

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 10: Justification and Adoption

Opening Discussion:

- What is the “good news” of the gospel?
- Why is it important that God remains a just judge? What would be wrong with salvation that comes at the expense of God’s justice?
- What kind of obstacles prevent you from believing in a greater way that you are a child of God?

Justification

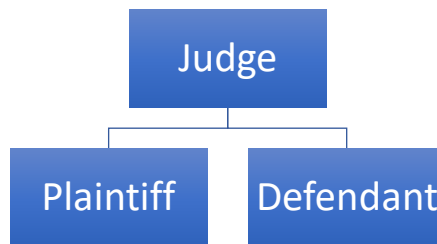
Centrality of Justification

Justification is “*the primary article of the Christian religion...the main hinge on which religion turns...the principal article of the whole doctrine of salvation and the foundation of all religion.*” John Calvin

Justification: A Lawcourt Metaphor

One prominent way the Bible explains salvation is through the law court. The biblical term *justification* must be understood within this context. A simple understanding of a law court will help us understand what the Bible is teaching.

The judge renders the verdict based on the law. The plaintiff brings the accusation, while the defendant stands accused.



According to the Bible, who fills each of these roles? What is the basis for judgment (the legal standard)?

It is important to note that God always judges us on the basis of works. We are condemned not for choosing or rejecting Jesus. We are condemned for breaking God’s law.

What verdict should God render? Why?

The Righteousness of God

Romans 1:17 proclaims “The righteousness of God is revealed”

What does the phrase “righteousness of God” mean?

Martin Luther’s account of how he discovered the gospel:

"I had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his Letter to the Romans, but thus far there had stood in my way, not the cold blood around my heart, but that one word which is in chapter one: "The righteousness of God is revealed in it." I hated that word, "righteousness of God," which, by the use and custom of all my teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically as referring to formal or active righteousness, as they call it, i.e., that righteousness by which God is righteous and by which he punishes sinners and the unrighteous.

But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn't be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, "Isn't it enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments? Why does God heap sorrow upon sorrow through the Gospel and through the Gospel threaten us with his righteousness and his wrath?" This was how I was raging with wild and disturbed conscience. I constantly badgered St. Paul about that spot in Romans 1 and anxiously wanted to know what he meant.

I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: "The righteousness of God is revealed in it, as it is written: "The righteous person lives by faith." I began to understand that in this verse the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the righteousness of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive righteousness, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: "The righteous person lives by faith." All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light. I ran through the Scriptures from memory and found that other terms had analogous meanings, e.g., "the work of God," that is, what God works in us; "the power of God," by which he makes us powerful; "the wisdom of God," by which he makes us wise; "the strength of God," "the salvation of God," "the glory of God."

If God's righteousness only meant God's commitment to judge justly, then we would fear and even hate the idea of God's righteousness. It would condemn us at every turn. Luther, however, discovered that Paul meant something else in this phrase.

Imputation vs. Infusion

How are we justified? Is it a process of moral renewal that leads to God's verdict?

Infusion

The Roman Catholic church did not and does not believe that we save ourselves by our own good works alone. God's grace saves us. God **infuses** grace into the recipient, who must cooperate with this grace. A Christian must merit an increase of grace and hope for final justification.

For the Catholic, justification is a process of becoming intrinsically righteous. The question remains: Do I have enough? Will the righteousness infused in me overcome my sin and sinful nature?

WCF 11.1 Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

Imputation

By imputation the sinner legally possesses Christ's righteousness. Christ's sinless record and active fulfillment of all righteous obligations are now reckoned to our account. The Christian is not mixed bag of some sin with some righteousness; the Christian is now **simultaneously a sinner and completely righteous.**

Luther describes this as an "alien righteousness" because it is not a righteousness comes from us; it is outside of us; it is Christ's righteousness.

God's verdict (justification) is not the goal of our Christian life; it is the basis of our Christian life.

Federal Representation

How does the righteousness of one man count for all Christians?

Scripture frequently teaches us that God treats us corporately rather than individually. For example, Achan's theft (Joshua 7) brought a curse to all of Israel.

We saw with the concept of original sin, Adam stood as our representative. Our future depended upon his actions. Christ is now the Second Adam, meriting righteousness for us.

Romans 5:12 *"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."*

Christ's active obedience: Christ completely fulfills all of the Law's demands that we and Adam failed to accomplish.

Christ's passive obedience: Christ took the penalty that our sin deserved to satisfy God's justice.

Romans 5:15–17

[15] But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. [16] And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. [17] For if, because of one

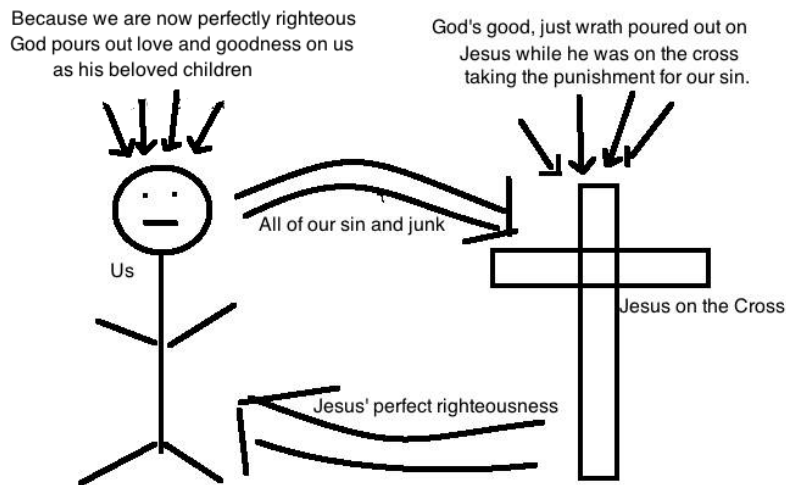
man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

WCF 11.3

Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

The Great Exchange

To return to the lawcourt metaphor, God now looks on Christ when rendering our verdict. In the same way, at the cross God looked at us when he rendered Christ's verdict.



The term “Justification” is another word for a verdict rendered in the positive. It is more than simply “not guilty,” because we do not wind up at a neutral position. God recognizes all of the positive obedience of Christ.

Judgment Day Verdict

What does all this legal language mean for our future standing before God? What will happen on Judgment Day?

Sign of Judgment

In the OT, God’s Judgment Day was prophesied as a time when God would render his verdict on all the dead: The unjust to eternal condemnation. The just to everlasting blessing. The sign of God blessing was “the resurrection” (Dan. 12:3; Ez. 37; John 11:24). When Jesus was raised from the dead, it was a sign of God verdict: Jesus was vindicated and all who are in Christ are vindicated in him (1 Cor. 15:22).

Paul in Romans 4 tells us that this verdict is not just for those who come after Christ, but it was the verdict Abraham had by virtue of his faith in God's promise of Christ. From that we can understand that all who are saved in the OT are saved by faith in Christ by imputation of his righteousness.

WCF 11.6. The justification of believers under the old testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the new testament.

It is remarkable that God doesn't just promise a future verdict, he declares that verdict to you now. God renders his eternal verdict on you by virtue of what Christ has already accomplished.

- **Romans 5:1** *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*
- **Romans 8:1** *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

This verdict, however, is not ours until we embrace it by faith. The benefits of Christ's work in history are applied to the believer by the Spirit and received by faith alone.

WCF. 11.4 God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them

What affect will receiving this verdict prior to the end of time (or end of your life) have on your obedience?

Many Christians have objected to the imputation of righteousness because of a fear that it will leave no motivation for holy living. Catholics object on this ground. So do many evangelicals.

Revivalist Charles Finney called imputation "absurd." He believed it undermined our personal holiness. He declared that no one can be justified "while sin, any degree of sin, remains in him."

This is not so different from those who proclaim that you can lose your salvation if you are not able to master sin.

How would you respond to the objection that grace will undermine your motivation to live faithfully?

WCF 11.5. God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and, although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

How does Westminster describe the nature of a sinner who has been justified? What is God's response to a justified Christian who sins?

Adoption

WCF 12.1. *All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have his name put upon them, receive the Spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry, Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him, as by a father: yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption; and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.*

"Our sonship to God is the apex of creation and the goal of redemption." Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, Sinclair Ferguson

Change in Our Status

"Adoption is, like justification, a judicial act. In other words, it is the bestowal of a status, or standing, not the generating within us of a new nature or character." John Murray

Change in Our Nature

"There are two ways whereby we may become members of a human family—we may be born into it or we may be adopted into it. The former is by natural generation, the latter is by legal act. It may be that the Scripture represents us as entering into the family of God by both—by generation and by adoption...When God adopts men and women into his family he insures that not only may they have the rights and privileges of his sons and daughters but also the nature or disposition consonant with such a status. This he does by regeneration—he renews them after his image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness." Murray

Romans 8:12-17

*[12] So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. [13] For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. [14] For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. [15] For you **did not receive the spirit of slavery** to fall back into fear, but you have **received the Spirit of adoption** as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" [16] The Spirit himself **bears witness** with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

Galatians 4:1-7

*[4:1] I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, [2] but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. [3] In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. [4] But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, [5] to **redeem** those who were under the law, so that we might **receive adoption as sons**. [6] And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

What kind of obstacles prevent you from believing in a greater way that you are a child of God?

“Adoption, like justification, is simultaneously legal and relational, as is the obverse: alienation and condemnation. Adoption is not a goal held out to children who successfully imitate their parents; nor is it the result of an infusion of familial characteristics or genes. Rather, it is a change in legal status that issues in a relationship that is gradually reflected in the child’s identity, characteristics, and actions. From the courtroom, with the legal status and inheritance unalterably established, the child moves into the security of a growing and thriving future.” Michael Horton

What happens to us when we believe our justification but not our adoption?

“Although your greatest difficulty in the Christian life is believing that the Father loves you, you commit your greatest sin by not believing that he really does love you.” Neil Williams

When we deny our adoption, we become spiritual orphans. An orphan does not trust that God love him and believes he has to look out for himself. An orphan will become self-righteous because he cannot trust that God will give him an unearned righteousness.

“I did not realize that the confidence I had always had about my life was not faith, as I had assumed, but a reliance on my own competency, be it real or imagined. When my competency was called into question by my failures in life’s momentous events, like my father’s death and my daughter’s wedding, my confidence—and the world it supported—began to crumble...Our confidence in ourselves is shaken by life changes; we fight back. We increase our demands upon our own “strengths,” be they inner qualities, outer achievements, or other people. But only emptiness follows. Like an orphan we cry, ‘I am abandoned.’” Rose Marie Miller

Spiritual orphans will become victims

“Spiritual orphans see themselves as humble sufferers in their emotional pain. But in fact they are simply closed off people who are too proud and fearful (the two are closely related) to admit failure, imperfections, and sins, and acknowledge their complete dependence on God.” Miller

Miller Summarizes the Orphan Mentality

- Life consciously or unconsciously is centered on **personal autonomy** and moral will power, with grace understood as God’s **maintaining your own strength**—not as his transforming power.
- Faith is defined as trying harder to do and be better, with a view to establishing a good record leading to self-justification.
- Obedience is related to **external, visible duties**, with attitudes and deeper motivation virtually ignored.
- “What people think” is represented as the real moral standard, based upon visible success and failure.
- An *I-am-a-victim* attitude is supported by coping strategies, wall building, blame shifting gossiping, and defending.
- All this is accompanied by *intense* feelings of aloneness, believing that no one understands and that one is trapped by circumstances.

Key Question: *How would my life and actions be different if I believed in a greater way that I am a child of God, that I am righteous, beloved, accepted, and forgiven?*

Characteristics of a son or daughter (from Miller)

1. Increasing assurance of God as Father through knowledge of the doctrine of the Cross
2. Building a partnership with God, relying on the Spirit for a willing and obedient life
3. Forgiving instead of judging and condemning, putting off defensiveness, and learning to listen
4. Relying on the Holy Spirit to use the tongue for praise and not complaint or gossiping
5. Seeing by faith God's sovereign plan over one's life as wise and good—a plan not to be feared
6. Learning to pray; recognizing that we have no resources, and claiming the promises of God
7. Relying on the Holy Spirit in going quickly to Christ with sins, burdens, and needs, seeking daily forgiveness and cleansing