



Justification

J I Packer's *18 Words*

Second Presbyterian Church

Summer Sunday School

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Defining “Justification”

Packer’s Definition

“To ‘justify’ in the Bible means to ‘declare righteous’: to declare, that is, of a man on trial, that he is not liable to any penalty, but is entitled to all the privileges due to those who have kept the law” (*18 Words*, 135.)

- Legal category – court of God’s justice
- The *problem* solved: *penalty* removed
 - “Just as if I’d never sinned.”
 - Sins forgiven: “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Ps. 32:1)
- The *benefits* secured: *privileges* restored
 - “Just as if I’d always obeyed.”
 - Righteousness bestowed: “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments” (Zech. 3:4).

Justification: Five Points

Five Points on Justification

1. A Declaration, not a Transformation
2. God's Once-for-All Act, not a Process
3. Imputed, not Infused, Righteousness
4. Faith, not Works, as the Instrument of Justification
5. By Grace, not Merit

Justification: *Declared Righteous*

Justification is a *Declaration*

- God's declaration that sinners are justified.
 - A righteous *status* in Christ.
"He believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6).
- God's pardon of sin
"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" (Rom. 3:23-25).
- Based on Christ's work *for us*, not *in us*.
"by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).
- Not a Transformation of our nature
"to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5).
"But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other" (Lk. 18:13-14).
- Contrary to Roman Catholicism

Justification: A *Divine Act*

Justification as a Divine Act

- Once-for-All Declaration
 - Once-for-all versus On-going Process:
 - “Justification is an *act* of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight” (WSC, 33).
 - “Sanctification is the *work* of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God. . . .” (WSC, 35).
- From Judgment to Life
 - “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (Jn. 5:24).
- Present and Final Justification *Are One*
 - “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (Jn. 3:36).
 - “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left” (Mt. 25:31-33).

Justification: *Imputed Righteousness*

The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness

- Our Sins Imputed to Christ; His Righteousness Imputed to Us
 - “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 Cor. 5:21).
 - “For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17).
- Not the *infusing* of a righteous quality (RCC), but the *imputing* of a righteous status.
 - “And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Rom. 4:4-5).
- Not a “legal fiction,” but a true righteousness before God.
 - “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” (Rom. 3:26).
- Our Righteousness before God is Christ's Righteousness
 - It is perfect, cannot be improved, finished and final.
 - “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt. 13:43).

Justification: *Through Faith*

Justification through Faith Alone

- By Faith, Not by Works

“A person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16).

“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. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith” (Rom 3:26-27).

“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 of God that depends on faith” (Phil. 3:8-9).

“Not for the sake of any virtue in them or work by them, but for Christ’s sake alone” (WCF 11.1).

- Faith as the *alone instrument* of our justification.

“Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification.” WCF XI.2

“For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” (Rom 1:17).

- Faith is *not* a new work.
- Faith establishes *union with Christ* and receives all his benefits.
- Faith in justification is *passive*, receiving Christ’s righteousness.

Justification *Through Faith, cont.*

- Relating Faith and Works

- Rome: Faith + Works = Justification
- Reformation: Faith = Justification + Works

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? (Rom. 6:1-2).

“Yet is [faith] not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.”
WCF XI.2

- What about James 2:18-24?

“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 see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works... You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (Jam 2:18, 22, 24).

- Paul: Faith = Justification + Works
- James: Faith \neq Justification - Works

Justification: *By Grace*

Justification by Grace Alone

- Apart from any Merit on Our Part

“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*” (Rom. 3:23-25).
- God’s Gift, Not Our Due

“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” (Rom. 4:4-5).
- In Christ

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7).
- Faith Itself as Gift

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Justification: *Final Comments*

Importance of the Doctrine

“The doctrine of Justification... is the principal ground on which religion must be supported, so it requires greater care and attention. For unless you understand first of all what your position is before God, and what the judgment (is) which he passes upon you, you have no foundation on which your salvation can be laid, or on which piety towards God can be reared. (John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (3.11.1).”

Not to be Corrupted

“Justification is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. An error about justification is dangerous, like a defect in a foundation. Justification by Christ is a spring of the water of life. To have the poison of corrupt doctrine cast into this spring is damnable” (Thomas Watson: *A Body of Divinity*, p. 226).

Leads to Godliness

Feckenham: “Why, then it is necessary unto salvation to do good works also; it is not sufficient only to believe.” Lady Jane Grey: “I deny that, and I affirm that faith only saveth; but it is meet for a Christian to do good works, in token that he follows the steps of his Master, Christ, yet may we not say that they profit to our salvation; for when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, and faith only in Christ’s blood saves us.” (Paul F.M. Zahl, *Five Women of the English Reformation*, 110).