

The Theology of the Westminster Standards

WCF 11.6 – Justification from the Old to New Testament

“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.” (WSC 33)

“Justification is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. An error about justification is dangerous, like a defect in a foundation. Justification by Christ is a spring of the water of life. To have the poison of corrupt doctrine cast into this spring is damnable.” – Thomas Watson

I. Review

A. WCF 11.1 – What is Justification? (The Nature of Justification)

*Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth ... by **pardonning their sins**, and by accounting and **accepting their persons as righteous** ... by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him ... (WCF. 11.1)*

B. WCF 11.2 – How May I Be Justified? (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)

C. WCF 11.3 – Where was Justification Secured for Me? (The Ground of Justification)

Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified ... [such that] 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. (WCF 11.3)

D. WCF 11.4 – When am I Actually Justified? (Justification and the Past, Present, and Future)

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. (WCF 11.4)

1. God decreed our justification in eternity past.
2. God secured our justification through Christ’s death/resurrection in history.
3. God applied our justification through faith in the present.
4. God will openly display our justification at the final resurrection of believers.

E. WCF 11.5 – Justification and the Past, Present, and Future (“When am I actually justified?”)

... although they [i.e., sinners justified in Christ] can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God’s fatherly displeasure ... until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance. (WCF 11.5)

1. We are *simul iustus et peccator* (“simultaneously just and sinner”)!

II. Justification in the Old and New Testament Periods

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. (WCF 11.6)

- A. In what respects (see above: “in all these respects”) is justification the same in all ages? In what ways, if any, is it different?
- B. How does WCF 8.6 explain just how it is that Old Testament saints encountered the gospel of Christ, so as to be able to be justified in Christ before he died on the cross?

Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent’s head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; being yesterday and today the same, and forever. (WCF 8.6)

1. **John 5:45–46** – “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.” (cf. Heb 3:5)
2. **Heb 4:1–2** – “Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ² For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.”
3. **Gal 3:8–9** – “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’”
4. **Gen 15:1–6** – “After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’ ² But Abram said, ‘O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ ³ And Abram said, ‘Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.’ ⁴ And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.’ ⁵ And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ ⁶ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”

“Christ often takes the crown off his own head, and puts it upon the head of faith; witness such passages as these, which are frequent in Scripture: ‘Thy faith hath saved thee,’ (Luke 7:50). ‘Thy faith hath made thee whole,’ (Matthew 9:22). And no wonder that Christ crowns faith, for of all graces, faith takes the crown off a man’s own head, and puts it upon the head of Christ.”
 – Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*

- C. Given this study of justification, what has stood out to you? How might it help you to enjoy Christ more? How might it help you in your sanctification (i.e., battle for holiness)?