

Justification

The Doctrine of Justification

Justification is the judicial act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness. It is the heart of the gospel, the article by which the church stands or falls. These studies explore this foundational doctrine of the Reformation.

The Nature of Justification

Justification as Declarative — Justification as Declarative

Justification is a legal declaration, not a moral transformation. God does not make the sinner righteous in justification but declares him righteous based on an alien righteousness—the righteousness of Christ imputed to his account. This forensic character distinguishes justification from sanctification, which actually changes the believer's character.

Romans 4:5

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Romans 8:33

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

Romans 3:28

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Galatians 2:16

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Romans 5:1

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

Justification Once for All — Justification Once for All

Justification occurs at the moment of faith and is complete, perfect, and irreversible. The believer is not partially justified or progressively justified but fully justified the instant he believes. This verdict cannot be overturned, for it rests on the finished work of Christ and the immutable decree of God.

Romans 5:9

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

John 5:24

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Romans 8:30

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Acts 13:39

And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

The Grounds of Justification

The Imputed Righteousness of Christ — The Imputed Righteousness of Christ

The ground of justification is not any righteousness inherent in the believer but the perfect righteousness of Christ credited to his account. Just as our sin was imputed to Christ on the cross, so His righteousness is imputed to us through faith. This great exchange forms the heart of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Romans 4:6

Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

Philippians 3:9

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Romans 5:19

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

1 Corinthians 1:30

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

Christ's Active Obedience — Christ's Active Obedience

Christ's righteousness imputed to believers includes both His passive obedience—His suffering and death for our sins—and His active obedience—His perfect fulfillment of the law on our behalf. We are justified not only because our penalty was paid but because Christ earned the positive righteousness that is now credited to us.

Romans 5:19

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Matthew 3:15

And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Romans 10:4

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Romans 8:3-4

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Faith and Justification

Justification by Faith Alone — Justification by Faith Alone

Faith is the alone instrument of justification—the empty hand that receives Christ and His righteousness. Faith does not merit justification but is merely the means by which we are united to Christ and receive all His benefits. This faith is itself a gift of God, not a work of man.

Romans 3:28

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Galatians 2:16

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Romans 4:16

Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

Romans 5:1

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

The Nature of Saving Faith — The Nature of Saving Faith

Saving faith includes knowledge of the gospel, assent to its truth, and personal trust in Christ alone for salvation. It is not mere intellectual agreement but wholehearted

reliance on Jesus as Lord and Savior. This faith, though it comes in varying degrees, always involves turning from self-reliance to Christ-dependence.

Romans 10:9-10

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Acts 16:31

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

John 1:12

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Fruits of Justification

Peace with God — Peace with God

The immediate fruit of justification is peace with God. The enmity caused by sin is removed, the wrath of God is propitiated, and the believer stands in grace. This is objective peace—a changed relationship, not merely a changed feeling. The war is over; reconciliation is accomplished.

Romans 5:1

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

Romans 5:10

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

Colossians 1:20

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

Ephesians 2:14

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

Isaiah 53:5

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

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