

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 11.1 – The Nature of Justification

“If this article [of justification] stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses.”
– Martin Luther

“If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.” – Psalm 130:3–4

I. Introduction: Justification in General and in Scripture

- A. In everyday life, to “justify” means to declare the truth of a prior claim, to declare that a prior claim you made was right. E.g., predicting the Falcons will win the Super Bowl.
- B. In the biblical context, justification is about showing/declaring that one is righteous according to a legal standard. One would normally assume that for one’s *entire life* to be declared “righteous” that (a) all of someone’s works would be evaluated and (b) the evaluation would be done at the end of one’s life.
1. **Prov 17:15** – *“He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD.”*
 2. **Deut 25:1** – *“If there is a dispute between men and they go to court, and the judges decide their case, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked ...”*
- C. On the surface, biblical (gospel) justification of sinners makes “no sense” because (a) one is not justified by his/her own works, and (b) one is justified in the middle of life, not at the end. Isn’t judgment at the end?!
- D. At a deeper level, biblical justification makes glorious sense because: (a) the legal requirement of works is fulfilled, not in my life, but in the life of Christ, and (b) given that the work performed is not ours, we do not need to wait to the end of life to be justified; hence, we can be justified now.

II. WCF 11.1 – The Nature of Justification

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. (WCF 11.1)

- A. The Roman Catholic church teaches that one is justified through a *process* of making us increasingly holy *inwardly*, in heart and life. How is the Confession's statement different?
- B. According to the Confession (and the Westminster Shorter Catechism), what are the two main parts to biblical justification?
1. **Ps 32:2** – *“Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity ...”*
 2. **2 Cor 5:21** – *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*
 3. **Westminster Shorter Catechism #33** - *“Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”*
- C. What part of justification do you think gets emphasized in evangelicalism today? What unbalanced view of the Christian life might result?
- D. How does someone receive the free gift of justification?
1. **Gal 2:16** – *“[W]e know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”*

“We define justification as follows: the sinner, received into communion with Christ, is reconciled to God by His grace, while, cleansed by Christ's blood, he obtains forgiveness of sins, and clothed with Christ's righteousness as if it were his own, he stands confident before the heavenly judgment seat.” – John Calvin, Institutes, 3.17.8

“To preach the gospel to yourself ... means that you continually face up to your own sinfulness and then flee to Jesus through faith in His shed blood and righteous life. It means that you appropriate, again by faith, the fact that Jesus fully satisfied the law of God, that He is your propitiation, and that God's holy wrath is no longer directed toward you.” – Jerry Bridges