

The Doctrine of Justification

I. The Language of Justification

If we are going to properly understand the doctrine of justification, we must begin with an understanding the legal background of the terminology. This background begins in the Old Testament usage of the Hebrew root *tsādaq*. This Hebrew word is then translated by the Greek word *dikaiōō* in the Septuagint (LXX), which is Greek translation of the Old Testament that was commonly cited by the writers of the New Testament. As we begin with a brief examination of a couple of Old Testament passages, we will see that, when used in legal contexts, or when used with other legal terminology, most particularly when set over against the concept of *condemnation* before a judge, the term must refer to a *declaration* of righteousness, or to what what we would commonly call an *acquittal*.

Deuteronomy 25:1

Proverbs 17:15

Matthew 12:37

Luke 7:29

Romans 3:1-4, 19-20; 8:33-34

II. The Meaning of Justification

Here our primary text in Romans 3:21-4:8, but we will look ahead in the epistle as well. We may summarize Paul's teaching in seven statements.

1. Justification is based upon the imputed righteousness of Christ (3:22; 4:1-8).
2. Justification based upon Christ's substitutionary death on the cross (3:23-26).
3. Justification is by God's grace (3:24).
4. Justification is through faith (3:22, 24-25).

Here it is worth noting also the excellent discussion of this point by Wayne Grudem:

Scripture never says that we are justified by the inherent goodness of our faith, as if our faith has merit before God. It never allows us to think that our faith in itself earns favor with God. Rather, Scripture says that we are justified 'by means of' our faith, understanding faith to be the instrument through which justification is given to us, but not at all an activity that earns us merit or favor with God. Rather, we are justified solely because of the merits of Christ's work (Rom. 5:17-19). (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 730)

5. Justification is an instantaneous act of God rather than a process (5:1, 9).

We can see, then, that Wayne Grudem correctly defines this doctrine when he writes that "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." (*Systematic Theology*, p.723)

6. Justification is the status of a future verdict applied in the present (2:4-6, 13).
7. Justification is for God's glory (3:27-30).