

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 19: Justification

Last time: *Repentance is a grace that leads us to greater dependence on Christ. Repentance is not a work that earns our salvation.*

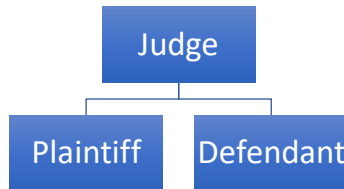
Centrality of Justification

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?

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

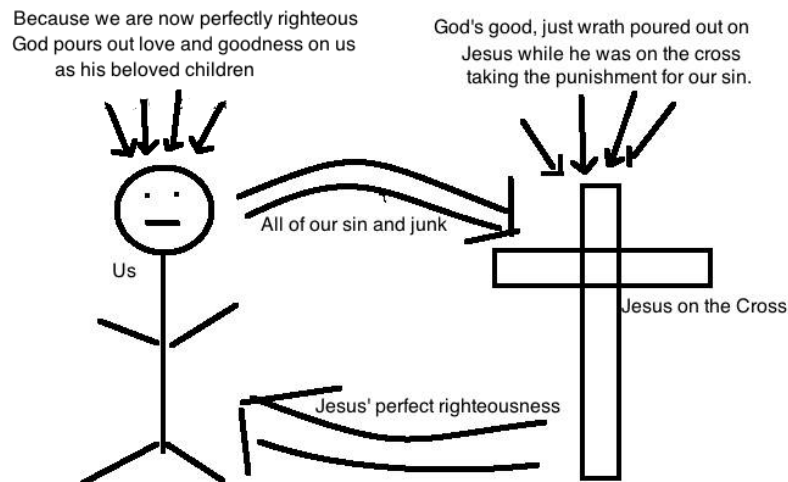
[15] But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. [16] And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following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

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: Justification is God's verdict based on Christ's righteousness. God legally counts our sin onto Christ and Christ's righteousness onto us.