Christ’s atoning work.” William Lane Craig
- “Justification is both negative and positive. Negatively, God does not count our sins against us. Jesus took them away. Positively, God counts our faith as righteousness.” Robert H. Gundry

Some other views

1) Roman Catholicism² - “Justification is God’s grace to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” *and* through Baptism.³ Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.”⁴

2) The New Perspective⁵ - “Justification is the declaration of God, the just judge, that someone has had their sins forgiven and that they are a member of the covenant family, the family of Abraham. It doesn’t describe how people get into God’s forgiven family; it declares that they are in.” NT Wright⁶

II. Justification: *OT witness*

¹ Calvin goes on to say that “justification is not a doctrine that holds to pardon of sins being part of righteousness, or merely a concomitant toward the justifying of man; on the contrary, he includes the whole of righteousness in free remission, declaring that man blessed whose sins are covered, whose iniquities God has forgiven, and whose transgressions God does not charge to his account. Thence, he judges and reckons his happiness because in this way he is righteous, not intrinsically but by imputation. God does not justify in part but liberally, so that we may appear in heaven as if endowed with the purity of Christ. No portion of righteousness sets our consciences at peace until it has been determined that we are pleasing to God, because we are entirely righteous before him.”

² See [Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification](#)

³ “Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy.” Roman Catholic Catechism, Article 2, Section I, 1992

⁴ Roman Catholic Catechism, Article 2, Section I, 1987, 89

⁵ *Justification: God’s Plan & Paul’s Vision*, NT Wright

⁶ The New Perspective teaches that one is saved by grace through faith, but good works are the *means* for believers persevering in the covenant. They are saved by grace through faith. They are kept *through* good works. For a helpful refutation of the New Perspective, see Robert H. Gundry, *The Old is Better*. For Gundry, (and I dare say, for Paul) good works are not the *means* for staying in the covenant, they are the necessary evidences of belonging to the covenant.

- Gen 15:6; Gen 27:15-29⁷
- Psalm 32:1; 51:4
- Isa 45:25⁸; 53:11
- Jer 51:10
- Hab 2:4

III. Justification: *NT witness*

- a) Justification in the Gospels and Acts
 - Matthew 12:36-37⁹
 - Luke 10:29; 16:15; 18:14
 - Acts 13:38-39¹⁰
- b) Justification in Paul –
 - Rom 3:21-28; 4:2-5; 5:9, 18-19; 8:1, 33-34¹¹
 - 2 Cor 5:18-21
 - Gal 2:16; 3:11
 - Titus 3:4-8
- c) Justification in James –
 - Jms 2:14-26

IV. Justification: *Implications*

Video: [Michael Reeves on “Why Justification Still Matters”](#)¹²

Luther:

- Our condition: the Christian is *simul justus et peccator* - "at once justified and a sinner."
→ Humility
- Our standing: "Through faith in Christ, his righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has becomes ours, or rather, he himself becomes ours! We have his righteousness because we have him." → Confidence
- Our Assurance: "I do deserve death and hell. What of it!? Does this mean I shall be sentenced to eternal damnation? By no means! For I know one who satisfied on my behalf and suffered for me. His name is Jesus Christ the Son of God, and where he is, I shall be also! No sin is greater than the blood of this Lamb and we are clothed in him." → Perseverance

Wright: Justification and Evangelism

- "'The gospel' does *not* mean 'justification by faith.' It means the announcement that the crucified and risen Jesus is Lord. To believe this message—to give believing allegiance to Jesus as Messiah and Lord—is to be justified in the present by faith (whether or not one has even heard of justification by faith). Justification by faith is a second-order doctrine: To believe it is both to have assurance (believing that one will be vindicated on the last day) and to know that one belongs in the single family of God, called to share table fellowship with all other believers without distinction. But one is not justified by faith by believing in justification by faith, but by believing in Jesus."

⁷ Calvin wrote of this passage, "Jacob did not of himself deserve the right of the firstborn, but concealed in his brother's clothing and wearing his brother's coat, which gave out an agreeable odor, he ingratiated himself with his father, so that to his own benefit he received the blessing while impersonating another. And we in like manner hide under the precious purity of our firstborn brother, Christ, so that we may be attested righteous in God's sight. This is indeed the truth, for in order that we may appear before God's face unto salvation we must smell sweetly with his odor, and our vices must be covered and buried by his perfection."

⁸ "God will be either Savior or Judge of everyone." Ray Ortlund Jr.

⁹ "Justified here means 'shown to be righteous.' This verse does not use 'justified' in the Pauline sense of 'declared righteous by God.' Similarly, evil people's evil words will be evidence by which they will be condemned." Michael J. Wilkins

¹⁰ ESV: "Freed" – Greek: "Justified"

¹¹ Justification is the opposite of condemnation

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH4unYA9hMM>