

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Term Defined – *Justification* is a judicial act whereby God declares a sinner **just** (righteous) with respect to the demands of His holy law on the basis of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The term itself is purely a forensic (legal) term. It is not the sinner's condition that is altered but status respecting the law of God that is altered. *Sanctification* is that which alters the sinner's condition, while *justification* alters the sinner's standing. Though the two are distinct they are inseparable, where justification occurs sanctification follows. **...Those who He justified He also glorified. Ro. 8:30** God glorifies none who He does not first sanctify.

Justification is distinct from sanctification: though the two terms are, in fact, inseparable they are distinct and the distinction must be maintained.

1. Justification removes the guilt of sin and restores the sinner to all the rights and privileges inclusive in the status of 'son of God.' Sanctification removes the pollution of sin and progressively brings the sinner into conformity to Christ.
2. Justification occurs outside the sinner affecting a change in status before the tribunal of God. Sanctification occurs inside the sinner affecting a change in the heart, life, and will of the sinner.
3. Justification takes place once and for all and is never to be repeated, it is not a process but occurs instantaneously. One is either fully justified or not justified at all. Sanctification takes place progressively and to a greater or lesser extent in the sinner. It is a continuous process that is never fully complete in this life.
4. Though the meritorious cause of justification is identical as sanctification, viz. the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ, there is a difference in the efficient cause. God the Father justifies while God the Holy Spirit sanctifies the sinner.

Justification: Its Source

Though the entire Trinity is involved¹, the source of justification is, in a special measure, the free mercy of God the Father. It is God who sought out a way of salvation for sinners, who were unable to help themselves. ***“But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions- it is by grace you have been saved.” Eph. 2:4 “This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” 1Jn. 4:10*** This is, indeed, an important and weighty consideration. Nothing can be more odious to the truth than to suppose variance between the will of the Father and that of the Son. Justification is not the result of an anxious Son desperately wringing mercy from

¹ God the Father justifies, ***“It is God that justifies.” Ro. 8:33*** God the Son justifies, ***“By Him all that believe are justified.” Acts 13:39*** God the Holy Spirit justifies, ***“But you are justified by the Spirit of our God.” 1Cor. 6:11***

an angry and unwilling Father. Rather, it is God who **so loved the world, that He gave His unique Son...John 3:16.**

Justification: Its Grounds

Negatively – The ground (or basis) for justification cannot be found in man. The testimony of the Scriptures is that man in his being and nature is radically corrupt and therefore cannot stand as a suitable ground for justification.

1. The Scriptures emphatically declare that there is none righteous. **“As it is written, There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”** Ro. 3:10 – 12
2. The Scriptures declare with equal insistence that none have the capacity of obedience. **“The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”** Ro. 8:7, 8 **“They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.”** Eph. 4:18, 19
3. The Scriptures declare that it is useless for man to look to the law of God for justification. **“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”** Ro. 3:20 **“Because law brings wrath.”** Ro. 4:15 **“For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of Sinful man to be a sin offering.”** Ro. 8:3 **“...by observing the law no one will be justified.”** Ga. 2:15 **“The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.”** He. 7:18,19

Positively – The ground (or basis) for justification is in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. (Jn.1:12) Christ, in His own person, satisfied the demands of God’s holy law and averted God’s righteous wrath. As fully man he was able of suffering for His people, as fully divine he was adequate to suffer for them and satisfy God the Father.

1. Through the (passive)² obedience of Christ there is sufficient ground for the forgiveness of the sins of His people. **But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; he punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we were healed. Isa. 53:5 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse**

² The distinction between passive and active obedience is a source of debate, in some circles. Was that which was passive only passive and was that which was active only active? Some hold that the two forms of obedience cannot easily be distinguished.

for us... Gal. 3:13 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit. 1Pe. 3:18

This is the true ground of the righteousness apart from the law.

2. Through the (active) obedience of Christ and as the second Adam, He completely, perfectly, and gloriously fulfilled the demands of the entire law of God by living a perfect life. In this way He merits eternal life, peace with God and a life in heaven for His people. **For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Ro. 8:3, 4**

Justification: its Means

The instrument by which justification occurs is **faith**. Biblical faith is simple, utter, childlike trust, in what God has said, done and made available through Christ. Faith, though a virtue in itself, is not counted as merit for justification. **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. Eph. 2:8, 9**

1. Faith is the involuntary first breath of the regenerated soul. In some sense it's the soul's reaching for and resting in God. While repentance is the turning *from* one's sin and self, faith is the act of turning *towards* God. It is a means by which we are united with Christ.
2. Faith alone brings justification, but the faith, that is true faith, is always accompanied by works, consistent with it.
3. Faith, though a virtue, cannot be taken as such in the application of salvation, because the subject is acting from a condition of objective guilt prior to the act of justification. No virtue can possibly counteract positive guilt in the sinner. Therefore, faith is only the means *by* which and not the reason *for* which God justifies.

Justification: its Method

Justification involves the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer. The believer is not simply declared free of guilt, but is declared righteous in the sight of God.³ **For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. Ro. 5:19**

1. Justification, because it is forensic and legal does not involve the *infusion* of righteousness. If it did the possibility would always exist that we could

³ Perhaps the most perfect picture is given us in the Scripture itself. **“Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD reduce you Satan, ...Is this not a burning stick snatched from the fire?’ Then he said to Joshua, “See I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.” Zach. 3:1 -10**

- lose the standing. Moreover it would be difficult to determine how sins committed after justification would be counted for.
2. Justification involves the *imputation* of the righteousness of Christ. This is an exceedingly wonderful reality! It means that, because this righteousness occurs in the courts of heaven, it will not be alter on earth. It can stand in the face of sin past, present and future. Because it is the imputation of the righteousness *of Christ* it gives the believer a righteousness that has a godlike quality.

Justification: its Power

Justification, according to Martin Luther, “is the article of the standing or falling Church.” It is a doctrine that lies at the very heart and soul of the Christian living. It provides the Christian with a righteousness that will meet the deepest exigencies.

1. Justification is a fountain of joy for those who rightly appreciate the greatness of what God has done for on their behalf.
2. Justification fortifies the heart during the white heat soul slanders of the devil. The believer can fall back on the promise, ***“who can lay a charge against God’s elect, it is God who justifies?”***
3. Justification provides the only foundation for holy living. One of the biggest sabotaging agents in the believer’s growth in holiness is the crushing guilt of past sins.
4. Justification gives much assurance that nothing will ever separate the believer from the love that is in Christ Jesus.