

RIGHT STANDING WITH GOD: JUSTIFICATION

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Justification Defined...

Justification is the gracious act of God by which He declares a sinner righteous only through faith in Jesus. (Platt)

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. (Grudem)

Key Texts...

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 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. 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.

Romans 3:21-26

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Galatians 2:15-21

As we come to Christ, then, empty-handed, claiming no merit of our own, but clinging by faith to His blood and righteousness, we are justified. We pass immediately from a state of condemnation and spiritual death to a state of pardon, acceptance, and the sure hope of eternal life. Our sins are blotted out, and we are “clothed” with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. In our standing before God, we will never be more righteous, even in heaven, than we were the day we trusted Christ, or we are now.

Obviously in our daily experience we fall far short of the perfect righteousness God requires. But because He has imputed to us the perfect righteousness of His Son, He now sees us as being just as righteous as Christ Himself. (Bridges)

*Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling.—Rock of Ages*

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
No merit of my own I claim,
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.—The Solid Rock*

In the New Testament, justification is the declarative act of God by which, on the basis of the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning death, he pronounces believers to have fulfilled all of the requirements of the law

which pertain to them. Justification is a forensic act imputing the righteousness of Christ to the believer... It is a matter of declaring the person righteous, as a judge does in acquitting the accused.
(Erickson)

Justification is a righteousness that God both requires and provides for us.

Rather it must be a righteousness that both perfectly fulfills the righteous requirements of His Law and satisfies the demands of His justice toward those who have broken His Law. This righteousness from God, then, is nothing less than the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, who, through His sinless life and His death in obedience to the Father's will, perfectly fulfilled the Law of God in both its precepts and its penalty. In other words, this righteousness that God both requires and provides embraces all the work of Christ. (Bridges)

Justification is by the gracious act of God.

*If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?
Psalm 130:3*

*Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your
faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! Enter not into judgment
with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.
Psalm 143:1-2*

- God gives faith.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this
is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8*

- God grants justification as a gift.

*And 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*

*For there is no distinction: for all have sinned
and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the
redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by
faith. Romans 3:23-24*

Justification is a declaration by God.

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were

justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.
1 Corinthians 6:11

- A legal declaration.

The use of the word *justify* in the Bible indicates that justification is a legal declaration by God. Romans 4:5: “And to one who does not work but trusts him who *justifies the ungodly* his faith is reckoned as righteousness.” ... “justify,” God issues a legal declaration about us. This is why theologians have also said that justification is *forensic* where the word *forensic* means “having to do with legal proceedings.” (Grudem)

(Rom. 3:20, 26, 28; 5:1; 8:30; 10:4, 10; Gal. 2:16; 3:24).

- An eternal declaration.

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:30-39

Justification is God declaring us to be just in his sight.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?

Romans 8:33–34

Justification is God imputing Christ’s righteousness to us.

When we say that God *imputes* Christ’s righteousness to us it means that God *thinks of* Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, or regards it *as belonging to* us. He “reckons” it to our account.

(Grudem)

Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6

To one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. Romans 4:6

- The three imputations...
 - Adam's guilt was imputed to us.
 - Our sin was imputed to Christ.
 - Christ's righteousness is imputed to us
 - God thinks of it as belonging to us. Justification!

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21

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 Christ 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 3:8-9

Justification is through faith alone in Jesus alone.

... yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 2:16

- Christ is the object of our justification.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

Romans 5:6-9

- He fulfills the promise to Abraham.

That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Romans 4:22-25

- He obeys the law of Moses.

For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Romans 10:3-4

... and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

Acts 13:39

- He makes possible the grace given to David.

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

Romans 4:4-8

- Faith is the means of our justification. Why faith? Because it is the anti-work.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1

- Be aware of dangerous legalism.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Galatians 1:6-9

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?

Galatians 3:1-6

- working in our own power.
 - working according to our own laws and rules.
 - working to earn God’s favor.
 - working to steal God’s glory.
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- Embrace the divine love.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

- Jesus is passionate about you.
- Jesus has paid a price for you.
- God’s pleasure in you is not based upon your performance for Him.
- God’s pleasure in you is based upon Christ’s performance for you. (Platt)

Justification and faith and works

- Works are the evidence of our justification.

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

James 2:24

- Paul wants us to avoid thinking that works are necessary as a basis or means of our salvation.

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 2:15-16

- James wants us to avoid thinking that works are not necessary as evidence of our salvation.

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. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 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. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

James 2:18-24

The principle of salvation by grace brings us to the question of the relationship of faith to works. It is apparent from what has been said that works do not produce salvation. Yet the biblical witness also indicates that while it is faith that leads to justification, justification must and will invariably produce works appropriate to the nature of the new creature that has come into being. It is well when we quote the classic text on salvation by grace, Ephesians 2:8–9, not to stop short of verse 10, which points to the outcome of this grace: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." James puts it even more forcefully: "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17; see also v. 26). Despite the fairly common opinion that there is a tension between Paul and James, both make essentially the same point: that the genuineness of the faith that leads to justification becomes apparent in the results which issue from it. If there are no good works, there has been no real faith nor justification. (Erickson)

How can I be justified?

"We are justified by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone."

How are you righteous before God? Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. In spite of the fact that my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have not kept any one of them, and that I am still ever prone to all that is evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of my own, out of pure grace, grants me the benefits of the perfect [sacrifice] of Christ, imputing to me his righteousness and holiness as if I had never committed a single sin or had ever been sinful, having fulfilled myself all the obedience which Christ has carried out for me, if only I accept such favor with a trusting heart.

Heidelberg Catechism

Summary:

The great question of the Bible is, "how can God view sinners as righteous?" The answer: because they have been credited with the righteousness of Christ, a righteousness not their

own, a righteousness that is complete and perfect...when God looks at those who have put their trust in Christ, he sees his Son's perfect righteousness now as theirs, imputed to them through faith. (Bruce Ware)

Application:

- Remember that this is nothing you have done, all about Jesus' work, brings humility.
- When you don't feel justified because of continued struggle with sin, remember that does not matter what you "feel" It has been declared by the mighty God! You are holy in his sight.
- When you feel like you are slipping into using your good deeds to gain God's favor—remember that it is all about his grace and not your works. Embrace the gospel anew. Embrace his love.

Group Questions:

1. What verses or thoughts stand out to you from this talk? Why?
2. In **Romans 5:1-2**, Paul writes, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace which we now stand." What does standing in grace mean for you on a daily basis?
3. Bridges says, "The more a person counts as loss his own righteousness and lays hold by faith of the righteousness of Christ, the more he will be motivated to live and work for Christ." Do you agree with this? To what degree would you say this has been your experience?
4. Share prayer requests and pray for one another.