

# THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

## WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

### QUESTIONS # 70 & 33.

*(Larger Catechism)*

Q #70. *What is justification?*

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners,<sup>1</sup> in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight;<sup>2</sup> not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them,<sup>3</sup> but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them,<sup>4</sup> and received by faith alone.<sup>5</sup>

*(Shorter Catechism)*

Q #33. *What is justification?*

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins,<sup>6</sup> and accepteth us as righteous in his sight,<sup>7</sup> only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us,<sup>8</sup> and received by faith alone.<sup>9</sup>

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Question 1—*What is it to justify a sinner?*

*Answer*—In the chain of salvation justification follows effectual calling and is set forth everywhere as the primary effect of faith, Rom. 8:30. And, notably, although justification and sanctification are distinct benefits and should not be confounded or taken for one and the same thing, yet, they are inseparable, 1 Cor. 6:11.

Justification is not the making of a person just and righteous by infusing grace or holiness into him, Acts 13:38, 39; but it is a discharging him from guilt, and declaring and pronouncing him to be righteous, Rom. 4:6-8. Justification is a law term taken from courts of judicature, wherein a person is accused, tried and after trial absolved, so that it opposed to accusation and condemnation, Rom. 8:31-34.

Justification is not a real change of the sinner's nature, but a relative change of his state, through remission of sins, Rom. 4:5. The change of the sinner's nature, from sin to holiness, is inseparably annexed to it, 1 Pet. 1:2; but it is only the bringing him out of the state of condemnation, and setting him beyond the reach of the law, as a righteous person, Col. 2:14. Thereby, he is absolved before a throne of grace, Heb. 4:16; of a judge pronouncing sentence, Rom. 3:20; and absolving of sinners, Zech. 3:3, 4. Justification is opposed to condemnation and, as accusation and condemnation occur only in a trial, it is a word to be taken forensically, Isa. 50:8, 9. Thus, the equivalent phrases by which our justification is described are judicial, John 5:24; 3:18; Rom. 5:10, *etc.*

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 3:22, 24, 25; 4:5.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 5:19, 21; Rom. 3:22, 24, 25, 27, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Tit. 3:5, 7; Eph. 1:7.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 5:17-19; 4:6-8.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 10:43; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9.

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 3:24, 25; 4:6-8.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor. 5:19, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Rom. 5:17-19.

<sup>9</sup> Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9.

This justification is an act done and passed in an instant in the court of heaven, as soon as the sinner believes in Christ, and not a work carried on by degrees, Rom. 4:1-3. For if a sinner is not perfectly justified, he is not justified at all, Ps. 143:2 *with* Rom. 5:1. Though one man may be more sanctified than another, 1 Pet. 1:13-16; yet, no believer is in the sight of God more justified than another, Rom. 3:30.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that this justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, whereby he makes a forensic declaration that changes their legal status in the divine judgment, Rom. 3:22, 24, 25.

Question 2—*What are the parts of justification?*

*Answer*—The parts of justification are two: pardon of all sin, Rom. 3:22, 24, 25, 27, 28; together with an accepting and accounting of those persons as righteous in the sight of God, 2 Cor. 5:19, 21.

*First*, the sinner having this act of grace passed in his favor, is fully indemnified as to all crimes committed by him against the honor and law of the king of heaven, so as they shall never be charged upon him anymore, Micah 7:18-20. This is a *full* pardon wherein all the man's sins are pardoned together, Col. 2:13. Great and small sins, sins against the Gospel and the law, the most and least heinous, in the hour of pardon, shall be drowned in the blood of the Redeemer, Jer. 50:20. This pardon is most *free* to us, though to Christ it was the price of blood, Rom. 5:16, 18. We have nothing to give for a pardon for our best duties are but menstuous rags, and would cover one unclean thing with another, Isa. 64:6. The sinner never pays for it, nor can pay for it, Isa. 43:24, 25. This pardon is *unalterable and irrevocable*, Rom. 11:29. When God pardons a sinner, it must stand forever, Jer. 31:34. This is the covenant which has been sworn, that the pardon will remain, despite any sinful failures on the part of the believer, Isa. 54:9. A child of God may possess a sense of his pardon, but the pardon itself is written in the Mediator's blood, and so is one of those same mercies mentioned, Isa. 55:3.

*Second*, in justification, God not only pardons sins but accepts the person of the sinner as righteous in his sight, 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 4:6; 5:19. This, too, is done without any eye to a work done by the man himself but through the Redeemer, Eph. 1:6, 7. The sinner has nothing in himself or wrought by himself that can constitute the righteousness demanded by the law, it is the gift of grace, Tit. 3:5, 7.

Question 3—*What is the cause of our justification?*

*Answer*—The *material* cause of our justification is the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed to believers as a free gift, Rom. 5:17-19. This righteousness is either: 1.) His essential righteousness, which he had from eternity as God, which cannot be that whereby sinners are justified, *cf.* Job 35:7, 8 *with* Ps. 16:2. 2.) His mediatory righteousness, peculiar to him as the Father's servant, and the Mediator between God and man, whereby he gave a universal obedience, Phil. 2:7; and so fulfilled all righteousness, Matt. 3:15. Additionally, he suffered the penalty of the broken law, Phil. 2:8; wherein the debt of the elect was charged upon him completely, Ps. 69:4. In this, he is made our righteousness, 1 Cor. 1:30; as he was so called in the Old Testament, Jer. 23:6.

The *instrumental* cause of our justification is the faith of the elect, whereby Christ's righteousness becomes actually theirs, Gal. 2:16. Whatever foundation is laid for it in the decree of God's election, and in Christ's satisfaction in our stead, it is not ours until by faith we possess an actual interest, Phil. 3:9. Thus, the burden of all Scripture and all Gospel ministry is to set forth the ground of our believing, Acts 10:43.