

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 11.2 – Faith as the “Instrument” of Justification (Part 1)

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

“There is no more basic or fundamental error in the whole realm of what we call religion than to think that a man is accepted in the sight of God, that he is justified by God, on the basis of what he himself is or on the basis of what he himself does.” – John Murray

I. Review: The Nature of Justification

- A. In the biblical context, justification is about 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.”*
- B. But sinners may be justified *now*, in Christ and by grace, because: (a) Christ as my obedient Substitute has fulfilled the positive legal requirements of God’s law for me, and (b) Christ as my dying Substitute has paid the eternal penalty for all of my failures to keep God’s law.
1. **Rom 4:5** – *“And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness ...”*

*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)*

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. (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 33)

2. **Rom 3:23–26** – *“For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness ... so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”*

II. The Role of Faith as the “Instrument” of Justification

Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love. (WCF 11.2)

A. What is faith? Is it a “work” that God is pleased to accept in lieu of our obedience to his law?

1. **Eph 2:8–9** – *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

B. What does it mean that “we are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone”? What is at risk if we misunderstanding either one of those truths?

1. **1 Cor 1:30–31** – *“And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,³¹ so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”*

“In the first place, he says that **he is made unto us wisdom**, by which he means, that we obtain in him an absolute perfection of wisdom, inasmuch as the Father has fully revealed himself to us in him, that we may not desire to know anything besides him ...”

“Secondly, he says that he is **made unto us righteousness**, by which he means that we are on his account acceptable to God, inasmuch as he expiated our sins by his death, and his obedience is imputed to us for righteousness. For as the righteousness of faith consists in remission of sins and a gracious acceptance, we obtain both through Christ.”

“Thirdly, he calls him our **sanctification**, by which he means, that we who are otherwise unholy by nature, are by his Spirit renewed unto holiness, that we may serve God. From this, also, we infer, that we cannot be justified freely through faith alone without at the same time living holily. For these fruits of grace are connected together, as it were, by an indissoluble tie, so that he who attempts to sever them does in a manner tear Christ in pieces. Let therefore the man who seeks to be justified through Christ, by God’s unmerited goodness, consider that this cannot be attained without his taking him at the same time for **sanctification**, or, in other words, being renewed to innocence and purity of life.”

– John Calvin on 1 Cor 1:30

C. Is it hard for you to daily remember that you are justified by grace through faith alone, while also remembering that such faith ought to be “no dead faith, but worketh by love”? Why is this so?

1. **Gal 3:4** – *“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”*

2. **Phil 2:12–13** – *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”*

D. How might our lives be changed if we meditated more on our justification in union with Christ?