

The Theology of the Westminster Standards WCF 11.3 – The Ground of Justification

“Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.” – Psalm 85:10

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

I. Review

A. Justification Through Faith Alone ...

1. By the sheer grace of God, because of the love of God (!), sinners may be justified *now*, through faith-union with Christ, 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.
 - a. **Gal 2:16** – “... 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.”

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)

B. ... But Not Through a Faith that Is Alone!

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)

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.”

“The faith by which sinners are justified, as it unites them to Christ and so secures for them all the benefits of salvation there are in him, that faith perseveres to the end and in persevering is never alone. It is, as Luther is reported to have said, ‘a busy little thing.’” – Richard Gaffin

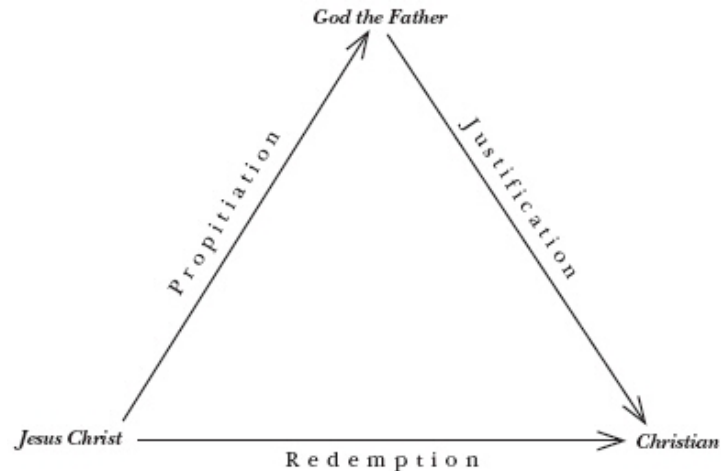
II. The Ground of our Justification

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. (WCF11.3)

- A. Where in WCF 11.3 do you find the historical basis for the “two parts of justification” you enjoy today?

“Whose is the righteousness that Daniel sees in the future (Dan. 9:24, 26)? What is the salvation that Isaiah pictures (Isa. 53:4–6, 10–12)? Who pays the ransom that Paul mentions to Timothy (1 Tim 2:5, 6)? Who is in view in the letter to the Hebrews when it speaks of a body that was offered on behalf of sinners (Heb 10:10, 14)? Every Christian knows that each of these questions has only one answer: it is the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom faith must find its resting place.” – Chad van Dixhoorn (CTF, 165)

B. Consider James Boice’s triangle below. Do you understand the terms and arrows?



1. **Redemption (“buying back”)** – *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’” (Gal 3:13)*
2. **Propitiation (“turning aside of wrath”)** – *“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” (Heb 2:17)*
1. **Justification – (“declaring righteous before God’s law”)** – *“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.” (Rom 3:22–26)*

C. In your own words, how does God display his attributes in the justification of sinners? Which attributes does he display? What other attributes of God do you see displayed at the cross?

1. **Eph 2:5, 7** – *“... by grace you have been saved ...⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”*

D. How should meditating on the work of Christ at the cross affect your view of God? Your view of Christ? Your view of yourself?