

CHAPTER 13

JUSTIFICATION

The redemption purchased by Christ includes these items:

- 1) Regeneration
- 2) Repentance and faith (conversion)
- 3) Justification
- 4) Adoption
- 5) Sanctification
- 6) Glorification

The first two items have just been discussed. The last item will be discussed under “Eschatology.”

The other three items are those experienced in this life by the believer after he is converted. Justification and adoption are instantaneous, and occur immediately when one first exercises faith in Christ. Sanctification is a process that begins at conversion and continues throughout life. These three rewards of redemption are gracious acts, and are applied to the believer by the Holy Spirit.

Biblical terms for justification

𐤑𐤓𐤗 *šādēq*, Qal “be just, righteous,” Piel & Hiphil “justify, vindicate, declare righteous”

Job 32:2 (piel), “Elihu . . . became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God.”

Deut 25:1 (hiphil—most common), “. . . the judges will decide the case, acquitting (“justifying”) the innocent and condemning the guilty”

This verb is related to many Hebrew nouns:

רָדָּק *šedeq*, m. righteousness

רְדִיקָה *šēdāqāh*, f. righteousness (157x)

רָדִיק *šadīq*, adj. just, righteous (206x)

names רָדָּק *šādôq*, Zadok, “Righteous”; רֵדְקִיָּהוּ *šīdqiyyāhû*, Zedekiah, “Yah is righteous”

δικαιόω *dikaioo*, “justify, declare or treat as righteous” (40x)

Luke 10:29, “But he [the lawyer] wanted to justify himself.”

Rom 3:26, “He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.”

This verb also is related to other parts of speech:

δικαιοσύνη *dikaiošune*, “righteousness” (92x)

δικαίωμα *dikaiošoma*, “regulation, righteous deed” (10x)

δικαίωσις *dikaiošosis*, “justification” (2x—Rom. 4:25; 5:18)

δικαστής *dikaštes*, “judge” (3x, Lk. & Acts)

δίκη *dike*, “penalty, judgment, justice” (4x)

δικαίος *dikaiošos*, adj. “righteous, just” (81x)

δικαίως *dikaiošos*, adv. “righteously” (5x)

Definition of justification

WSC 33, “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”

[Cf. WCF 11:1, WLC 70]

To justify means to treat as righteous, or to declare righteous.

Thus we can “justify” God:

Ps 51:4, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.”

Luke 7:29, “All the people . . . acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptized by John.” (“justified God” [ASV], “declared God just” [ESV])

Rom 3:4, “Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: ‘So that you may be proved right (“justified”) in your words and prevail in your judging.’” (quoting Ps 51:4)

Thus God can “justify” Christ:

1 Tim 3:16, “He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit” (NIV, ESV; ASV has “was justified”)

Thus one can “justify” wicked sinners (which is bad):

Prov 17:15, “Acquitting (“justifying”) the guilty and condemning the innocent—the Lord detests them both.”

Or one can “justify” doers of the law (which is good):

Deut 25:1, “the judges will decide the case, acquitting (‘justifying’) the innocent and condemning the guilty”

Rom 2:13, “For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous (‘justified’).”

But usually it refers to God’s justifying repentant sinners through faith in Christ:

Rom 3:19-28, (where *dikaioo* occurs four times, vv. 20, 24, 26, 28)

We should note that “to justify” does not mean to “make righteous” in practice. This translation of the verb in William Beck’s *The Holy Bible, An American Translation*

(1976) in places like Rom 3:20, 26, 28, has caused much controversy in the LCMS; cf. his rendering of the verb in Luke 7:29 and Prov 17:14. Because of pressure from his readers, Beck in later editions changed the translation back to “justify.”

The ground of justification

How can God in his pure righteousness justify the ungodly? This question is the heart of Rom 4:5, which was the text of Jonathan Edwards’s *Justification by Faith Alone*. This section follows the outline of WCF 11:1.

“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: not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith: which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.”

- The ground of justification is not righteousness found in us.

Ps 130:3, “If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?”

Rom 3:20, “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.”

- The ground of justification is not righteousness infused into us (see under Sanctification).
- The ground of justification is not anything done or worked in us, even faith (see under Faith).
- The ground of justification is not God’s benevolence or pity.

God cannot countenance sin; he must judge it. (Cf. under Nature of God, Sin).

Note the plea of the patricide: a boy killed his father and then begged mercy because he was an orphan!

- The ground of justification is the perfect righteousness of Christ, applied to us on the basis of his blood shed for us.

Rom 5:9, “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!”

Eph 1:7, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

The instrument of justification

Faith is the only instrument to receive justification.

Gal 2:16, “. . . a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.” (This was the common theological ground between Paul and Peter; cf. Machen *Notes on Galatians* 140-48.)

Rom 1:17 (Martin Luther’s verse; quotes Hab. 2:4), “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” [Cf. the script of the film *Martin Luther*, 36-37]

Rom 3:28, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”

Cf. R. C. Sproule, *Faith Alone* (concerning the Evangelical-Roman Catholic dialog, as in the popular document *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*)

Note also the changing of the statement of faith of the Promise Keepers in order to retain Roman Catholic cooperation. Instead of the earlier statement, we are saved “by faith alone in Christ,” it now reads we are saved “by faith in Christ alone.” This new statement is acceptable to Roman Catholics, who believe we must have faith in Christ to be saved, but also must have good works.

Faith has always been the instrument of justification.

WCF 11:6, “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.”

Abraham, Gen 15:6; Rom 4:1-5, 9-25

David, Ps 32:1-2; Rom 4:6-8

—see also Rom 3:25-26; Gal 3:6-9; Heb 11

Modern dispensational theology recognizes this truth; see Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, ch. 6, “Salvation in Dispensationalism,” where he maintains that dispensationalism has always held to one way of salvation. Against the notes in the Old Scofield Bible, p. 1115 (“the point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation”), Ryrie notes the remarks on pp. 93 and 1245; the New Scofield has changed the note at John 1:17. Ryrie admits that dispensationalists need to further clarify the relation of grace to the Old Testament dispensation (p. 116; see his explanation, pp. 116-22).

This faith is saving faith, and is always accompanied by the other saving graces.

WCF 11:2, “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.”

With this fact in view, we can appreciate those verses which appear to contradict the principle of justification by faith alone:

Rom 3:24, justified by grace
Rom 5:9, justified by blood
Rom 3:28, justified by faith
Jas 2:24, justified by works

Jas 2:14-26, read carefully, agrees with this analysis of saving faith.

See John A. Battle, “‘Justified by Faith’ . . . ‘Justified by Works’: Abraham’s Justification, As Viewed by Paul and by James,” *WRS Journal* 13:1 (Feb 2006): 11-21.

Even this faith is by grace.

—WCF 11:1, WLC 71 (see above under Faith)

Thus all of our salvation is a work of God—all of his grace!

Time of justification

Justification is applied at the time faith is exercised.

WCF 11:4, “God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect; and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.”

Cf. also Gen 15:6; Col 1:21-23; Tit 3:4-7

Justification continues in its effects; all sins are forgiven throughout life.

WCF 11:5a, “God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified: . . . they can never fall from the state of justification, . . .”

Justification is experienced at the time of conversion (Isa 1:18), and the state of justification continues throughout life (1 John 1:7-9; 2:1-2).

Justification continues in force, even as saving faith continues. This is the point of Hab 2:4 and its NT quotations in Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38.

Note that the Bible says that Abraham was “justified” by faith four different times (Gen 15:6; quoted three times in the NT – Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23). Each of these four times is talking about a different time in Abraham’s life (ages of 75, 86, 99, and over 100). This shows that this expression in the Bible simply means “to be declared to be righteous” by God; it is not limited to only the first time Abraham believed. Each time he expressed his faith, God took the occasion to declare that Abraham was righteous in his sight. This shows that Abraham continued in the estate of justification throughout his life, after his initial faith.

Although the Christian is justified throughout life and all his sins are forgiven, he still may be chastened in this life and lose rewards in the next for his sins.

WCF 11:5b, “yet they may by their sins fall under God’s fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.”

Chastening for sin on the part of the Christian is a frequent theme of Scripture: Ps 32:3-5; 51:7-12; 89:30-33; Prov 3:11-12; 1 Cor 11:30-32; Heb 12:9-10.

Likewise, Christians’ future rewards are affected by sins committed during life, whether of omission or commission; 1 Cor 3:12-15 (for ministers especially) and 2 Cor 5:10 (for all Christians). See further under Eschatology.

“Final justification”—at the final judgment, Christians are openly acquitted and acknowledged as righteous in God’s sight.

Rom 2:13, “For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.”

Rom 3:30, “since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.”

Although the Bible can use the term “justify” for any occasion when God declares someone righteous, Protestant theologians, for the sake of clarity, normally refer to this final act with the similar but distinct terms “vindicate” or “acquit.” Usually Protestant writers limit the term “justify” to refer to initial justification.

Cf. WSC 38. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection? A. At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God, to all eternity.