
Title: What are Justification and Adoption?

Series: Speaking of God

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Introduction

Justification Is a Legal Declaration by God

The doctrine of justification has been one of the most controversial doctrines in the history of the church. It is controversial because it goes to the heart of what it means to be a Christian. The Bible's presentation of justification has been disputed in various ways for various reasons. Contrary to what you may hear from some in the Catholic camp, the doctrine of justification by faith was clearly declared in the teaching of the ancient church and church fathers. This doctrine was the central difference between Protestants and Roman Catholics at the time of the Reformation, which began with Martin Luther in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517. Luther and all other Protestants who followed him insisted that justification was by "faith alone, while Roman Catholics responded that justification was by faith plus use of the "means of grace" found in the sacraments of the church (such as baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper as experienced in the mass, and penance).

The major question answered by justification is one we posited earlier: how is it that a man is made right with God? What is it that God demands? God demands perfect righteousness. The quandary for humanity has been: how can we get that righteousness since we are sinners? Adam's sin threw the entire human race into war with God.

The controversy through history has been: what is the source of that kind of righteousness that makes one right with God? Catholics believe that there is an inherent righteousness in man. Historically, Protestants have affirmed that there is no inherent righteousness in man; man must be given a righteousness that is not his own. Romans 3:10 says "none is righteous, no, not one." Man is not inherently good. Man is inherently evil. Without justification, it is impossible for man to have the righteousness necessary to have a right standing with God.

What is it that the scriptures say about justification? Romans chapters 3 through 5 are critical in understanding this teaching. Romans 3:21ff says "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one. He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” Since the fall, man has a problem. He is a rebel against God. He has no access to God. He does not have a right standing with God. He is guilty of treason against the creator and in need of righteousness that is impossible for him to obtain. Romans 3:21 says “but now... the righteousness of God has been manifested”. What is this a reference to? This is a reference to the coming of Jesus. Christ came to earth to give man a right standing with God.

This right standing involves forgiveness for that inherent rebellion against God. Those whom God effectually calls, have repentance, faith, and union with Christ, He also freely forgives all their sins by the blood of Christ and in God’s sight Christ’s righteousness belongs to them (Rom. 8:30, Rom. 3:21-24).

The instantaneous, legal act of God in which the sinner is acquitted from all guilt of sin and declared to be righteous in God’s sight is called justification. God justifies us by taking the initiative himself, without human help. The relationship with the rebellious ungodly is reconciled by a declaration of righteousness.

Justification accounts Christ’s righteousness to the sinner, and declares the sinner to be righteous and absolved, rather than condemned or accused (Exodus 23:7, Deut. 25:1, Proverbs 17:15, Luke 18:14, Romans 3-5, 8:1,33).

Our sins are imputed to Christ; Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us (Col. 2:14, 1 Pet. 2:24, 1 Cor. 1:30, 2 Cor. 5:21). This transaction is very real. The absolution is real. The righteousness is real. The sins of those justified are considered forgiven because God considers their sins as belonging to Christ, and Christ already paid the penalty for those sins (2 Corinthians 5:21). If we read this passage in 2 Corinthians 5, we see that justification isn’t merely about forgiveness and reconciliation: “¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Not only are we forgiven and reconciled, we are made a new creation. Justification is a creative act of God when he applies Christ’s righteousness to our account. God isn’t merely stating things the way they are in justification. He is bringing about a new reality. Regeneration quickens the sinner and makes him alive. Justification applies Christ’s righteousness to the sinner so that Christ’s obedience is the featured mark of the new creation.

Justification is through the satisfaction that Christ has made by His death for all the sinner’s sins, and is applied through faith (1 John 1:7; Heb. 10:14, 9:26; 2 Cor. 5:19; Rom. 3:23,25,30, 5:1,3, Acts 13:38,39). The result is that the sinner is justified. We are both sinners and justified. We are saints, yet sinners. This highlights the problem with that pet phrase we so often hear “Just-as-if-I’d” never sinned. It’s true that God sees Christ’s

righteousness as our righteousness. But we will always be identified as “saints yet sinners”. We will never be completely like we had never sinned. The effects of Christ’s death are eternal. We will always be known as the redeemed. Further, that pet phrase only speaks to one effect of justification. As we’ve stated in previous weeks, forgiveness is only the beginning of justification. We also must be given, and are given, a righteousness that satisfies God’s standard. It’s not enough to have never sinned. We must also obey God perfectly in a positive way.

Justification by Faith Alone

Justification is a result of God’s grace and it is applied to the elect in Christ through faith alone (Rom. 3:24; Ephesians 2:8,9).

Faith is the sole instrument by which we are united to Christ, whose perfect righteousness and satisfaction for sins is alone the ground of our acceptance with God (Rom. 3:28, 4:4,5, 5:18,19, 2 Cor. 5:21, Phil. 3:9).

Justification is based solely on the merits of Christ’s work (Romans 3:24).

In his obedience, the Last Adam gained the merit that is transferred to the account of the elect (Romans 5:10,19, Philippians 2:8, Hebrews 5:8,9).

The Protestant doctrine of justification says that we are fully justified by God the instant we believe, for “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). The Roman Catholic doctrine says that we are not fully justified until our lives are completely cleansed from sin, which will not be until after we die and we have been purified in purgatory (Protestants say there is no purgatory). These differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics about justification have continued to this day.

Adoption: Membership in a New Family

The act of God in which the children of wrath are made members of His family is called adoption (John 1:12, Eph. 2:3,19).

In His regeneration of those He has chosen, God imparts to them eternal life by the Holy Spirit so that they are born into His family; and they become, upon adoption, legal sons in full standing (John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Hebrews 12:5 9).

Through union with Christ all believers are declared to be and are made the sons of God, and joint heirs with Christ, to whom belong all the promises of this life, and that which is to come (1 Thess. 1:1; John 17:21, 20:17; Heb. 2:11, 1 John 4:16; Gal. 2:19,20).

Those who have been justified enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God (Rom. 8:17, John 1:12), have His name put upon them (Jer. 14:9, 2 Cor. 6:18, Rev. 3:12), receive the spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15), have access to the throne of grace with boldness (Eph. 3:12, Rom. 5:2), are enabled to cry, Abba, Father (Romans 8:15, Gal. 4:6), are protected (Prov. 14:26), provided for (Matt. 6:30,32, 1 Pet. 5:7), and chastened by Him as by a Father (Heb. 12:6).

We live as heirs to all the blessings that God desires to lavish upon his children (Rom. 8:15,17).

We are God's children now (1 John 3:2), but we also "groan inwardly," waiting for the day when the full blessings of our adoption are experienced (Rom. 8:23).