

From Your Pastor

A Study of the Shorter Catechism: Justification

Question 33: What is justification?

Answer: Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, (1) and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, (2) only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, (3) and received by faith alone. (4)
(1)Rom. 3:24,25; Rom. 4:6-8 (2)2 Cor. 5:19,21 (3)Rom. 5:17-19 (4)Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9

An Explanation: God is holy. Man is sinful. God's perfect righteousness demands of mankind perpetual, personal, and perfect righteousness in order to be saved and dwell in His most glorious presence (Matt. 5:48). How can there be any hope then? All sinners know how to say: "*Nobody's perfect!*" How then can a sinful man or woman, who has continually offended God in word, thought and deed (Rom. 3:9-22), ever hope to dwell in God's presence with joy?! (cf. Psa. 16:9-11). **How can a sinful man or woman be made right before a holy and perfectly righteous God?!**

The wonderful news of God's justifying the sinner is that the holy and just God that **requires and demands** perpetual, personal, and perfect righteousness in order to be saved and to dwell in His presence is also the one who **provides** this perpetual, personal, and perfect righteousness for all who believe in the active and passive obedience of Christ Jesus. Christ has graciously obeyed perpetually, personally, and perfectly on our behalf (this is His **active** obedience that is imputed to us as our own righteousness, Matt. 5:17; Rom. 8:2-4; John 17:4) and Christ has laid down His life as a propitiation for our sins becoming a curse for us under the wrath of God (this is His **passive** obedience that satisfies the justice of God for our sins, Rom. 3:25-26; Gal. 3:13). God is perfectly just in upholding His perfect righteousness revealed in the holy and good requirements of His Law, but He is also the justifier of all who believe in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24-25).

It should be understood that justification is the opposite of condemnation (cf. Rom. 8:1, 33-34). Justification is God "*for us*" in the most glorious way! (Rom. 8:31-34). To be justified by God through the perfect righteousness found in Christ is to no longer be condemned, but freed from the guilt of breaking God's Law as sinners (Acts 13:38-39; cf. Gal. 2:4; 5:1, 13; 2 Cor. 3:17). In the act of justification, God legally declares believers as righteous in Christ, imputing our sins to Christ, and imputing Christ's righteousness to believers by faith alone apart from works (Rom. 4:5, 8, 11-12, 16). Our faith that receives this gift of grace is also a gift from God (Eph. 2:6-9). Faith is never a work, only an instrument given by God that receives all the righteousness and perfection one needs in Christ. Now there is no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus! (Rom. 8:1). We are declared righteous by Christ's blood (Rom. 3:24-26). Our consciences no longer condemn us (1 Jo. 3:20). We are reconciled to God, and we have peace in our union with Jesus (Rom. 5:1). We have confidence for the day of judgement because of God's love for us in Christ (1 Jo. 4:17-18).

What a benefit to know that God has legally declared you righteous in Christ—there is no condemnation, no judgment awaiting you! We will face the Judgment Seat of Christ clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ, and though our every word, thought and action has been tainted with sin, the Lamb without blemish has loved us and given Himself for us! (Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 5:14-15). We are spotless in Him! We can rejoice with the Psalmist: "**...Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin**" (Psalm 32:2). Further, our justification by faith alone in Christ alone because of grace alone also begins God's work of sanctification in believers whereby He renews us in His image (Eph. 4:19-24; Col. 3:10; also see Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 35). Though our sanctification can never precede our once-and-for-all justification, our sanctification must follow if we are truly justified. Justification and sanctification, though they must be distinguished from one another (one is an **act** of God, one is a **work** of God, cf. WSC, Q&A 33, 35; WCF, chaps. 11, 13), they must never be separated from one another (see Romans 8:29-30). In Christ, we have all of our righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

A Prayer: Holy and Just and Gracious Father full of steadfast love and mercy for sinners in Christ, thank you for declaring me righteous because of the beautiful and glorious righteousness of Jesus Christ! Thank you that in Him I find all the righteousness that I need to live before you, to dwell in your presence, and to thrive in joy in this life and in the life to come. How eager I am to dwell with you in glory because of the grace that I have received in Christ here and now in my union with Christ! Amen and amen.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Biggs

"[Sinners] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..."

- Romans 3:24