

Q33. What is justification?

A33. **Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.**

Scripture References: Ephesians 1:7; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Romans 4:5-8, 3:22, 24-25, 5:1, 17-19; Acts 10:43; Galatians 2:16

DQ1: Whose act is justification?

DQ2: What is the cost of justification to us?

DQ3: Why is justification needed?

DQ4: Why is justification an act of God's free grace?

DQ5: What are the elements of justification?

DQ6: How is our sin addressed under justification?

DQ7: How is a sinner accepted by God?

DQ8: How is justification possible?

DQ9: How is the righteousness imputed to a sinner?

Notes:

Justification is a very special judicious act of God. "It is God who justifies." (Romans 8:33) Justification is a unilateral ministry of God in the lives of His covenant people, those whom He has predestined and chosen to receive the benefits of His grace when none deserved it. No one can buy justification. No one is entitled to justification. No one, outside of Christ, can effectuate justification. No one can be justified without God's willingness and desire. The doctrine of justification is totally unique in the universe and among all religions because it is a unilateral act of God's free grace.

Justification, which is an act of God's free grace, is what entitles God's people to be accepted and enjoy salvation, a deliverance from their sin. It is an act of God's free grace because it comes at no charge to sinners. The entire cost of justification is borne by someone else. The cost of justification is indeed enormous. In fact, the cost cannot be paid except by God Himself. Justification is necessitated by the fact that no man could pay the price to earn it. Therefore, if it could be earned, it could not be the doctrine of justification of the Bible. It is by grace alone.

Justification is needed because of sin. We have studied sin at length in Q17-20 in the past. According to the Bible, sin is exceedingly sinful. We also learned that there sin and sinful nature in the fallen man are inseparable. Sin made it impossible for man to be acceptable to God. Therefore, man must deal with the sin issue. Justification is how God has made it possible for man to overcome the problem of sin.

Justification is an act of God:

- (1) Requiring the full righteousness of Christ as He offered Himself as a propitiation (or 33333an appeasing sacrifice);
- (2) Imputing all of our sins so that the punishment, burden and misery thereof would be borne by Christ, the Lamb of God;
- (3) Pardoning our sins based upon the exchange of sin and righteousness (i.e., imputation of Christ's righteousness to us and taking over our sins), a transaction made possible by the implanted faith in Christ; and
- (4) Accepting us as righteous in His sight.

Under justification, sin and its demands are not ignored but rather considered judicially dealt with. Man sinned. Sin is a fact and is not undone in any way by justification. Sin kills. So, man experiences physical death even after regeneration. However, under justification, the eternal penalty for sin is removed from us by operation of God's love expressed in Christ's work on the cross. Additionally, God then judicially declares us to acceptable having fully accounted for the penalty.

"In his sight" is an important expression. Our accountability is to God and Him alone. God is the standard of justice and righteousness. God has required His Son to pay the penalty for our sins as a requirement for justification. Christ then perfectly met such a requirement in the sight of God, i.e., in accordance with His requirements and to His satisfaction. We are not accepted because we are righteous but because we have been made or counted as righteous in God's sight. The devil cannot stand the fact that anyone can be acceptable in God's sight. The devil attacks man with doubts and accusations. The devil knows but will not be truthful about how sinner may be saved. Therefore, it is critical that we understand what it means to be righteous and acceptable in God's sight. Let us remind ourselves of the following: "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." (Romans 8:33-34)

We need to understand the true meaning of "faith." Everyone has faith – in something or someone. But, this is not the kind of faith we are talking about. Faith is often thought of as our own determination or decision. So, "leap of faith" denotes that faith requires the work of our own determination or decision. Faith that is required of justification is not merely a determination, decision or action but trusting in and having relationship with a specific person, the person of Jesus Christ. Biblical faith is faith in Jesus Christ and in nothing else and no one else. In order for justification to stand, faith must be in the person of Christ. Christ is our justification. Faith is how justification resides within us. Faith receives justification with understanding and gladness. Faith is said to work when we can finally see why we truly needed Christ to be acceptable in God's sight.

Justification is an indispensable doctrine and Biblical truth. Hang on to it. Our understanding of justification will lay a solid foundation for our understanding of the doctrine of adoption which will study next.

Westminster Confession of Faith
CHAPTER XI
Of Justification

1. Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth;[a] 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,[b] they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.[c]

[a]. Rom. 8:30; Rom. 3:24; Rom. 5:15-16

[b]. Rom. 4:5-8; II Cor. 5:19, 21; Rom. 3:22-28; Titus 3:5, 7; Eph. 1:7; Jer. 23:6; I Cor. 1:30-31; Rom. 5:17-19

[c]. John 1:12; Acts 10:43; Acts 13:38-39; Phil. 3:9; Eph. 2:7-8; John 6:44-45, 65; Phil. 1:29

2. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification:[d] 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.[e]

[d]. John 3:18, 36; Rom. 3:28; Rom. 5:1

[e]. James 2:17, 22, 26; Gal. 5:6

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.[f] Yet, in as much as he was given by the Father for them:[g] and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead:[h] and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace:[i] that both the exact justice, and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.[k]

[f]. Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:8-10, 18-19; Gal. 3:13; I Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 1:3; Heb. 10:10, 14; Dan. 9:24, 26; see Isa. 52:13-53:12

[g]. Rom. 8:32; John 3:16

[h]. II Cor. 5:21; Eph. 5:2; Phil. 2:6-9; Isa. 53:10-11

[i]. Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7

[k]. Rom. 3:26; Eph. 2:7; Zech. 9:9; Isa. 45:21

4. God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect,[l] and Christ did, in the fulness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification:[m] nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.[n]

[l]. Rom. 8:29-30; Gal. 3:8; I Pet. 1:2, 19-20

[m]. Gal. 4:4; I Tim. 2:6; Rom. 4:25

[n]. Eph. 2:3; Titus 3:3-7; Gal. 2:16; cf. Col 1:21-22

5. God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified:[o] and, although they can never fall from the state of justification,[p] 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.[q]

[o]. Matt. 6:12; I John 1:7, 9; I John 2:1-2

[p]. Rom. 5:1-5; Rom. 8:30-39; Heb. 10:14; cf. Luke 22:32; John 10:28

[q]. Ps. 89:30-33; Ps. 51; Ps. 32:5; Matt. 26:75; Luke 1:20; I Cor. 11:30, 32

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.[r]

[r]. Gal. 3:9, 13-14; Rom. 4:6-8, 22-24; Rom. 10:6-13; Heb. 13:8